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UNWORDED PROCLAMATIONS:
Exhibitions of Women's Work in
Colonial Australia

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The Exhibition of Women's Industries in Sydney was nothing but a manifesto of the position of the women of New South Wales. It was a history written in objects. Its unworded proclamation was "See what we can do with our hands tied. For centuries men have compressed us into the mould they thought befitted us, this is the best we can do."

Illustrated Sydney News, 29 November 1888.

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of History
University of Sydney
March 2000
Abstract

This thesis brings to light the role played by exhibitions of women’s work in the development of feminism in colonial Australia. It focuses on two women’s exhibitions held in Sydney at the end of the nineteenth century: the Exhibition of Women’s Industries and Centenary Fair of 1888, and the Woman’s Work Exhibition of 1892. It also examines the display made by New South Wales in the Woman’s Building at the World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893, which featured exhibits chosen from the Exhibition of 1892.

Women’s exhibitions, which emerged internationally in the late nineteenth century, represented the translation of women’s culture and aspirations into public discourse through an already-established form: the exhibition. Exhibitions’ powerful rhetoric and dynamic ideology offered women a unique forum to make material the invisible reality of women’s work, and the intangible ideals of femininity. But exhibitions were also display spaces that, fundamentally, worked to substantiate and sustain middle-class values, masculine endeavours, and imperial power. Genteel colonial women faced major challenges in their attempts to turn the exhibition form to their own ends.

The problems and possibilities of exhibiting were what made women’s exhibitions significant events in the emergence of feminism in colonial NSW. Shaping and organising the displays gave the women involved new and unexpected insights into the fragility of ‘sisterhood’ and the vehemence of colonial masculinism. Nevertheless, on the whole women’s exhibitions remained ‘unworded proclamations’ of womanly possibility. Their politics was one of exposure and validation, of self-representation and self-realisation. Women’s exhibitions allow us to examine a different kind of colonial feminism to that we have become familiar with through recent feminist history. This is a feminism contesting femininity beyond maternalism, a feminism mobilised around women’s work as much as the vote, and a feminism vitally concerned with issues of colonial and national identity.
The Broken Hill Proprietary Company's Silver Trophy, topped with a statue of Atlas, was displayed at the World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893.

Acknowledgments

Prior to her departure for America and the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, Margaret Windejer farewelled friends at a meeting of the Women's Literary Society in Sydney by reading them Coleridge's poem 'Love, Hope and Patience in Education':

For as an Atlas on his broad neck places
Heaven's stony globe, and there sustains it; -- so
Do these upbear the little world below
Of Education, -- Patience, Love, and Hope.

As I finally put down my thesis-load, I am conscious of the debt I owe to those who have sustained me, and 'upbeared' my little world, over the years it has taken to complete.

To begin, this thesis was made possible by an Australian Postgraduate Award Scholarship. It could not have been written without the patience and professionalism of library, archive and museum professionals throughout Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. I would especially like to thank the staff of the Mitchell Library in Sydney, who have continued to exhibit Margaret Windeyer's dedication to the collection and its users, in the face of cutbacks and corporatisation.

Many individuals and organisations have assisted me in my research. In particular I would like to thank members of the Windeyer family, notably Mary Windeyer and Margaret Lockhart; the National Council of Women of NSW; those who so kindly responded to my request for information in the Sydney Morning Herald, including Sam Fyvie, Mrs C. Alton, Belinda Webster and Annette Butterfield; the Newcastle Historical Society; the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Graduate Nurses Museum; and Wendy Hucker, of the Pioneer Women's Hut at Tumbarumba, for undertaking research on my behalf into the significance of country shows to rural women.

Numerous scholars and academic support staff have enriched my intellectual life and provided help of all kinds. I am particularly grateful to Carole Adams, Alison Bashford, Peter Cochrane, Mary Cordato, Kate Evans, Ann Feldman, Stephen Garton, James Gilbert, Neil Harris, Jo Holder, Ian Hoskins, Bronwyn Hutchinson, Grace Karasens, Jan Kocumbas, Ann Larsen, David Lennon, Carol Liston, Roy MacLeod, Susan Magarey, Pat Morris, Joan Patrick, Jan Roberts, Robert Rydell, Shane Samuelson, Glenda Sluga, Liani Solari, Mary Spongberg, Henry Storey, the staff of SUPRA, Patricia Talbot, Tiffany Urwin, Richard Waterhouse, Richard White, Shane White, and Linda Young. Joan Kerr has been an especially enlivening influence. To those who read or commented on my work I offer special thanks.

My colleagues at the Powerhouse and Macleay Museums have given me a new and rewarding perspective on exhibition-making. I thank them all, but especially Lucy Bannyan, Grace Cochrane, Peter Cox, Susie Davies, Scott Donkin, Paul Donnelly, Julian Holland, Kim McClintock, Sandra McEwen, Vanessa Mack, Judith O'Callaghan, Sarah O'Neill, Barbara Palmer, Charles Pickett, Debbie Rudder, Rosemary Shepherd, Ann Stephen, Anni Turnbull, Inara Walden, Lindie Ward, Richard Wood, and Helen Yoxall. At the Powerhouse, Kimberley Webber and Megan Hicks have been steadfast in their encouragement, always offering just the right combination of mentorship,
inspiration and good fun. Kimberley in particular has displayed a wonderfully sustaining faith in the notion that I might create exhibitions as well as write about them.

Friends have shown me Love and Hope, as well as apparently endless amounts of Patience. Special thanks must go to Michelle Arrow, Katherine Biber, Melanie Cariss, Clare Corbould, Catherine Dickson, Betty and Barbara Fryer, Mary Gissing, Dylan Glynn, Lorraine Grant and all at Ashton's Circus, Mrs Groves, Catherine Hanna, Melissa Harper, Susie Higgin, Judy Johnston, Catherine Kevin, Nadine Lee, Jane Lennon, Justine McGill, Elaine and Ian McPhie, Jenni Moore, Lisa Murray, Katy Nebhan, Jodi Phillis, Eve Salinas, Zora Simic, Richard Taylor, Kirsten Tilgals, Rebecca Webster, and Patricia Young. Three friends have been especially devoted, and I offer them heartfelt thanks: Claire Salinas, for being my exposition companion; Claire Hooker, for illumination, clarity, and courage; and Julia Baird, for integrity, grace, solace and sisterhood.

My most profound debt is to my supervisor, Penny Russell. Her dedication, enthusiasm, insight and friendship, her generosity and good humour, have not wavered over the last nine years. My gratitude has grown ever-stronger. Penny has been the Atlas holding up my thesis-world, and perhaps only as I leave it am I fully aware what a weight that has been to carry. Penny's husband James and their children Joe and Sarah also deserve my thanks. Escape into the children's 'little world' has been a matchless antidote to thesis-induced seriousness and seclusion.

The interest and kind concern shown by the Merchers and the Marshalls, James Dick, Frank Grill and Hughina Murray has been much appreciated. I would also like to acknowledge the enduring personal legacies of Olive Kitson; Frank and Bill Grill; William and Mildred Sear; and Ian, Edith and Arthur Kitson.

Finally, the support of Maranne, Brian, and Thomas Sear has been unstinting. My deepest thanks goes to them, because their love, hope and patience has been greatest of all.

Martha Sear
March 2000
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Introduction
Realising feminism

...and now a little procession is forming and "God Save the Queen," rings down the building. A simple informal procession it is, as befits a ceremony connected with the daily needs and daily woes of life rather than with its outward show; secretaries and delegates preceding Lord and Lady Carrington, who are followed by a few privileged members of the sterner sex. The sunny little President(ess) tripping along in her white silk, looks as bright as good women do when seeing their plans for the general weal practically realised; and when the voices take up the National Anthem in carefully blended parts we are dimly conscious of a general sentiment which is distinct from abstract loyalty. It is the Power of Womanhood which is being hymned, with a Woman Ruler as the embodiment thereof; and this Exhibition is but the visible expression of that subtle influence for good which makes true woman's work a blessing to man.¹

The opening of the Exhibition of Women's Industries, Sydney 1888, as described by the Englishwoman's Review, 15 January 1889.

The Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair transformed Sydney's Old Exhibition Building into a women's world. The crowning event of the New South Wales centennial celebrations, it was a display of more than eight thousand exhibits from bootmaking to bread baking: 'Women's Work' classified, ranked and put on show [Figure I.1]. The fanlight of the Exhibition Building in Prince Alfred Park became a giant refracting lens for a kaleidoscope of feminine activity including prize-winning exhibits of lace, horticulture, embroidery, laundry work, photography, drawing, design, and invention; demonstrations of first aid, cigar-rolling, typewriting, and spinning; a loan exhibition of fine art and Hawaiian craft; lectures on temperance and education; and a women's orchestra playing the works of women composers. Pulling this all together, like a bright encircling ribbon, were the bustling stalls of the Centenary Fair which helped raise more than £6000 for the Queen's Jubilee Fund for Distressed Women. The display was organised by an all-female executive committee

under the presidency of Lady Carrington, the wife of the Governor [Figure I.2]. It brought together professionals and amateurs, radicals and conservatives, working women and leisured ladies in a new and sometimes turbulent alliance.

Four years later, another women's exhibition laid claim to the city's new civic centrepiece. The Woman's Work Exhibition of 1892 filled the Sydney Town Hall with a thousand exhibits showing the skills of women applied to the products of Australia: knitted possum-fur gloves, native plum jellies, a platypus-pelt rug, cabbage tree hats, and cushions embroidered with waratah and wattle [Figure I.3]. A clever woman taxidermist transformed a black swan skin into a stylish muff and a brolga into a firescreen. Imitation Roman mosaic made by factory girls appeared beside Aboriginal women's basketry. One stall was crammed with images taken by a professional woman photographer, capturing both the silk wings of social butterflies and the inky frock-coats of the recent Federal Convention. With its oilskins, water filters, patent mattresses, and electric corsets the Exhibition was a calculated demonstration of female ingenuity. Its showcases of lace, woolwork and watercolours were presented as material proof of the feminine origins of 'civilisation' in the young colony.

Yet even as the Governor's wife Countess Jersey rose to open the display, the Exhibition's organising committee sat behind her on the platform, their spirits downcast. It had been planned that the best work from the Exhibition would be sent to Chicago to form the New South Wales display in the Women's Building at the forthcoming World's Fair. The organisers' bright hopes for the exhibit had flickered and then dimmed into disappointment over the year they had been working. In the wake of an economic depression, exhibitors' enthusiasm ebbed. Goulburn embroiderers and Surry Hills seamstresses feared for their fragile treasures, to be sent so far over the sea. The organisers themselves had struggled mightily, not only to obtain exhibits, but against the all-male New South Wales Exposition Commission over issues of autonomy and support, and amongst themselves over the feminist implications of the display. Mary Windeyer [Figure I.4(a)], President of both the Woman's Work Committee for the Chicago Fair and the newly-formed Womanhood
Suffrage League of New South Wales, lamented that ‘[w]ith small exception, no patriotic zeal to show that refinement, art, industry and capability exists among the women of Australia, has inspired ... interest in this great enterprise. This was all the more distressing because, in her view, it was important that women 'mark their appreciation of the first national undertaking in which the promoters had recognised women officially'.

But once the New South Wales exhibits arrived in Chicago, everything changed. Colonial pride soared higher than the highest arc of Mr Ferris's new wheel, spinning above the fairgrounds. Against all expectation, New South Wales shone at the fair. The colony's exhibit in the Woman's Building took the best from the Town Hall and set it creditably amongst the best in the world. Although cramped and compressed in a narrow niche, and vexingly over-hung by the flag of the British exhibit next door, the New South Wales display expressed a self-confidence and assurance that belied its difficult birth and colonial origins. Highly praised and lavishly rewarded with medals and certificates, it was also popular with visitors. Its official custodian, Margaret Windeyer, strode about the fairgrounds like an Amazon queen [Figure 1.4(b)]. 'Frank', 'plucky' and 'independent', Windeyer was the archetypal Australian girl. The only woman appointed to the Fair from a foreign country, she presented herself as living proof of the unique cultural identity and social progressiveness of a maturing colony reaching towards nationhood. An ardent federalist, Windeyer spoke at the Fair's World's Congress of Representative Women as agent for the 'newest country', that country of 'great actualities and greater possibilities, Australia'. A committed feminist, she added Australia's 'youthful' voice to a gathering conceived of as a women's parliament for a new world.

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2 World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893. NSW Commission, Woman's Work Department, Reports of Committee XII, 1891-1893, ML MSS 932 (hereafter 'Reports of Committee XII'), 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq, President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting to the Commission 21 October 1892'.

3 Sydney Mail, 30 July 1892, cutting in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
Women's exhibitions, exhibitions that incorporated only the work or interests of women, emerged internationally in the 1880s. Between 1885 and 1930 nearly twenty such exhibitions were held in locations as diverse as Bristol, Sydney, Copenhagen, Vienna, New York, London and Berlin [see Appendix]. In 1927 Elizabeth Bass described the Woman's World's Fair she was helping to organise in Chicago:

"Women from the shimmering web of a dream -- a woman's dream -- into the enduring fabric of an exposition, planned by women, made and installed by women, for the benefit of all women everywhere, the Third Annual Woman's World's Fair opens its doors and bids you welcome."

Under the general banner 'women's exhibitions' there was much variation in form and content, but the majority fitted Bass's description [Figure I.5]. They were idealistic ventures initiated and controlled, at least to some extent, by female organisers intent on showing the work of women within the recognised and legitimising space of the exhibition. Bass's metaphor perfectly describes the character of their efforts and aspirations. Women's exhibitions represented a desire to make visible the gossamer threads of meaning and identity that tied together women's lives and the life of 'the world', and to strengthen and immortalise them through their incorporation into the larger and more lasting matrix provided by the exhibition tradition.

This thesis explores some of these 'fair women's worlds', exhibitions of the work of Australian women held prior to Federation. Studying such exhibitions offers the opportunity to examine from a new perspective the transformation of women's culture into organised feminism, as well as woman-centred reconceptualisations of work, identity and femininity which played a significant role in the transition from colonialism to nationhood in Australia. Never before had women's work in all its variety been brought before the public as a concentrated statement of women's capabilities. Never before had women's hidden contribution to colonial life been so materially exposed. A new feminist consciousness emerged from, was expressed by, and embodied in the orchestrated display of women's work.

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5 A few were not. The Woman's Exhibition held in London in 1900, organised by a man, Imre Kiralfy, was described by the Englishwoman's Review as 'exploiting the women's movement ... for the sake of commercial speculation'. Englishwoman's Review, 17 April 1900, pp. 84-6.
In 1988, Lisa Tickner began her pioneering study of the imagery of the English suffrage campaign by quoting Sheila Rowbotham:

> Beginnings are hard to find. People don't see themselves as beginners. How are they to know what comes ahead? They can see behind them not in front. There is no 'beginning' of feminism in the sense that there is no beginning to defiance in women. But there is a beginning of feminist possibility - even before it is conceived as such. Female resistance has taken several historical shapes.

Her invocation of 'beginnings' served a dual purpose. Tickner's book was an account of the origins of feminist art and feminist propaganda, but as the first significant consideration of the visual culture of feminism it was also a beginning in itself. This thesis builds on Tickner's beginning, examining the origins of an Australian feminist exhibiting culture by turning attention onto two events that, to use Rowbotham's words, represented a 'beginning of feminist possibility' in colonial NSW.

Exhibitions of women's work were a relatively common feminist activity between 1880 and 1930, but then their popularity waned. In recent years exhibitions about women and their work have again formed an important part of feminist thought and action. These new exhibitions are different to the first group in so much as they have been part of establishing a women's presence in masculine institutions like art galleries and museums, and in numerous other ways that mark them as unique expressions of late twentieth century feminism. But the impulse to make a feminist point about the nature, diversity and valuing of women and women's work through the display of objects has re-emerged with some force. Fully identifying that this activity has a history has taken longer to happen.

A century ago women's exhibitions were seen as key events in the history of Australian womanhood. Now they are unknown and unstudied, at best consulted as

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miscellanies or lists by art historians searching the silences for women's creations. Despite the fact that Australia produced three large women's exhibitions in the course of twenty years there has been no comprehensive study of any of them.\(^8\) Internationally the twenty or so women's exhibitions held between 1880 and 1930 have received no scholarly attention at all. The feminist use of exhibition culture has proved even more marginal to the writing of women's history than Tickner's suffragist art. Women's exhibitions have not only suffered banishment from public recollection as 'women's work', but have also been obliterated from feminist memory. They have fallen through the gaps between the traditional disciplines, as well as between the feminist discourses seeking to refashion those disciplines.

Women's exhibitions do not fit neatly into the historical discourses which might be expected to take an interest in them. Within exhibition history they seem minor events compared to the spectacle of the great international exhibitions, so multifarious, rich and beguiling to the postmodern eye. Consequently, the study of women's involvement in exhibitions has been confined to analysis of women's buildings at the great world's fairs. Women's exhibitions, like their sibling specialist displays such as health and sanitary exhibitions, ethnographic exhibitions, fisheries exhibitions, and juvenile exhibitions, have had to wait in the wings while their endlessly fascinating parents monopolised the spotlight.

The absence of women's exhibitions from women's history is more puzzling. The historians who began writing the history of Australian women in the early 1970s

\(^8\) The third and best known was the First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work held in Melbourne in 1907. It was given the epithet 'First' because it was the first women's work exhibition to follow Australia's Federation in 1901. It has been the subject of a small number of articles, book chapters and honours theses, cited below. This thesis does not discuss the First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work in detail. The 1907 exhibition differed markedly from the two that preceded it. It was the product of a very different social and cultural milieu, post-Federation Melbourne, political centre of a new nation that gave women the vote, but capital of a State, Victoria, that did not. It was a women's exhibition organised by two large committees made up entirely of men: clergymen, politicians, business leaders and doctors. The subordinate ladies' committee acted only in an advisory capacity. The Exhibition was declared 'non-political' and space was refused to groups like Vida Goldstein's Women's Political Association. It embodied a very different feminist potential from the two Sydney shows that came before it. Instead this thesis focuses on the two Sydney exhibitions of women's work that preceded the creation of the Australian Commonwealth. They shared similar and evolving aims, common committee members, and continuing exhibitors. They both took place in the same city, and drew on the same population, women working in hundreds of iron-laced suburbs and corrugated-iron towns from Bathurst to Broken Hill.
were certainly aware of the women's exhibitions. The broad-ranging basic research of those early years found them at every turn. Even the most rudimentary search of the Mitchell or La Trobe libraries' card catalogues turns up the category 'exhibitions' under the broader heading 'women'. In the preserved papers of feminists like Mary Windeyer they have a significant presence, and contemporary efforts to record the 'pioneering work' of such women invariably mentioned the displays. Newspaper women's pages and early women's journals like the *Dawn* and *New Idea* often featured them. But for all this, the exhibitions did not become the subject of historical study in their own right. Despite enormous interest in women's work in the 1970s and 1980s, exhibitions of women's work, tainted indelibly by their genteel connections, did not enter analysis informed by labour history. Where they are known at all, women's exhibitions carry with them a faintly embarrassing air. They conjure for today's feminists uncomfortable images of fetes and fancy fairs, galas and bazaars; images of triviality, pettiness and insubstantiality that themselves have a history which is scrutinised in this thesis.

When Australian women's exhibitions have been examined, it has been by people engaged in contemporary exhibition-making: art and museum curators. Their discussion of women's exhibitions in Australia has formed part of a feminist project to recover and validate women's creativity, in turn connected to a larger process of national cultural re-assessment [Figure 1.6]. It has centred around redressing the omission of women from history, and the exclusion of women's traditional craft work from the artistic canon. It has been concerned with bringing women and the

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domestic sphere of home and family into public view and recognition. The metaphors employed were those of revelation and exposure. Work which had been 'hidden' was now brought to light. Jennifer Isaacs, author of the bicentennial volume on women's crafts *The Gentle Arts*, spoke of how her project had 'exposed the tip of an iceberg of women's creativity in Australia -- hitherto ignored.'

She saw a contrast between the way in which women's work had been valued in the past and the way it was being appreciated now:

At the turn of the 20th century, a Melbourne newspaper called crochet 'the scullion wench of the needle arts'. ... In presenting this pictorial survey of women's domestic and decorative arts over the last 200 years I hope that they might be raised from the 'scullion wenches' that they were, to take their place as important and valuable components of the social and creative history of Australia.

While I acknowledge the feminist significance of valuing women's work from the past, I am less convinced by the argument that this work was not similarly valued in the past.

Like Joan Kerr, I would question the idea that women a century ago did not attempt a similar project, and that the denigration of women's work was a result of an uncomplicated and unchallenged sexism. The smears of masculinist journalism do not fully represent the social or cultural value of crochet or any other women's craft, which was both championed and contested. Like women today, women in the past revered and treasured women's work as a connection with distant foremothers, beyond personal association and with a clear political purpose. Many of our present day display strategies were shared by the organisers of late nineteenth century women's exhibitions. Therefore what is needed is not simply to recover women's work but to forge some reconnection with their efforts to value and display it, through

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a new reading of women's exhibitions that places them more fully into their historical context.

The art history framework that has surrounded women's exhibitions so far has established a sophisticated critique of the male 'canon' of high art, and its success in excluding the enormous variety of women's creativity. The next step is to shift the spotlight off the art and craft exhibits, and examine them amongst the cakes and taxidermy and boot-making that they were displayed with last century. We need to connect the individual artist with her exhibition 'sisters', and individual exhibition objects with their immediate and their imaginative surroundings. We need to look for feminism not only in the inarticulate resistance of individual exhibitors, but in the collective engagement and renegotiation of the whole enterprise. Understanding the aims, strategies, and motivations of the exhibitions' organisers, as well as the responses of visitors and the reactions of the press, provides an improved framework for more specific discussion of particular exhibits or artists. It allows us greater access to the social and political implications of making women's creativity visible.

The history of feminism has almost entirely ignored the role of women's exhibitions in the development of the colonial women's movement. Their invisibility may stem from the fact that historians of feminism in Australia and overseas have been largely indifferent to sources beyond the written word. Women's exhibitions are fundamentally about things rather than words. They represent efforts to present ideas about women through the display of objects, their classification and arrangement. Their feminism is a politics of revelation and exposure, of ideals and aspirations expressed through mute things. Ironically, their wordlessness has made their significance as realms of feminist possibility difficult to 'see'.

While the re-discovery and display of women's work has been a fundamental part of late twentieth century feminist activity, considering the history of feminism through material culture has not. The exception is research undertaken into the imagery and spectacle, and to a lesser extent the material culture, of the suffrage movement in the United Kingdom, most notably Lisa Tickner's book *The Spectacle of Women* and
Diane Atkinson's exhibition and catalogue *The Purple, White and Green*. These studies have not stimulated work of a similar kind in Australia. It is often hard to identify a feminist impetus behind objects that have survived in private or public collections. Object-based research is beginning to be done on the role of art and women's traditional crafts in the nineteenth-century woman's movement, but the feminist load borne by singular items like Dora Meeson's 'Trust the women' suffragette banner, and the Swann quilt, is great [Figure I.7]. It suggests we are straining to find feminist art and craft in the nineteenth century. Perhaps we are looking in the wrong place.

This thesis uncovers a material culture of feminism in Australia by shifting attention off individual objects and makers, and onto the valuing and exhibition of women's work. It explores the feminist potential of embroidered tablecloths, pokerswork teapot stands, and beaded milk-jug covers not by looking for a feminist impetus behind their production, but focussing instead on the politics of their display. To date, only minor attention has been paid to women who gathered the diverse products of women's labour together to create a new object: the women's exhibition. The development of a women's exhibition was a creative as well as an organisational act, a deliberate process of construction and representation of 'Woman' and her 'Work', a feminist statement as worthy of study as any speech, article or protest.

Only after several decades of feminist scholarship in a diverse set of fields can we begin to fully appreciate the contribution of women's exhibitions to the development of feminism. Exhibition history has explored the part played by women in the great international exhibitions of the Victorian age, and developed a language for

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16 Exhibitions about feminism have provided a beginning. These have included exhibitions of women's political poster art, the National Museum of Australia travelling exhibition 'Women with Attitude', and my own exhibition marking the centenary of the National Council of Women in Australia. See Kerr and Holder, *Past Present*, pp. 136ff.
describing the ideological workings of display. Feminist art history has reclaimed the exhibitions as expressions of the variety of women's creativity, and given voice to a female resistance revealed through cultural production. Material culture studies have found solid form for the everyday experiences of women's lives, and given expression to the silent speech of manufacture and consumption. Women's history has articulated the strength of women's culture, the complex interrelationship of gender with personal and social identities, and the richness and diversity of feminist thought and action. When all of these insights are combined, the importance of women's exhibitions to the history of Australian feminism comes sharply into focus.

So this thesis is an act of reclamation. It seeks to add women's exhibitions not only to the story of women in Australia, but to the history of feminism in this country. Women's exhibitions were feminist events, but in complicated and at times uneven and unexpected ways. They present today's feminists with a challenging puzzle. How do we characterise the efforts of a group of elite ladies to promote women's paid employment and publicly demonstrate the value of domestic labour? How do we explain the benign response of the colonial press to these claims, in contrast to the violence of their reaction to genteel women's organisational enterprise, appropriation of the exhibition form, and attempts to construct a classless 'sisterhood'? How do we interpret the appointment of the President of the Womanhood Suffrage League to head an exhibition of women's work, and the ensuing absence of any mention of the vote from the display?

It is hard to fit women's exhibitions into our current picture of nineteenth-century Australian feminism. That picture is composed around the central achievement of the vote, and foregrounds maternalism and its challenge to masculinist nationalism. Women's exhibitions depict additional, but relatively neglected, aspects of the same overall movement: genteel women's concern with work in all its forms, a powerful and at times politically useful feminist engagement with colonialism, and a feminist reconceptualisation of Australian femininity.
Adding women's exhibitions to feminist history demands not only the expansion of the idea of feminism in Australia, but also a reassessment of its origins. Evangelical reform and temperance movements have been identified as seeding grounds for colonial feminism.\(^{18}\) Although women active in these movements were involved, the exhibitions were resoundingly secular and only peripherally concerned with the problem of alcohol. Their primary interest lay in the reconceptualisation of women's work. Women's exhibitions therefore represent a fresh field in which to study the germination of feminism in this country.

The events took place in the period which witnessed the colonial feminist movement's birth and first steps. In Australia, therefore, women's exhibitions played a unique role in the development of feminism. When women's exhibitions first appeared in Europe in the 1880s, the feminist movement there was already in existence. It had its champions and its causes, its platforms and associations. As avid readers and connected colonists, Australian women in the 1880s shared in this intellectual context, but besides the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, organised feminist groups and campaigns did not emerge fully in NSW until the early 1890s.\(^{19}\) Thus the first women's exhibition held in Australia, which opened a mere three years after the first was held in Britain, sprang from a culture with the language to phrase the woman question, but without the vocal organs to ask it.

One contemporary commentator aptly described the Exhibition of Women's Industries of 1888 as an 'unworded proclamation'.\(^{20}\) This was as much to do with the fact that objects 'spoke' for women, as with the way in which the Exhibition's overall message was a statement of feminist possibility that had proved otherwise difficult to express. The Exhibition's impact was a shock to everyone: it was more controversial, more challenging to colonial patriarchy and social institutions, than its organisers had

\(^{18}\) See for example Patricia Grimshaw, 'Only the chains have changed', in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds), Staining the Wattle, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Fitzroy, 1988, pp. 66-86.
\(^{20}\) Illustrated Sydney News, 29 November 1888, p. 23.
intended or anticipated. This is not to say the women involved were somehow 'unwitting' feminists, or that they had failed to engage with the meanings and implications of their actions, but that the process of creating the Exhibition, and the responses it provoked, contributed to the expression of feminist thought in Australia in ways that were unexpected as well as planned.

This thesis offers fresh perspectives on the development of feminism, particularly in a colonial context. But its focus on exhibitions gives it a unique position in these debates. By characterising exhibitions as spaces of dynamic interaction between material things and their intangible meanings, identities and ideologies, realities and aspirations, it offers new insights into the processes that saw feminism emerge from femininity, politics emerge from the reiteration and reinvention of class relations, and nationalism emerge from colonialism. Resisting the urge to represent these transitions as clean, simple or inevitable, it explores women's exhibitions as moments of cognisance and recognition, for women, for feminism, and for colonial society as a whole.

Internationally, debates about the development of feminism have focussed on the transition from women's culture to women's political consciousness.21 What can a study of women's exhibitions tell us about the connection between women's culture and feminism? Women's exhibitions were not in themselves a part of women's

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culture. The display form which was a part of women's culture was the bazaar, which is examined in detail in chapter 1. Women's exhibitions drew on the organisational and fund-raising aspects of the bazaar, but represented an altogether different space in the public sphere: the exhibition. The creation of the women's exhibition represented a negotiation, and adaptation of an already existing 'public' platform to represent women's culture. Women's exhibitions were a conduit through which women's interests, work and concerns could be brought into public discourse. This study is therefore not about women's culture per se, but women's efforts to value and display it.

Equally, this thesis is not so much concerned to test the permeability or impermeability of the public and private spheres in colonial life, as with the use to which the idea of 'separate spheres' could be put to use by women interested in revealing and reinventing women's place in society.22 Women's exhibitions were 'women's worlds' created in public space. Their organisers drew considerable rhetorical power from the shock of visibility, the thrill which they felt and could evoke by literally exposing the value and contribution of women to society. These sensations rested on drawing a distinction between the private world of the home, and the public sphere of the exhibition. Further, the organisers delighted in creating women's exhibitions as new feminised public spaces, places where men, their interests and productions were excluded in an inversion of the usual state of affairs. These new public 'women's worlds' therefore offered both a critique of women's exclusion from power, and a tangible alternative to that exclusion.

Although this rhetoric of exclusion was intended to embrace all women, at core it was an expression of genteel women's growing feelings of alienation and parasitism. These women were called to create exhibitions by religious conviction, a sense of social responsibility, and a desire for personal improvement and meaningful activity. Australian women's exhibitions reveal genteel women's powerful longing to

be 'useful'. These women traced the origins of their personal or political move into the public sphere to the marginalisation of middle-class women.\textsuperscript{23} Through women's exhibitions genteel women in Sydney expressed their sense of being cut off from the 'world', even though at the same time they were keen to point out just how much women were contributing to the colony, unknown and unacknowledged. Their lament revolved around the powerful concept 'work'. The organisers of women's exhibitions were fearful about women's economic vulnerability, frustrated at being denied the full life men enjoyed, and upset that they did not have access to some of the fundamental emotional rewards of middle-class life, such as the satisfaction that flowed from hard work.

Their frustrations were the result of tensions inherent to genteel ideology, especially as it came under the strain of social, economic and political reorganisation in the wake of the 1880s 'boom'.\textsuperscript{24} In the colonies, concepts of the gentry and gentility, as Penny Russell has shown in her study of early colonial Melbourne, were endlessly contested and reasserted in the face of a changing social order. The boundaries between all of these shifting and competing identities were policed by women. So, as Russell argues, the 'contradictions between the image of gentility as a deeply conservative and unchanging force in society, committed to preserving traditions and social distinctions in defiance of changes, and the reality of an endlessly evolving and responsive social group, were lived by women as an ambivalence about their place in society.'\textsuperscript{25} By the 1880s, this ambivalence was crystallising around new alliances and new modes of public expression.

Exhibitions of women's work gave public expression to the idea that had all women, regardless of class, nationality or race, had much in common. The exhibitions' organisers not only universalised middle-class femininity, but their own


particular frustrations about middle-class life. On a fundamental level, genteel women felt restricted by their sex from entering into the meaningful realm of 'real life', which they largely defined in terms of the public world of work, action and reward.  

Recognition of this fact created a constituency for feminism, women, those who were deprived a full existence on the basis of their gender. Mobilising women around ideas of 'invisibility', 'exclusion' and 'work' allowed the organisers of women's exhibitions to invoke some of the fundamental preconditions for feminism: the constitution of women as a group, a critique of their condition of life, and a presentation of alternative visions.  

In practice, establishing universal sisterhood on such genteel terms would prove fraught and unsustainable.

But while the organisers of women's exhibitions made collective claims for women as a sex, and contained implicit criticism of women's position in society, they did so largely by letting objects speak for them. This was a step on from the inarticulate, individual resistance of colonial women from earlier periods. But it was still one step removed from the direct speech that would characterise Australian

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26 This widespread cultural mood has been described in an American context by T. J. Jackson Lears as a response to the dislocations of industrial consumer culture, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Anti-modernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1981.

27 The question 'what is feminism?' has been a perennial one in feminist history, the inevitable corollary of asking 'where did feminism come from?'. Scholars like Nancy Cott have questioned whether the word 'feminism' should be applied to women who were socially or politically active before the term came into common usage in the 1910s. Like Barbara Caine and Judith Allen, I agree with Cott that scrutiny of the definition of 'feminism' is an essential part of feminist history, but also that, even by Cott's definition, the women who mobilised around 'the woman question' in the late nineteenth century were feminists. As Caine puts it: 'Cott sees three core beliefs as fundamental to feminism: an opposition to sex hierarchy, a belief that women's condition is socially constructed and not ordained either by God or nature, and finally a perception by women that they constitute both a biological sex and a social grouping.' The Australian organisers of women's exhibitions meet each of these criteria. See Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, pp. 6-7. See also: Cott, *Groundings of Modern Feminism*, pp. 5 and 39; Karen Offen, 'Defining feminism: A comparative historical approach', *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 11, 1988, pp. 119-209; Nancy F. Cott, 'Comment on Karen Offen's "Defining feminism: A comparative historical approach"', *Signs*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1989, pp. 203-5; E. C. DuBois, 'Comment on Karen Offen's "Defining feminism: A comparative historical approach"', *Signs*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1989, pp. 195-7; Nancy F. Cott, 'What's in a name? The limits of "social feminism"; or, Expanding the vocabulary of women's history', *Journal of American History*, vol. 76, no. 3, 1989, pp. 809-829; For a discussion of this issue in an Australian context see Judith Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, introduction; and Susan Magarey, *History, cultural studies, and another look at first-wave feminism in Australia*, *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 27, no. 106, April 1996, pp. 96-110.

feminism in the 1890s, exemplified by Louisa Lawson’s feminist journal the *Dawn*, which she described in its first issue in May 1888 as ‘a phonograph to wind out audibly the whispers, pleadings and demands of sisterhood’.29 Women’s exhibitions gave material expression to a growing awareness amongst colonial genteel women of the paradoxes and inequalities of their social and political status, an awareness that had been intensified by rapid changes in colonial life, but raised by a much wider discourse about ‘the woman question’.

One of the main things that set the Australian woman of the 1880s apart from her 1860s equivalent was her access to the language of subjection. John Stuart Mill, along with other liberal authors, had given voice to the idea that ‘the legal subordination of one sex to the other ... is wrong in itself’, as well as authority to the argument that women might expand their interests and occupations. Mill’s vivid representation of women’s unnatural, stunted growth, and the electrifying possibilities of their future development, galvanised women the world over, giving shape to individual feelings of confinement and aspiration. In addition, thinkers like Mill had connected women’s emancipation to the general ‘improvement’ and progress of society.30 The influence of Mill on Australian liberalism and Australian feminism was profound.31 Many of the women, and most of the men, whose voices rise up in the chapters that follow to debate the colonial ‘woman question’ speak to one another in Mill’s new language. Harsh press critics, chivalrous male protectors, and female exhibition organisers and commentators, all took Mill as their baseline, and proved themselves ingeniously able to construct starkly opposing arguments from the same source.

Colonial feminists faced the peculiar difficulty of using liberal ideas as the basis for resistance to gender inequality in a culture where recognised political groupings

29 *Dawn*, May 1888, p. 5.
were in flux. Women's exhibitions emerged from the complicated mix of liberalism and conservatism, innovation and traditionalism that marked colonial society and underpinned colonial identity, as well as shaped colonial feminism. As Leonora Ritter's study of the lives and work of Mary Windeyer (delegate to the Exhibition of Women's Industries and president of the Woman's Work Exhibition) and her husband William so perceptively describes, members of the colonial governing class 'brought together a conservative gentry tradition and a reforming liberal-radical tradition.'

Even colonists labelled 'conservative' held liberal views, while radical voices for social change often invoked 'traditional' ideals. This delicate balancing of positions by individuals and within the society as a whole made women's exhibitions practically possible, but it also goes some way to explaining why their feminist potential was so unevenly distributed and capitalised upon. Close analysis of the two exhibitions of women's work held in Sydney in the late colonial period reveals a society giving the appearance of tolerance and progressivism, that could suddenly turn with crushing derision on women's fledgling efforts at self-representation.

Connecting the multifaceted character of colonialism to the origin and development of Australian feminism is a central concern of this thesis. Colonialism in Australia deserves more attention, not simply as a 'stage' between total administrative dependence on Great Britain and the formation of the Commonwealth in 1901, but also as a complex and contested culture. Anita Calloway, in the introduction to her thesis on ephemeral art in nineteenth-century Australia, makes an impassioned plea for a scholarly reconsideration of what she calls its 'robust hybrid culture':

It is too easy to dismiss Australian colonial culture as an impoverished European derivative: the traditional categorization does not sufficiently account for the Australian situation in the nineteenth century. This ostensibly pre-modern society had already taken up - superficially at least - some modern notions, thus showing some of the signs if not the substance of modernity; yet this same society was also non-hierarchical, paradoxical, eclectic, ironic, and highly self-conscious from its inception. This explains, perhaps, the peculiar mix of ingenuousness and ingenuity, of naivete and sophistication, of sincerity and satire, of bombast and self-

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depreciation, in Australian cultural identity, and the difficulties that outsiders have in understanding these dual layers.\textsuperscript{33}

Not all Australians shared equally in the possibilities of this kind of culture, but for genteel white Australians at the end of last century colonialism was a state of mind that contained both imminence and impermanence, rampant materialism and great imagination, cultural anxiety and growing boldness.

Much of the feminist potential of women’s exhibitions emerged from the unexpected possibilities and cultural power that colonialism offered genteel women in their efforts to redefine their own identity and reshape society.\textsuperscript{34} In Australian feminist history, colonialism has largely been explored in relation to the interaction between indigenous people and white settlers. The emphasis in the pages that follow will be on white genteel women’s representation of themselves as colonists. The term ‘fair women’, often used to describe the women immersed in exhibition work in this period, also alludes to the skin-colour of the majority of women involved: the white hands which sewed the white linen, sifted the white flour, and placed the white prize cards. While Aboriginal and other indigenous women and their work made appearances at Australian women’s exhibitions, the displays were overwhelmingly an expression of white colonial power and identity. Women’s exhibitions incorporated the work of Aboriginal women as a gesture of inclusion, but ultimately the exhibition organisers championed ideals and ideas of ‘civilisation’ and ‘progress’ that were the basis of and justification for the dispossession of indigenous people. It is therefore essential to acknowledge the centrality of race to colonial feminist identity and


\textsuperscript{34} Colonialism and post-colonialism have been the subject of intense scrutiny in scholarship over that last 15 years. Feminist historians have complicated the idea of the frontier as a man’s world, traced the interrelationship of gender and imperial power, connected the idealisation of motherhood with the perpetuation of white racial ‘superiority’, and exposed white women’s involvement in the imperial project of domination and exploitation. See Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (eds), \textit{Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance}, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1992, p. 3; Vron Ware, \textit{Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History}, Verso, London and New York, 1992; Antoinette Burton, \textit{Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915}, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1994; Anne McClintock, \textit{Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest}, Routledge, New York and London, 1995.
representation. Marilyn Lake has outlined Australian feminists' sense of 'double difference', as 'colonisers and colonised both'. White Australians were keen to distinguish themselves from 'other (coloured) colonised peoples', and assert their 'Britishness' and their consequent cultural and racial 'superiority', but they were equally 'subjugated and derided as colonials' back 'home'. White Australian feminists, by extension, measured their 'advancement' by reference to the 'backwardness' of indigenous women. Colonial women's confidence and claims to superiority were always modulated by degrees of uncertainty and self-consciousness which were highlighted in their interaction with indigenous people.

But, as Raewyn Dalziel has argued, when colonial feminists were successful in gaining reforms like the suffrage, they also measured their advancement positively in comparison with older societies. In her article on the reception accorded the comparatively early enfranchisement of women in New Zealand, Dalziel points out that its characterisation as a colonial 'experiment' could have both positive and negative implications. As WCTU missionary Jessie Ackermann put it, colonial New Zealand presented conditions 'more favourable to innovations ... than in the old world from which the settlers came'. Settler colonies like New Zealand and Australia could be represented, by feminists and colonial politicians alike, as progressive beacons to the rest of the civilised world. Patricia Grimshaw, reflecting on the factors which contributed to the success of the New Zealand case, has pointed to the intersection of women's rights with the processes by which men in these communities were seeking to establish an identity for themselves in some ways in contra-distinction from men in the metropolitan cultures from which they had


36 Dale, Between Old World 'Barbarism', pp. 80-83.


38 Jessie Ackermann, quoted in Dalziel, 'Presenting the enfranchisement', p. 59.
Colonial men’s concern to maintain white dominance, along with their desire to promote their communities and differentiate themselves from the social problems of the old world, combined to make female suffrage a possibility and then a reality. The image of the Australasian colonies as progressive, or of combining the best of the old world with the innovations of the new, was an important part of colonial identity at the end of the nineteenth century, a part that colonial feminists like Margaret Windeyer could readily capitalise on to press for change.

However the colonial nature of Australian feminism as it was expressed at women’s exhibitions did not exist separately from nationalism. Feminist historians have noted nineteenth-century feminism’s critical engagement in a ‘battle over the national culture’, and argued over the apparent incompatibility of feminism and nationalism. This thesis suggests that the 1880s and 1890s were a period when, to use Jill Roe’s expression, ‘the nationalist vision of self-determination has offered women a space’. Colonial feminists constructed a complex interaction between colonial and national identities to further women’s cause. Exhibitions gave women a

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41 Roe, ‘What has nationalism offered Australian women?’, p. 30.
unique forum to express women's present position and future emancipation, as well as
to measure the current stage of colony's progress and give material form to the coming
nation. Exhibition organisers like Mary and Margaret Windeyer sought ultimately to
connect the two in a vision of feminist federation visible to both the colony and world.

Women's exhibitions took on the role of representing the colony to itself, and
to the 'outside' world. This process brought with it an unpredictable blend of
confidence and self-consciousness that was the feminine form of more generalised
colonial feeling. The quote with which I began this introduction contains some of these
tensions, as well as illustrating the dynamic blending of national, imperial and
feminine identities made possible by an exhibition of women's work. It mixes
assurance with uncertainty. The public celebration of the everyday, the gender-reversal
amongst the official party, and the dilemma of what to call a female president generated
an air of novelty and unfamiliarity. But when the national anthem is sung, all doubt is
cast aside as womanhood unites and triumphs, and the Queen of England becomes the
Queen of an empire of womanhood. Women's affiliation to colony and empire is
expressed through their glorification of femininity.

The passage quoted formed part of a much larger account of the Exhibition of
Women's Industries written by a woman in the colony for the readership of the
*Englishwoman's Review*. The correspondent sought throughout to involve the reader
with an intimate, conversational style that emphasised the universal feminine appeal of
lace and china, even directing the reader's gaze to particularly fine exhibits of womanly
skill. The English paper framed the description with passages that drew the reader's
attention to points of comparison between women's exhibitions in Britain and
Australia. The slight disjunction between the eagerness of the New South
Welshwoman to connect herself and the enterprise of her colonial sisters to a wider
world of womanhood, and the desire of women in the imperial centre to emphasise
points of difference, played a significant role in the development of exhibitions of
Australian women's work.

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Women's exhibitions have much to tell us about the ways colonial women thought about themselves, and about the ways in which that self-image affected the development of an organised women's movement in NSW. In contrast to the Exhibition of Women's Industries, the most resonant note of the Woman's Work Exhibition of 1892 was one of strong, at times almost crippling, self-awareness. Partly this was a result of the lessons learnt in 1888. Partly it was because the NSW Government had officially recognised women in its representation to the Chicago World's Fair, and this was seen by all as a great test of women's capabilities and commitment to the colony. Partly it was because the exhibition committee's leadership was simultaneously engaged in the first battles of the fight for the women's vote. Certainly the mixture of self-consciousness and moral confidence represented in the exhibition also characterised the activities of the Womanhood Suffrage League at this time. In 1892 the strong connection between the suffrage cause and the Exhibition's organisers curbed overt feminist expression in the Exhibition itself. The difficult political imperative for the women involved in feminist activity to meet both the highest standards of feminine selflessness and sensitivity, and masculine objectivity and organisation, was conspicuously exposed.

Women's exhibitions allow the historian access to some of the processes that have been identified as central to the emergence of feminism, but they also prevent us from seeing that development as simple or inevitable. Women's exhibitions represented a powerful argument for women to identify themselves as women, beyond class or even racial assumptions. They were a strong and unparalleled claim by women to public space, and a public voice through which women could promote their own interests. They were an assertion that women had a part to play in the creation, maintenance and celebration of colony and nation, at the same time as they helped form webs of association and support between women on an international level. They were a tangible representation of an Australian femininity that was creative and civilising, responsive and responsible in matters of social concern. They incorporated practical lessons about organisation, argument, image-making and alliances. But the vast
majority of women who were involved in them, as organisers, exhibitors or visitors, did not go on to become feminists. Some women were ignited with a passion to reform society, some were softened and rendered more open to feminist ideas, some remained unaltered. Women from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences participated, and each took away what was useful or relevant to them. Seamstresses jumped at the chance to advertise their expertise, while other working women rebuffed competitions intended to 'improve' their domestic skills. Some genteel women saw the displays as a chance to reinforce the moral authority of housework, others as ways of creating opportunities for women to enter into new fields of paid employment.

Australian women's exhibitions were a complex mix of tradition and innovation, provocation and reassurance, reaction and inspiration. They both challenged and confirmed assumptions about women and their work. Because of this unevenness and complexity, I am as unwilling to label women's exhibitions as 'pre-feminist' or 'proto-feminist', as I am to cast them simply as crucibles in which feminism was made.43

Instead I would characterise women's exhibitions as moments of feminist 'realisation'. The double meaning of the word is especially appropriate, and I also want to incorporate Denise Riley's use of it in her discussion of nineteenth-century reconceptualisations of the term 'women':

If 'women' can be credited with having a tense, then it is a future tense. ... [N]ineteenth-century 'women' did not suffer so much from uncertainty about their teleology -- but rather about their realisation. What might they become; what might they not become?44

Women's exhibitions made women's belief in their own value, their sense of womanly 'possibility', material and therefore more 'real', yet they also provoked new revelations for the women involved, most crucially about the way women were perceived in society at large. This was perhaps the women's exhibitions' greatest contribution to colonial feminism. They were sudden moments of awareness and

43 For use and discussion of these terms see Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity*; and Cott, 'What's in a Name?', p. 809.
44 Denise Riley, *Am I That Name?*: Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988, p. 47.
recognition, with a power that even their organisers were not fully aware of, or in control of. This is why women's exhibitions need to be incorporated into the history of Australian feminism, and why that incorporation must be achieved through the discipline of feminist history.

Nevertheless, historical reappraisal needs to be carried out with a sensitivity to the fact that women's exhibitions were made up of material things. So far, histories of women's contributions to international exhibitions have largely failed to engage with the materiality of the displays, with their complex negotiation of imagination, organisation and realisation in three dimensions. I hope to foreground that negotiation here. Women's exhibitions, like all exhibitions, represented a self-conscious orchestration of objects for a rhetorical purpose. It is essential, therefore, that we study exhibitions as a whole as material culture, as three dimensional things, rather than simply words on a page, or dreamlands fixed in silver on a photographer's plate.

The study which follows is a feminist history informed by material culture studies. It asserts the importance of adding an understanding of 'exhibiting' to the current study of women's material culture. Any woman who made a decorative object intended to 'display' it in some form or another, while at the same time the conspicuous leisure and domestic expertise that produced the work were important elements of social performance. Victorian women's craft work, enmeshed as it was with notions of universalised femininity, industry and gentility, was almost by definition created for show as well as use, be it on mantelpieces, or at an exhibition. The farmer's wife as well as the governor's wife wanted to prove her womanly skill and gather the good associations that followed in its train. Much time and devotion was expended on competitive work, from cake-baking, to jam-making, to knitting, by even the poorest and most isolated of women.

I had hoped to use surviving exhibition objects extensively in combination with historical research to understand what such activity meant for Victorian women, but my goal has been frustrated by the vagaries of fate, the changing tastes of successive generations, and the very ephemerality that was central to exhibition culture. I began
my work with several questions. How was an exhibition object different to an 'everyday' piece of work? Were they obviously brazen displays of skill or talent? Were they more conventional, or more original? Did they reveal a greater investment of time or materials? Did they carry with them different stories, emotions and layers of significance to a similar object made for a loved one or a customer? I have been disappointed but not surprised at the small number of exhibits from these exhibitions that have survived. I have located fewer than 20 from the nearly 10,000 shown at these two displays. It is likely that many of the objects now in museum collections have an exhibition or show provenance of some kind, which they have lost in the ensuing century. While this means I have been unable to answer my initial questions, where possible the thesis engages with the material culture of women's exhibits through an analysis of comparable or remaining exhibition pieces.

The closer analysis of the material culture of women's exhibitions is work that remains to be done. This thesis is a beginning. It has implications for analyses of women's creativity in the fine, decorative and craft arts, as well as in a diverse range of historical fields from the history of women's labour, especially factory and domestic work, to the story of Federation. Women's exhibitions also offer a mass of new information in innumerable other areas of interest to women's history such as gardening, education, nursing, philanthropy, cookery and literature. But instead of focusing on any of these areas in detail the thesis steps back to examine the displays as a whole, setting objects within exhibits, exhibits within exhibitions, and exhibitions within their historical context.45

This thesis is about exhibitions as display with a purpose. It is about the choice and placement of objects more than the objects themselves. It is about the meanings expressed by the display of objects, and about the new meanings created by their exhibition and their arrangement with other objects. Exhibitions represented a series of deliberate choices about the arrangement of people, objects, architecture and decoration

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45 In the pages that follow I will be using the term 'exhibit' to embrace both individual objects and groups of objects displayed as part of larger exhibitions.
for a specific purpose. Exhibitions were not merely lists of objects or floating abstract ideas. They were real, three-dimensional 'installations', the original examples of multimedia.

The processes of feminist 'realisation' that women's exhibitions both embodied and exposed were a direct result of the practical and ideological possibilities that were unique to the exhibition form. As a consequence, this thesis looks at the way things were exhibited to reach an understanding of why they were exhibited. Its argument revolves around the conceptualisation of exhibitions as part material and part imagination, as sites of dynamic interaction between the tangible and the intangible. These compound possibilities of exhibiting I call the 'exhibition dynamo'.

A dynamo is a machine that changes mechanical energy into electrical energy, and vice versa. An invention of the Victorian age, dynamos were first brought before the public at the great international exhibitions. There they were watched in awe by mesmerised fair visitors. American writer Henry Adams, observing the dynamos on display at the Chicago and Paris Expositions, saw them as the symbols of a 'new phase' in human history. In a famous chapter in The Education of Henry Adams, The Dynamo and the Virgin', Adams puzzled over the dynamo's mystical ability to translate force from one form to another, from the mechanical to the electrical, the real to the ideal, the physical to the spiritual. In Paris, he claimed, he 'began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross.'46 Standing bewildered in the machinery hall, Adams believed he sensed a shift in human culture, one in which America was the leading edge. This was the displacement of the Virgin by the dynamo, a dying away of the influence of the enigmatic authority of the feminine on the creative mind of 'man'. Virgin or Venus, Adams argued, 'was goddess because of her force; she was the animated dynamo; she was reproduction -- the greatest and most mysterious of all energies'.47 Adams' juxtaposition of gendered forces was a lament for a passing epoch. In the new age Adams first witnessed at the

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Exposition, he declared the invisible power of 'Woman' had been degraded to the level of sentiment. The masculine dynamo was the new symbol of infinite energy.

Adams's theories may seem outlandish, but his imaginative engagement with the symbolic power of the dynamo, and his efforts to connect gender and historical change, provide a suitable beginning to a thesis about exhibitions of women's work. Iconic exhibition objects, dynamos also offer a metaphor for the ideological work exhibitions performed in the late nineteenth century. Exhibitions translated the material into the ideal, as well as making the ideal real. They made abstractions like 'progress', 'nation' and 'empire' intelligible and tangible. They turned ordinary objects into venerated commodities. They formed conduits and connections between imperial centres and colonial peripheries, reconciling, if temporarily, apparent oppositions like economic competition and world peace. Anyone or anything that passed through them was altered, transfigured. They were created to improve mankind's productions, raise human aspirations, and refine their visitors.

Exhibitions were developed in the centres of industrial and imperial power by middle-class men. In those places and in those hands the exhibition dynamo turned smoothly. At the outer edges of empire, or in the hands of women, the ideological machinery of display did not run so easily. Nevertheless, the imaginative power of the exhibition form held considerable attraction and potential for women the world over during the late nineteenth century.

At the Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Pair of 1888, at the Woman's Work Exhibition of 1892, and at the NSW display in the Women's Building at the World's Columbian Exposition, genteel colonial women tried to make the exhibition dynamo 'work' for the cause of Australian women. They hoped to translate women's tangible contribution to the colony into the realms of nobility and dignity, as well as cultural authority and political power. They hoped women's mechanical 'work', their physical labour, would be transformed by the displays into the electrifying energy of social reform. The organisers also sought to make women's invisible influence tangible. The genteel evangelism of respectability, the refining
powers of the home, the civilising inspiration of femininity were all to be made material in exhibits of fancywork, cookery and invention.

But as Adams so acutely observed, exhibitions ushered in a new, modern, era where the source of generative and creative power was removed from a 'natural' and mysterious femininity and placed instead into masculine technology. The chivalric code of honour, medieval craft skills and traditional work practices that Adams revered were in decay. The women he figured as the inspiration to male endeavour were increasingly inspired to create themselves. Exhibitions offered women a unique space in which to attempt their own reinvention. There, women could be creators and spectators, viewers and participants, makers, gazers and commentators. But in seeking to combine women's work and interests with an implicitly masculine display form, women's exhibitions embodied the transitions and contradictions perceived by Adams at their very heart.
Figure I.1

Image: "The Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair, Sydney 1888. 'Sketches at the Exhibition', from Sydney Mail, 20 October 1888, p. 827."
Lady Cecilia Margaret Carrington.
From Mitchell Library Small Picture File - Portraits.
The Woman's Work Exhibition, Sydney 1892: 'Among the flower stalls', 'The tea room', 'The Tennyson memorial', 'An interesting exhibit'.

Sketches by Percy Spence, from the Illustrated Sydney News, 22 October 1892, p. 17.
Figures 1.4 (a) and (b)

(a) Mary Windeyer (L)
(b) Margaret Windeyer (R)

Figure 1.5 (a)

*The Women's Exhibition, London 1909.*
Figure 1.5 (b)

*Woman's World's Fair, Chicago 1927.*
D'oyley by Frances Budden, 'needlework provides all the information needed for a history of women's creative thought', 1976.
Figure 1.7

This banner, designed by Australian artist Dora Meeson, was carried in suffrage processions in London in 1908 and 1911. Dora Meeson, 'Commonwealth of Australia: "Trust the women mother, as I have done', 1908. Collection of the Australian Bicentennial Authority. Reproduced from Joan Kerr (ed.), Heritage: The National Women's Art Book, Art & Australia/Craftsman House, Roseville East, 1995, plate 372.
Chapter 1
Vashti's daughters: Exhibiting gender

This thesis is about two women's exhibitions (the Exhibition of Women's Industries and the Woman's Work Exhibition), a fancy fair (the Centenary Fair attached to the Exhibition of Women's Industries), and a colonial exhibit shown in the woman's building of an international exposition (the NSW exhibit at the Chicago World's Fair). In the nineteenth century these events represented distinctly different display forms. Each was distinguished by virtue of its subject matter, approach, cultural meaning, and status. Women's exhibitions emerged from a culture that already had numerous ways of displaying women's work. They were more than a parlour-cabinet, more than a bazaar, more than an agricultural show, an art exhibition, or a ladies' court at an international exhibition, but they contained elements of all of these displays.

This chapter sets the scene for the detailed study which follows by examining the classed and gendered ideologies that lay behind the display of women's work in the nineteenth century. It focuses on 'public' displays of women's work at bazaars and international exhibitions. It does so to help explain why, when colonial women decided to display women's work in 1888, they chose to bring together these two dichotomous display forms.

The fancy fair and the international exposition were ideologically constructed in relationship to one another as symbolic opposites, one feminine and one masculine, one the embodiment of a base marketplace, the other proof of civilising commerce. Theoretically the lines of demarcation between the bazaar and the exhibition were clear. In practice they were blurred and contested. This was especially true for groups on the margins. The colonial exhibit, whether it was an exhibition on the periphery, or a representation to the centre of empire, could never avoid the taints of savagery and trade, while the woman's building and the women's exhibition could never escape the
negative associations of femininity. The colonial exhibit contained within it the seeds of independence as well as subservience, the women's displays contained the seeds of feminism as well as traditionalism. The organisers of colonial and women's exhibits believed (each in their own way) that they could harness the ideological power of 'exhibition' to their own ends. What they found was that they were unable to make the exhibition dynamo turn smoothly.

Consequently, the exhibition and the bazaar offered colonial women interested in representing themselves and their work on the public stage great possibilities as well as significant problems. The bazaar was both enormously popular and vigorously opposed throughout the nineteenth century. A littoral space between the public and the private spheres, it became the focal point for interconnected debates about the separation of women from the marketplace and the regulation of female sexuality. Bazaars were an ambiguous part of feminine culture, simultaneously an expression of women's moral and sexual power. They were a public display of genteel women's selflessness, their charity, and their social involvement. They were also sites of flirtation and bargaining between men and women. A profusion of stalls bursting with cake, slippers and antimacassars, fancy fairs exposed the domestic productivity of the middle-class woman, at the same time as they placed the value of her labour at zero. Bazaars destabilised the ordinary rules of exchange, and disturbed most of the fundamental distinctions in middle-class thinking. These transgressions were only held in check by the reassertion of transcendent femininity by the ladies involved, and the overwhelming authority of the male gaze. The bazaar functioned in genteel ideology to expose and disturb the conventions of middle-class life, and then reaffirm them by recourse to stereotypical feminine and masculine roles. When the organisers of the Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair decided to combine an exhibition and a bazaar, they drew not only on a tradition of feminine 'good works', but also on a potent force for upsetting and reassembling genteel ideology.

The exhibition provided another way of publicly expressing middle-class identity, and resolving the tensions and dichotomies of middle-class life. At
exhibitions the marketplace was transformed from a place of danger and sensuality into something rarefied and spiritualised. Exhibitions were characterised by their contemporary historians as spaces where commerce and imperialism were combined into a force for 'civilising' the world. On the broadest level, exhibitions also functioned to make sense of a new industrial climate, and its physical and imaginative impact on every aspect of life. As Anne McClintock puts it, the new economy 'created an uproar not only of things but of signs'.

Exhibitions made sense of this chaos by ordering, unifying and refining spaces, objects, and people. They gave material expression, as Graeme Davison has argued, to Marx's concept of 'commodity fetishism'. Thomas Richards, in his study of Victorian advertising and spectacle, has described how what the Great Exhibition of 1851 'heralded so intimately was the complete transformation of collective and private life into a space for the spectacular exhibition of commodities'. It is exactly the implications of this transformation for women, on an ideological and personal level, that I would like to explore here. Looking closely at how exhibitions and bazaars were gendered forms of display gives us a fresh insight into these processes and negotiations. It also allows us to see what made the exhibition as a form so attractive to women seeking to represent the 'private' or the 'unseen' world of women through public exhibitions in the late nineteenth century.

Before turning to explore these issues in detail, it is important to note that 'public' shows like exhibitions and bazaars were conceptually underpinned by other displays of women's work in the 'private' sphere. Display was a central part of genteel culture,

1 McClintock, Imperial Leather, pp. 208-9.
but also a point of tension and anxiety. It was on this paradoxical foundation that the
organisers of women's exhibitions would build their hopes that exhibitions could
display the invisible and the intangible: morality, refinement, femininity.

Notions of gendered display were central to the construction of class in this
period, from dress and etiquette to architecture and household furnishings.\(^5\) The home
was a space where gentility was 'on show', 'public' rooms like the parlour indicated
'to the inhabitants and to their visitors a vision of correct taste, a demonstration of
gentility and thus proof of morality.\(^6\) True gentility demanded more than the
conspicuous consumption of goods as an expression of wealth. As Richard Bushman
notes:

Reducing the meaning of objects to pecuniary exhibitionism obscures the large
part of their meaning. ... The importance of the provincial parlor lay in the
implied commitment of its occupants to refine their lives. This distinction must be
kept in mind or the implications of gentility for the division of the
population into social classes will be lost. The parlors meant more than that the
owners were rich or in touch with English culture. The significance was deeper,
and the implications for class comparison more damaging. Brandishing
possessions in the faces of the poor to demonstrate pecuniary superiority only
signified the difference in wealth—a matter of simple crass financial muscle.
Creating parlors as a site for refined life implied spiritual superiority. ... Pecuniary
display was outward and by definition superficial; refinement was
inward and profound.\(^7\)

This was true of nineteenth-century Australia as well as colonial America [Figure
1.1].\(^8\) The slide from pure acquisition and vulgar display to the 'moralisation of
aesthetics' was necessary to the construction of class hierarchy in a comparatively fluid
society. It also served to offset a deep anxiety about materialism and competition that
lay at the heart of middle-class culture.

Women played a special role in the creation and maintenance of gentility. In her
analysis of the upper classes in mid-nineteenth century Melbourne, Penny Russell

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\(^5\) See Elizabeth Windschuttle, 'The new science of etiquette', *Supplement to the Historic Houses
Trust Newsletter*, no. 6, December 1989; John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in
Margaret Maynard, *Fashioned from Penury: Dress as Cultural Practice in Colonial Australia*,
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and Melbourne, 1994; Jane Elliot, 'The politics of

\(^6\) Linda Young, *The Struggle for Class: The Transmission of Genteel Culture to Early Colonial
170.

\(^7\) Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, pp. 181-2.

\(^8\) Young, *The Struggle for Class*, ch. 6.
describes how women converted the ideals of gentility into what she calls a 'genteel performance'. Russell argues that 'the notion of "performance" is important because it was precisely around the question of the display of gentility that the gentry confronted its greatest dilemma. This dilemma, centred around the interaction between the public and private spheres was 'infinitely troubling for women'.

They faced a dual challenge: to make a public display of their avoidance of and protection from the public world, and at the same time to display, while seeming only to be revealing, the moral haven of the home itself, and the genteel values and lifestyle which flourished there, protected from the cruel and competitive world.  

Women's work, especially needlework, was both a manifestation of these anxieties, and a possible means through which some of these tensions could be resolved.

In her study of the role of embroidery in the making of the femininity, Rozsiska Parker affirms that on a broad level the activity was an 'index of gentility'. Yet there was a 'profound contradiction in embroidery as a status-affirming art'. Embroidery's 'association with the aristocracy made it suspect for the middle class.' Unless embroidery was 'performed as a moral duty, in the spirit of selfless industry, it was regarded as sinful laziness - redolent of aristocratic decadence.' Embroidery was a 'resource for fulfilling an impossible role - answering the demands of nineteenth-century femininity':

How were middle class women to be industrious and useful in an industrial capitalist society which scorned idleness and glorified work as the supreme virtue? They had their 'work'. And because they did not 'work' for money it could be seen entirely in the light of their primary duty - to love their husbands.

To that duty we could also add women's wider responsibilities to promote and preserve the importance of the domestic sphere, and maintain the status of the family.

The same might be said of other women's arts and crafts of the period, especially in a colonial context, where the economy revolved around a cycle of boom and bust, class and status were fluid, and colonists existed in a state of almost constant

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11 Russell, A Wish of Distinction, p. 60.
comparison with England. The embroidered cushions, Berlin woolwork slippers, and gutta percha mantledrapes to be found in a wide range Australian homes were displayed as evidence of application and taste, leisure and morality as well as proof of the dominance of middle-class values [Figure 1.2].\(^\text{15}\) The 'ladies' of the family were industriously employed making a house a 'home', and in the process reconnecting the old world and the new with one continuous thread.

Whilst symbolising the traditional, women's craft also became a means through which gentility could promote individualism and accommodate consumerism. Women's decorative work personalised standard genteel household items and mass-produced goods. As Nancy Dunlap Bercaw argues in her study of fancywork, 'by constructing new goods themselves, women transformed unfamiliar objects into personal expressions. They tamed them, making them objects of the heart not the marketplace.'\(^\text{16}\) But as Bercaw points out, by the end of the nineteenth century the very practices that had modified consumerism to make it an acceptable part of gentility were themselves threatened by it:

By the 1880s a woman could buy an object and consider her purchase an act of self-expression. She no longer had to construct the object to see herself reflected in it. By transferring the self to the object, fancywork carried the seeds of its own decline. Even while it accommodated opposing interests and conflicting self-dehinitions, fancywork confirmed a belief in the importance of objects in defining and displaying the self. ... Self-conception, not public conception, of status and respect could be invested in objects and exhibited. Fancywork, because of its availability, enabled anyone wishing to be genteel, useful, dutiful, fashionable or tasteful to be just that.\(^\text{17}\)

Between 1860 and 1880 a significant shift occurred in the relationship between identity, gentility and display. Emphasis moved from the internalised moral aesthetics identified by Bushman to the overt intertwining of moral life and public life described


\(^{17}\) Bercaw, 'Solid objects/mutable meanings', p. 247.
by Denise Riley. In parallel, importance shifted from public conceptions of identity made visible through the expression of group ideals, towards increasing individualism. Changes flowing from commodity culture reached into the home, and significance began to be placed in the purchase of things rather than their construction or creation. The growing connection between women's work, 'self-conception', objects and their display, would prove fertile ground for women interested in expanding women's sphere and influence. Yet while these changes made the displays possible, women's exhibitions would also express their genteel organisers' defiant faith in the older ways of conceptualising identity.

The interconnected anxieties of gentility, femininity, and colonialism powerfully shaped the ways in which women's work might be seen in public. In the late nineteenth century both femininity and class were subjected to new social and economic pressures and intense public scrutiny, to which the genteel class responded with a varying fusions of traditionalism and progressivism. Bringing both the products and the 'exhibitionism' of the home into the public sphere, the various displays of women's work across this period of change represented different complex negotiations of femininity, class, economics, and the public/private divide. Above all, it was the dichotomy between the exhibition and the bazaar that shaped their creation and reception.

Gendered display

In the nineteenth century bazaars and exhibitions were culturally constructed as binary opposites. Bazaars came to represent the baser aspects of the marketplace: greed, uncertainty and self-interest. They were also feminised spaces that brought genteel women into contact with the market. Bazaars sexualised and commodified women at the same time as they granted them a circumscribed form of agency. Middle- and upper-class men, however, remained ultimately in control of the ideological workings of bazaars, for their gazes and sexual desires, as well as their physical bodies, were

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18 Riley, "Am I That Name?", pp. 44-51.
placed on centre stage, and their masculinity was legitimised and reinforced through their attendance. Exhibitions, however, were conceptualised as transcending the physicalising force of the marketplace by placing power in the eye on the object rather than the gaze on the body. By prohibiting the sale of objects they made display the central means by which respectable behaviour and high culture could be taught to and assimilated by a mass audience. At the same time, as a product of manufacture and trade, exhibitions showed how, in a process equated with biological evolution, commerce had created culture and social order. Exhibitions, then, materially embodied a view of civilisation which legitimised the social aspirations and cultural authority of the middle-class.

Exhibitions were profoundly public displays, built to be experienced by individuals on a personal intellectual level. Bazaars were experienced in a social or interactive way. Bazaars were places of public intimacy, where exhibitions were sites of personal communion with universal ideas. Bazaars opened a littoral space between the 'public' and the 'private' spheres, between the upper- and middling- classes, and the rich and the poor. Genteel women who ran and took part in bazaars were inextricably caught up in the fuzzy boundaries between the 'home' and the 'world', paid and unpaid work, 'natural' feminine sexuality and 'cultural' feminine morality, and religion and commerce.

**Bazaars**

_The married and single will intermingle_  
_and cash will jingle on every hand_\(^{19}\)

From 'The Big Bazaar', a poem published in connection with the All Nations Bazaar held in Melbourne, 1883.

'Of bazaars and fancy fairs', wrote the NSW _Town and Country Journal_ late in 1887, 'there seems to be no end'.\(^{20}\) F. K. Prochaska, in his study of English women's philanthropy, postulates that over the course of the nineteenth century more than one

\(^{19}\) 'The Big Bazaar', a poem published in the _Book of the All Nations Bazaar, Town Hall, Melbourne, Easter Week, 1883, Christchurch South Yarra, Ferguson & Moore, Melbourne, [1883]._ p. 55.

\(^{20}\) _Town and Country Journal_, 5 November 1887, p. 971.
thousand bazaars were advertised in the press annually, and that in addition to this
thousands of smaller fancy fairs were held which were publicised only by informal
means.21 A survey of the social columns and advertisements pages of Australian
newspapers confirms that a similar situation, proportionate to the smaller population,
existed in the colonies. By the late 1880s, in any one week there could be as many as
five open at once in the immediate environs of Sydney alone, and they were just as
likely to be used by socialists as socialites to raise money for what each considered to
be worthy causes [Figure 1.3].22 Such events were often got up in response to
specific funding needs, such as the purchase of a church organ, the repair or
construction of parish buildings or sporting facilities, or the support of hospitals and
homes.23 Bazaars were seen as quick and sure ways of making money. Most often
men in positions of organisational power identified a funding need, and then handed
the work of meeting the goal over to women of their own class.24

Since their appearance in the early 1800s, bazaars have been associated with
‘feminine’ triviality, amateurism and social climbing. But throughout the nineteenth
century, the bazaar also carried with it a very different set of meanings to the ones we
now associate with the local school fete or church fair.25 Far from being a benign

Oxford, 1980, pp. 51ff. See also an earlier version of this chapter: ‘Charity bazaars in nineteenth-
22 *Town and Country Journal*, 5 November 1887, p. 971. Joy Damousi has detailed the use of bazaars
by socialist organisations in her *Women Come Rally: Socialism, Communism and Gender in
23 See for example the accounts of the Knox Church Organ Bazaar held in Dunedin in 1887, Knox
Church Dunedin, *Annual Report of the Kirk Session and Deacon’s Court for the Year ending 30th
September 1887*, Caxton Steam Printing Company, Dunedin, 1887.
24 For example, when the Port Adelaide Institute, an educational institution containing amongst other
things a museum, a school and a library, but with no permanent premises, hit severe financial
difficulties in 1871, Mr David Bower offered to give £500 towards the erection of a building to house
the collections ‘on condition that the public contributed a like amount’. The Committee of the
Institute, made up entirely of upper-middle-class men, ‘immediately took decisive measures to fulfil
this condition’. These ‘decisive measures’ amounted to asking a group of women to hold a bazaar. The
resulting fete raised £600 and secured the Institute’s future. See F. E. Meleng, *Fifty Years of the Port
Adelaide Institute, Incorporated, with Supplementary Catalogue*, Vardon & Pritchard, Adelaide, 1902,
vii.
nuances that deserve a study in themselves. For the purposes of this thesis, however, ‘bazaar’, ‘fair’ and ‘fete’
will be examined as generally interchangeable terms, except where reference is made to specific events.
This chapter also deals mainly with the charity bazaar, rather than the commercial bazaars which rose
to particular prominence in England in the 1810s.
aggregation of white elephant stalls, sponge cake, booties, toffee, crochet and fairy-floss, bazaars were seen as sites of sexual intrigue, disorder and pleasure, where men and women flirted with one another. At nineteenth-century fancy fairs, stallholders became sirens, sparks flew between young bodies, flames were lit and amorous couples 'got mated'.

In this sense bazaars were microcosms of a broader system of Victorian sexual economy, in which economic relations were defined in terms of sexual relations, and sexuality was conceptualised using economic terminology. As places where women were displayed and goods were sold, bazaars were popularly associated with 'the marketplace', and with overt and covert heterosexual exchanges. Flirting was a form of barter which made fairs one stall in the broader marriage market. More generally, men and women who entered the bazaar were sexualised by their contact with money and with bargaining.

At the same time, bazaars were places where the normal power relations of gender were disrupted. Women sold and men bought, and stall-holders used their feminine wiles to draw pennies from men's pockets. It was possible in 1887, for example, for the Sydney Morning Herald to describe a bazaar where the attendants, 'with whom it was evidently a labour of love, used all their feminine graces and their most seductive tones to dispose of their wares for the good of the church'. The irony that the money thus extracted went to fund religious or moralistic philanthropic activity was not lost on its critics. This apparent contradiction was the source of a great deal of the criticism that dogged bazaars throughout the century. Anti-bazaar sentiment, which arose from feminists and archbishops alike, led one poet to implore prospective visitors to the All Nations Bazaar held in Melbourne in 1883:

Seek not excuse to stay away,
Join not with those who finely say
Bazaars are base, and all that's gay

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26 Bazaar Alligator, 13 May 1876, p. 1.
28 Sydney Morning Herald, 20 June 1887, p. 5.
Evidence from Australian bazaars held between 1850 and 1900 suggests that the Victorian ambivalence about bazaars, which revolved around the disjunction between their 'baseness' and their avowed higher purpose, was representative of a wider ambivalence in nineteenth century culture about the interaction of men, women and the marketplace which had profound implications for women's work and women's exhibitions.

In general historians have shown little interest in the bazaar, despite their crucial role in the story of nineteenth century charity, philanthropy and religious life. Notable exceptions are Frank Prochaska, whose pioneering research locates bazaars in a wider context of women's charity work, Gary Dyer, whose perceptive reading of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* addresses the complex relationships that existed between women, commerce and the East, and Beverley Gordon, whose comprehensive study of the American fundraising fair characterises bazaars as undervalued repositories of aesthetic meaning. My own analysis begins from Dyer's assessment that bazaars summoned up images of the exotic East, the marketplace, and middle-class women's involvement in business feared by middle- and upper-class Englishmen 'so that it could contain and exercise them'. Bazaars' close association with prostitution meant that they 'quickly became integrated with misogynistic notions of feminine corruption and duplicity', which implied that 'lust, greed and deceit are women's essence and that they are sure to resurface'.

Dyer's analysis can be fruitfully contextualised with the work of feminist historians of the middle class in Britain and America. As Leonore Davidoff and

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29 *Book of the All Nations Bazaar*, p. 29.
30 Even a book with as promising a title as Elizabeth Windschuttle (ed.), *Women, Faith and Fetes: Essays in the History of Women and the Church in Australia*, Dove Communications, Melbourne, 1977, focuses more on the former than the latter.
Catherine Hall have shown, the involvement of both men and women in the marketplace or commercial world brought with it a complex set of ideological problems. The 'mental map' of a typical middle-class man included at its core a 'belief in the home as haven from the market'. 'Aspects of such middle-class thinking' argue Davidoff and Hall, 'were premised on the separation between market and family. This was highly contradictory since the market itself was structured by the organisation of sexual difference.' Mary Poovey notes that the idea of 'separate spheres' for men and women, combined with the depoliticisation and domestication of virtue, were central to the consolidation of bourgeois power:

linking morality to a figure (rhetorically) immune to the self interest and competition integral to economic success preserved virtue without inhibiting productivity. In producing a distinction between kinds of labor (paid versus unpaid, mandatory versus voluntary, productive versus reproductive, alienated versus self-fulfilling), the segregation of the domestic ideal created the illusion of an alternative to competition; this alternative, moreover, was the prize that inspired hard work ... Locating difference between men and women ... helped set limits to the groups that actually had access to liberalism's promise of universal economic opportunities.

It was essential to middle-class identity that genteel women were seen to be outside of the market.

The market was the source of middle-class wealth; it also contained moral danger, danger to which women were particularly susceptible. It was coarse, competitive, risky, selfish, and tended to encourage the sins of avarice and greed. But problems were also traceable to 'woman's nature' itself. It was not simply that women's more refined natures shrank from selfishness and coarseness, but also that they were naturally susceptible to the allure of the base desires commerce could foster. Women could be therefore be seen simultaneously as the embodiment of virtue, and as morally suspect.

The interaction of women and men at bazaars involved a complex negotiation of gendered ideologies of class, commerce and carnality. Anyone familiar with the

34 Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 10.
35 Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, pp. 9-12, chs. 1 and 5; Riley, "Am I That Name?", ch. 2; Russell, *A Wish of Distinction*, ch. 3.
bazaar scene in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* might agree with the English writer Charlotte Elizabeth Phelan Tonna that young ladies often worked stalls 'less from a sense of 'Christian duty', and more with the 'avowed purpose ... of having a flirtation with gentlemen buyers'. Flirtation was directly linked to the sale of goods, and was expressed in commercial terms. 'WHAT IS LOVE?' asked the Hobart Town bazaar newspaper the *Bizarre Gazette* in 1877:

> Love is the first subversive principle of this evening's purchases. Love is a fulcrum, and man the pivot on which Love revolves.

With the exchange of goods and money between men and women, it appeared a parallel exchange of a more amorous nature was inevitable.

As Dyer proves, the spectre of prostitution haunted bazaars throughout the nineteenth century. On the whole though, sexual exchange was contained within the rhetoric of the marriage market. In May 1876 a 'BALD HEADED CONTRIBUTOR' to the Emerald Hill Wesleyan church's bazaar newspaper, the *Bazaar Alligator*, asked:

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37 This maxim was followed by a mock notice proclaiming "The Public attending this Hall are hereby cautioned against stealing hearts, or gambling for smiles; Bizarre Gazette, Hobart Town, vol. 1, no. 2, [1877], p. 4.

38 In his analysis of the Soho bazaar Dyer shows that from the very beginning, bazaars were associated with prostitution and female sexual duplicity. The manner in which at bazaars women were seen 'to be the merchandise and not merely the vendors' made visible the link between the sexual corruption of pure women, and their contact with money and with the market. Dyer, The "Vanity Fair" of nineteenth-century England", pp. 205ff. In a fascinating and amusing instance, one small group of women wittily reversed the formula. In 1864, the United States Sanitary Commission, working to attend to the needs of the Union army at that time engaged in the American Civil War, staged the Great Central Fair in Philadelphia. Sanitary Fairs, as they were known, organised by thousands of concerned Northern women, raised literally millions of dollars, the bulk of which was spent on medical supplies and in maintaining a postal system for soldiers. In conjunction with the Philadelphia Fair, the Commission appointed a Committee on Labor, Income and Revenue, which requested that every industry and every labourer in Pennsylvania donate the value of one day's labour, or one day's income. A group of prostitutes published a broadside offering to donate the takings of their day's work to the Fair. The prostitutes managed to mock almost every aspect of the generic fair, down even to the rhetoric of Christian Charity, at the same time as they poked fun at the men who profited by or proselytised against prostitution. See Alvin Robert Kabot and Marjorie Sered Kabot, *Sanitary Fairs: A Philatelic and Historical Study of Civil War Benevolences*, S. F. Publishing, Gelcoe Ill., 1992, pp. 147-8; and more generally Charles J. Stille, *Memorial of the Great Central Fair for the U. S. Sanitary Commission, Held at Philadelphia, June 1864*, United States Sanitary Commission, Philadelphia, 1864; Robert H. Bremner, *The Public Good: Philanthropy and Welfare in the Civil War Era*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1980; and Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, ch. 3. For more general discussion of the way in which middle-class fears about prostitution and unregulated female sexuality intersected with concerns about women working, see Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, ch. 5.

39 A mock advertisement for a 'GREAT ATTRACTION' in *Ladies' Bazaar*, a newspaper published at the Grand Temperance Bazaar held in Hobart Town in 1857, described 'Tasmania's fair Daughters ... whose happy smiling faces as they greet each expectant purchaser is an attraction in itself which few
Why do young ladies, engaged in bazaar operations, always look so fascinating, and why do young men, innocent of pipes, tobacco, cigars and cigarettes, purchase that odd looking garment, known as the smoking cap, of the aforesaid young ladies? ... Well this I can tell you. He can produce sparks, and there is nothing that a young body takes as much as a spark. I was a spark once myself, I had my flame, and with the aid of Hymen's torch, (sweet torch-ure), we made a match of it, but I wax old now and find myself in the wrong box, when in the midst of youth and beauty. I now recommend safety matches to all young people, but they don't mind my advice, they all go to bazaars and get mated in no time.

While the natural 'laws of attraction' between men and women were irresistible and involuntary, the moral of this tale was matrimonial:

Young folks if you want to get a partner for life go to the bazaar. Boys, youths, and young men, ladies never look so nice as when engaged in good works. Girls, maidens and young women, gentlemen are never so impressionable and susceptible as when in your fair clutches, when you make them buy baby's caps, violet powder, polonaises and side combs, what you know no man can do without.40

The idea that men were weakened and susceptible to women's 'fair clutches' in the feminine space of the bazaar was a common one.41 Male fear of bazaars stemmed directly from the way in which women used love and wiles to subvert the normal rules of the marketplace. Goods were sold at exorbitant prices, on the basis of flattery only, without any eye to utility or taste. The slippers, baby's caps and violet powder purchased in such a manner were pointedly described by George Elliot as 'effeminate futilities'.42 The possibility that bazaars emasculated men and presented a challenge to male power was consistently evoked in bazaar literature.43 An article published in another Hobart bazaar publication, the Ladies' Bazaar, addressed the 'Proposed Emendation of the Marriage Service' by women, who would request men to pledge to

of our bachelor friends would desire to lose.' Ladies' Bazaar, vol. 1, no. 2, 2 December 1857, p. 4. The Bizarre Gazette also published an advertisement in the form of poem, beginning 'Wanted a wife!', and concluding 'Enquire within, that's where we live'. Bizarre Gazette, Hobart Town, vol. 1, no. 1, 1 February 1877, p. 1. The Book of the All Nations Bazaar included two poems under the title 'Love Making in two Styles', the first, translated from the Latin in, 'Ancient Style', the second from 'New South Welsh' in Modern Style. The latter ended with the charming entreaty: 'Society there's none to keep/But fifty thousand bleating sheep/Inpore intelligence and fun---O, live with me and share my run'. Book of the All Nations Bazaar, pp. 56-8.

40 Bazaar Alligator, 13th May 1876.
41 The Daily Telegraph described 'daintily-attired girls [who] roamed over the floor wheeling shillings and half-crowns out of the pockets of those who dared to brave their wiles', 23 April 1887, p. 6; see also Sydney Morning Herald, 14 May 1892, p. 7.
42 Elliot, The Mill on the Floss, p. 446.
43 For example, a poem composed for the Book of the All Nations Bazaar entitled 'The Belated Preacher', took as its theme the tale of a Baptist minister who shrank from conducting a service on discovering that his congregation consisted entirely of women, see Book of the All Nations Bazaar, p. 24.
'love her, comfort her, keep her, honour her, admire her, obey her, and submit thyself to her'. Women, in their turn, would agree to 'take charge of him, ... and govern him', and 'subdue him unto thee, and make him serve and obey thee'.

While there was mock concern that men might be rendered powerless or effeminate by their involvement in bazaars, the male gaze retained overall authority at the fancy fair. As Charlotte Tonna concluded, gentlemen buyers 'make no secret of their conviction, that all the young ladies who take stalls at a fancy fair, do so in order to be flirted with.' Although some girls chose to flirt with their male customers, all were potential quarry for men.

The most interesting way in which male authority asserted itself was through comparisons drawn between the charity bazaar and its Eastern namesake. Dyer, who has analysed these comparisons, argues that the Western bazaar as an ideological construction tried to, but could never completely, overcome the interconnected male fears of women and the East by pitting the two against each other. Making the Western bazaar a woman's domain in the hope that the purity of the feminine might cleanse it of its impure associations did not work. This was not just because 'the East traditionally was associated with female sensuality but because women too were constructed as essentially "other" (both the Orient and woman being the foci of masculine desire). Building on Dyer's argument, I would suggest that it was this desiring gaze, coupled with derisive and racist comparisons between the Eastern and Western bazaars, that checked the potential for female power at the fancy fair. Unflattering comparisons between the Eastern and the Western bazaar, and between 'lazy' Turks and 'gossiping' ladies, were utilised by middle-class men to control and criticise the women who took part in fetes and fancy fairs. The marketplace was no place for a woman, but any woman who ventured into it was 'fair game'.

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44 Ladies' Bazaar, vol. 1, no. 1, 1 December 1877, p. 3.
47 See for example a snippet published in the Hobart Town Bazaar Gazette headed 'THE DIFFERENCE, LADIES': 'A Turkish bazaar is a collection of drapery cases, on end, the entrance being a lid. The vendor sits dreamily amidst his wares, looking like a fat, lazy, tabby cat, waiting for
An analysis of public criticism of bazaars confirms the pervasiveness of the connections between evocations of lust and lucre. Criticisms raised by a clergyman about the manner in which bazaars encouraged 'evil' stimulated a vibrant debate in the pages of Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* in October 1891. The Rev. William Allen wrote to comment on remarks made by Archdeacon Langley condemning raffling at bazaars. Allen wished the Archdeacon had 'pushed his enquires a little further' and condemned bazaars in general. '[I]n conducting sales of gifts' he argued, 'the Church is invading a province which does not belong to it', the marketplace. It is not the place of the Church ... to enter the competitive arena, and join in rivalries of business.

Such an involvement not only hurt ordinary shopkeepers, but worse, promoted 'false conceptions as to the nature of charity'. Any attempt to 'maintain a spiritual institution upon commercial principles ... must fail in the long run', he said:

> if we must say "give because you may expect a carnal return for your gift," we had better make no appeal at all.

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a visitor. The bazaar Turk does not gossip, nor push his wares. Are you not glad, ladies, that you are not Turks?, *Bizarre Gazette*, Hobart Town, vol. 1, no. 2, [1877], p. 4. See also the *Book of the All Nations Bazaar*, p. 24; *Ladies' Bazaar*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1 December 1857, p. 1.

48 Debate about the conflict between pleasure and piety at bazaar which took place within the Anglican Church in Sydney in the late 1880s was evidence of greater worries: about the relationship between the Church and the commercial world, and about increasing irreligion in the general community. In the same month as the EWI took place, October 1888, the *Echo* published an editorial entitled 'A hint for church bazaars', which described a fair and entertainments which had taken place inside the church at Maffra, near Cooma, as a result of rain. The author portrayed the actions of the townfolk as defiance against the last Anglican Synod, which had 'heaped' 'objugations' on those who 'adopt this adventitious aid to church revenues'. In Maffra church, '[t]hey had raffles with dice and a shooting gallery, amongst other things. Whether they shot at the pulpit for a target, or the clergyman's hat, we are not told; but they appear to have had a gay old time, and probably will hear an exposition one of these days touching the fate of those old Jews who used the Temple as a money-changing and bird-fancying establishment.' *Echo*, October 27 1888, p. 6. The 'objugations' alluded to by the author were heard at the Anglican Synod held in Sydney late in 1887, and formed part of a larger debate between Evangelicals and Tractarians about the 'growth of ritualism' in the diocese. Hostilities centred on the newly-installed cathedral rederos, but had broader implications for the decoration and ornamentation of churches in general, hence the *Echo's* interest in where the bazaar had taken place.

49 Allen continued: 'People are invited to attend sales of gifts and spend their money "in the sacred cause of charity" But how? When I take an article from a trader and hand him the money for it I do not pretend to hand it to him "in the sacred cause of charity." The "regular way of business" and the "sacred cause of charity", he stated, "must not be confounded in this style." The 'gravest objection to the fancy fair, in his point of view, was that 'it bases gifts to religion on wrong principles'. Paul say [sic]-=""If we sowed unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap carnal things?" (1st Cor., 9-11) This is exactly the opposite of the principle underlying sales of gifts in aid of the Churches. Paul's principle is --"Carnal things in return for carnal things." In other words, it is the introduction of commercial principles where Church principles ought to rule." *Daily Telegraph*, 20 October 1891, p. 3.

50 *Daily Telegraph*, 20 October 1891, p. 3.
Allen's emphasis on the 'carnality' of the marketplace reveals the extent to which critics of the bazaar in the nineteenth century saw a link between the exchange of money and goods and sexual exchange. The correlation in language between economics and sexuality, between the material and the 'carnal', was used to maximum effect in efforts to curtail or stop bazaars. Allen concluded that the bazaar's 'tendency to make contribution not a free gift of service, but a barter for arbitrary power' implied that 'spiritual things ... could be purchased by money'.

Criticism of bazaars was just one aspect of the Anglican Church's efforts, as Patricia Grimshaw has shown, to 'contain the threat posed by women's expanding sphere while continuing to benefit from, and indeed depend upon, women's fund-raising and administrative activities.' But it was not only clergymen who argued that bazaars upset fundamental divisions between morality and the market. Storekeepers, feminists and advocates of the rights of poor women workers also entered into the debate.

Allen's emphasis on the carnality of commercial principles was expanded in the contemporary feminist critique of fancy fairs. In her feminist newspaper the Woman's Voice, Maybanke Wolstenholme (later Anderson) often expressed criticisms of bazaars within a framework that asserted the purity of true religion, and the wider economic effect of fancy fairs on women workers. In an editorial published in the edition of 20 April 1895 Wolstenholme advocated the 'utility of direct giving', by showing how

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51 At the opening of Synod in 1887, Bishop Barry had spoken of the two great problems facing the diocese: the development of 'party spirit', and 'lack of pecuniary means'. He lamented the fact that the clergy had to 'beg' for funds, and that of the contributions received there was 'much which is not freely or gratuitously given'. 'What are we to say of the devices—always unwelcome, often miserable devices—of which parishes seem to be driven—(applause)—the bazaars, the entertainments, the inevitable collection at every meeting, even the picnic and the cake fair?' Such devices, he claimed, threw a 'terrible light' on the 'fagurox of Christian duty and charity', and the 'scandal' which they caused in the 'eyes of popular judgement' threw 'hindrances ... in that way of gaining for Christianity the allegiance of the great mass of the working people.' Sydney Morning Herald, 31 August 1887, p. 3, and Daily Telegraph, 31 August 1887, p. 3.


bazaars were 'simply an organised arrangement by which two parties to a bargain may try to get the better of each other', the 'two parties' being the Church and the general public.\textsuperscript{54} Wolstenholme's ire was directed at the manner in which the trappings of commerce which the bazaar represented, namely 'bargaining' and 'trafficking', 'allowed' the 'beauty' and 'purity' of religion 'to be dragged through the mire of uncleanly bargain-hunting'.\textsuperscript{55}

The 'problem' of bazaars was a vexing one for Australian philanthropic and feminist women in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Aside from fielding the slurs and criticisms outlined above, genteel feminist fund-raisers struggled with their own doubts about the usefulness of the form. Some women who organised or participated in fairs shared with the clergy misgivings about raising funds by enticing donors with pleasure, but they rationalised their efforts on the grounds that overall financial necessity, or financial success, more than compensated for involvement in so 'light-minded a proceeding'.\textsuperscript{56} At the same time, they felt empowered by the experience bazaars provided of businesslike organisation, financial success, and 'noble', 'selfless' triumph, often in the face of male apathy, complacency or disbelief.

Ironically then, the greatest hurdle faced by most women involved in bazaars was the charge of self-interest or vanity. In \textit{The Mill on the Floss} George Eliot described the bazaar as 'an admirable modern purpose, that made charity truly elegant, and led through vanity up to the supply of a deficit'.\textsuperscript{57} Proving that the women's efforts were beyond the selfish thrusting of the market was one strategy for justifying women's work at bazaars. A poem published in 'South Yarraish' for the All Nations

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Woman's Voice}, 20 April 1895, pp. 215-6. Wolstenholme also made similar comments at a meeting of the Women's Literary Society in Sydney in June 1893, see Minutes of the Woman's Literary Society, 5 June 1893, ML B693.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Woman's Voice}, 20 October 1894, p. 74. Wolstenholme's use of commercial metaphors to measure the sexual bargaining which also took place at bazaars is clear and precise. In an earlier editorial on this subject, she argued that 'thinking women should see and ponder on' the fact that 'bazaars are frequented by people who go to them in a spirit of idle curiosity, or with a desire to gratify a mania for gambling, a mania which every lover of honesty must condemn. They foster vanity in our girls and children, and encourage them to place a marketable value on the beauty of their youth or innocence. They make trafficking and chaffering for money an ideal amusement', \textit{Woman's Voice}, 20 October 1894, p. 74.


Bazaar contrasted the selfless work of the women organisers with its parallel in the
world of commerce by addressing male visitors as
... you, who know but thought of self,
Who sought your gain and gold and pelf,
Quick clear each stall, wall, each shelf
Our goodly store! 58

The voluntary nature of women's benevolent work diminished its value in the
marketplace at the same time as it raised its status in the moral economy in which
middle-class women traded. 59 As a male speaker commented at the 'picnic ... given by
the gentlemen's committee of the German Fair to the lady stallholders and their
assistants' in Sydney in June 1888: 'the very large success met with in this
undertaking had been achieved, not by buttonholing visitors, not by political or social
influence, nor by the powerful lever of religious pressure, but solely by the devotion
and self-sacrifice of the ladies. 60 Not only were the ladies' actions outside of trade
practices, politics, society, and even religion, they also carried a substantial moral
weight beyond them as a result.

Other women argued that it was a measure of their commitment, as well as
proof of their hidden capacities, that women could manage bazaars in a business-like
way. As they did in other areas of charitable work, many women found the
responsibility and practical aspects of running bazaars both empowering and
educational, although it took place an area between the public and private spheres that

58 Book of the All Nations Bazaar, p. 29.
59 Lori D. Ginzberg, in her study of benevolence in the nineteenth-century United States, has pointed
out that ideologically much of the status of women's charity work stemmed from the fact that it was
unwaged and essentially invisible. Ginzberg, Women and the Work of Benevolence, pp. 46-7, 53. See
also N. Orwin Rush, 'Lucretia Mott and the Philadephia Anti-Slavery Fairs', Bulletin of Friends
Historical Association, vol. 35, Autumn 1946, pp. 69-75. As Mary P. Ryan has neatly put it, at
ladies' fairs 'women were extending their customary work, producing use values in the home, outside
the market, but for a larger social purpose.' Mary P. Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in
Ballock argues that twentieth century women see their voluntary work not as an extension of their
domestic work, but as 'not dissimilar to paid work for men'. Cora Ballock, Volunteers in Welfare,
60 Sydney Morning Herald, 9 June 1888, p. 13.
required careful negotiation. Good organisation gave, by association, a kind of masculine authority to women's efforts.

Bazaars contained the germ of feminist action not only in that they gave women access to organisation, businesslike management and a public role, but also because they both evoked and defied women's powerlessness and invisibility. In a speech at the opening of a sale of gifts in aid of the Presbyterian Church at Leichhardt in November 1891, feminist Mary Windeyer asked:

what can women of themselves give but a free-will offering of time and labour. Their generous impulses can have no other gratification. ... In looking at this display of work, the hope is forced upon us that a spirit of reverential devotion, such as inspired the religious builders of the beautiful churches of old time, and of the old world, has lifted up the hearts and winged the willing hands of those whose labour in this cause has been as real as if they had laid a course of brick or carved a pillar in their church.

With these words she echoed the sentiments of Julia Ward Howe, author of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, when she told a meeting of women in New Orleans in 1883:

Ladies, we must remember that women have sometimes built churches with no better instruments than thimbles and a teapot.

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62 By 1896 it was possible for Anna Barrows, in an essay on ‘Women and Fairs’ published in the catalogue of the World’s Food Fair and Home Congress held in Boston, to argue in relation to bazaars that: ‘The objectionable features often ascribed to such charitable enterprises have been much magnified by the funny men of the newspapers, but such as existed have been due mainly to women’s lack of knowledge of business detail. As she has come to place a just value on her own labor and time, these features have disappeared. Such fairs are a legitimate method of turning effort into money when no other means exists.’ Anna Barrows, ‘Women and Fairs’, in the World’s Food Fair and Home Congress, *Official Program*, The Fair, Boston, 1896, pp. 38-40.

63 One bazaar newspaper even explicitly drew out the connection between the bazaar and women’s rights. The great question of the day, it trumpeted, was ‘Our Bazaar.’ How can it be otherwise, seeing that it has fully solved that great political doctrine which our trans-Pacific Cousins of the fair sex have been so long contending for, namely, ‘Women’s rights.’ ‘For has not our bazaar’, it claimed, ‘indisputably, once and for ever, settled the right of fair and gentle woman to exercise undisputed sway, in that she has shown her superior power, he ability to command, her wisdom to devise, her sagacity and tact to provide and carry out so great and so comprehensive an institution as “Our Bazaar,”’ and which has fully proved her great capacity, even in these days of circumscribed skirts and anticrisoline.’ ‘The so-called Lords of the Creation’ were now ‘compelled to acknowledge that they are utterly powerless in this great matter; that, in fact, a Bazaar without the Ladies would be a miserable failure.’ The implications of this new awareness, the author claimed, should impel the ‘bachelor Attorney-General’ to ‘gallantly’ prepare a new jury act which would allow a ‘panel of ladies’, and to ‘abrogate the Salic Law’, and allow the appointment of a ‘governess’ to Government House, Hobart Town. *Bicarre Gazette*, Hobart Town, vol. 1, no. 1, 7 February 1877, p. 4.

64 Mary Elizabeth Windeyer, ‘Part of a speech at the opening of a sale of gifts in aid of the Presbyterian Church at Leichhardt Nov. 26 1891’, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML MSS 186, p. 208.

While Windeyer's comments expressed a belief in the importance and moral worth of voluntary labour, she did not see this worth stemming from its separation from other forms of labour. Rather, its relation to work, and creative physical labour in particular, was explicitly drawn. The moral value of women's voluntary work stemmed not from its separation from the public sphere, but from the inspirational and devotional nature of the work itself, which could be brought safely into the market, immune to any baser encroachments.

While some women justified bazaars by arguing they transcended the market, their critics, including feminists like Maybanke Wolstenholme and merchants in general, argued that they clearly were inside the market, and that their work hurt those it was aiming to help by affecting the market prices of goods. Although with very different agendas, these critics claimed that bazaars economically disadvantaged the businessmen and shopgirls mimicked by the organisers, and hurt the same respectable working poor they sought to assist. Bazaars sold 'goods which any tailor could furnish',66 'or milliner, modiste, or tradesmen be bought of',67 but they sold them at prices not regulated by any of the rules of capitalistic exchange. A smoking cap, made at home and with materials and labour calculated at zero, might be sold well below or well above its market value.

Merchants were the group most likely to complain about bazaars, and while they always argued the case for the adversely affected outworker or seamstress, their main concern was usually with their own emporium.68 While it was perhaps hypocritical of storekeepers to complain about such ill-effects while they paid their own suppliers poor wages, the effect of bazaars on women workers making fancy goods should not be underestimated. Throughout the 1890s, Maybanke Wolstenholme argued that richer women should take greater responsibility for the poverty of their

67 Bazaar Alligator, no. 2, 11 May 1876.
68 The merchants of Philadelphia complained that bazaars were made up of "combinations of individuals who can afford to work for nothing" who could consequently afford to 'undersell the stores', see 'Mere Justice', A Review of An Address to the Citizens of Philadelphia, on the Subject of Fancy Fairs', M. Fithian, Philadelphia, 1834, pp. 6-8.
fellow females. 'If a woman can afford to buy cushions and embroidery and crochet, if they have money to spare for luxury, surely the starving woman who must work to live should have the first claim on her prosperous sister', she claimed in an editorial in the Woman's Voice. 'We have at the present moment', she argued, 'here in our great Australian cities, hundreds of women, who barely keep within the narrow line, outside which lies starvation and prostitution.'

They can do little or nothing but needlework or fancy-work. Every bazaar undersells them, and, in the name of Christ, asks a blessing on the traffic—a traffic that competes with the labor of the destitute, and coaxes the bread-money from the channel where it might reach the starving. 69

Wolstenholme located the problem of the bazaar in female 'bargain-hunters', not just men who ogled the stallholders. 70

In January 1895 Wolstenholme republished an address which had been given by Miss Boughton, a member of the Woman's Political League in Wellington, which she felt added to her own critique of bazaars and sales of work. 71 Miss Boughton (an advocate of equal pay) had argued that the incursion of women into men's work had been brought about by a number of factors, which had combined to make needlework an unprofitable occupation. These included the increasing importation of ready-made clothing into the colony; 'the desire on the part of shop-keepers to obtain enormous profits on their goods' by 'grinding down the pay of the unfortunate seamstress to the barest pittance'. But the 'principal cause of the difficulty of obtaining work of a better class—that is the kind of work for which good prices are paid—is that the greater part is done at the Sewing Bees.' Ladies 'with plenty of leisure time' and money to purchase materials made up such goods and sold them at sales of work, thus contributing greatly to the 'injustices' inflicted on poor seamstresses. Miss Boughton advocated instead the setting up of depots where good work could be sold at fair prices, and where women would 'be paid for their time, otherwise they cannot be

69 Woman's Voice, 20 October 1894, p. 74.
70 'It is well-known', Wolstenholme argued, 'that dozens of articles are sold at every bazaar at a price barely sufficient to cover the cost of the material, and woman with an insane love of bargains will buy them, and by doing so establish a price at which no one can earn a pittance.' Any 'system which can make bargain-hunting seem like Christian charity' she concluded, 'must be wrong—wrong in conception, wrong in method! And it is wrong—utterly, hopelessly wrong.' Woman's Voice, 20 October 1894, p. 74.
71 Woman's Voice, 12 January 1894, p. 152.
expected to put in quite as many ruffles and tucks as those who are sewing for love.' Benevolent women should remember that 'many are compelled to accept charity for the sake of those dependent upon them, who would much prefer to work'. She concluded that 'raising money for churches may be good work, ... but finding employment for those who require it is much better.' In her last statement she echoed Wolstenholme, who had previously commented:

> a woman who can spare time for labor ought to be able to sell that labor in the open market; and ... if she cannot sell it, because of bad social conditions or unfair competition, then we should give our energy to altering the conditions, and cease to try by two wrongs to make a right.\(^72\)

Both women, with clearly stated feminist agendas, identified responsibilities and culpabilities in relation to bazaars and women's labour, and traced them not only to the doors of the male capitalist, but also to the women in the family he supported. They sought general societal changes to address the inequities of women's employment. They asserted that bazaars were active factors in the marketplace, and rejected them on those grounds, advocating instead direct charity, or the channelling of female voluntary labour into the foundation and management of institutions which placed a proper market value on women's paid labour.

In the nineteenth-century Australian imagination the bazaar conjured up images of coquetry and commerce as much as Christian charity. Bazaars symbolically represented the base marketplace, where men and women engaged in various forms of sexual exchange, most commonly flirting. At bazaars women's work was not so much on display as women themselves. A fear of female authority in the bazaar space was controlled and contained by the primacy of the male gaze, contextualised in a wider Orientalist discussion of the Eastern marketplace. Bazaars were a stepping stone for feminist activity, but a problematic one, because of the difficulties they presented for middle-class women negotiating the 'private' and the 'public' spheres, and for their real economic impact on poor women workers. The misgivings, criticisms and

\(^72\) *Woman's Voice*, 20 October 1894, p. 74.
problems associated with the bazaar form profoundly shaped the development of all other displays of women's work.

Exhibitions

Like the bazaar, the exhibition also carried with it well-established, though less contested, cultural meanings. These meanings were constructed by the enormous proliferation of exhibition literature, including official catalogues, speeches, souvenir publications, odes, cantatas and guidebooks, that surrounded every display following the Great Exhibition held in London in 1851.\(^2\) Exhibition histories traced the proud development of the exhibition ideal from ancient markets and medieval fairs. Some Twentieth century exhibition historians, influenced by Rabelaisian readings of early modern markets and fairs, have conflated the chaotic, playful, satirical and rebellious aspects of these fairs with the world's fairs of the Victorians.\(^4\) While audiences and entertainments may have brought this playful spirit to the exhibitions, it was not what Victorian exhibition organisers had in mind when they planned the great events, nor what their allies the exhibition chroniclers meant when they invoked Donnybrook or Bartholemew Fairs. International exhibitions were clearly defined in contrast to fairs and bazaars - especially bazaars. Exhibitions were marketplaces which had 'evolved' beyond these low relations.

The following discussion of international exhibitions is informed by the growing body of literature devoted to exhibition history, but its emphasis is on what role exhibitions played in Victorian culture. It draws on the insights of exhibition historians Graeme Davison, Robert Rydell, Tony Bennett and Neil Harris into the visual and imaginative functions of display to examine the ideological workings of


exhibitions through their celebratory literature. It focuses on how exhibition historians in the nineteenth century traced the origins of the great world's fairs. In doing so it exposes the interconnected roles played by gender, imperialism and capitalism in the exhibition genesis stories constructed by contemporary commentators.

Nineteenth-century exhibition historians traced the evolution of the form from primitive sites of individual exchange, to vibrant but base marketplaces, and finally to the civilised and civilising exhibition, a marketplace without sale or exchange, where men traded in abstracts and ideals rather than goods and money. The ultimate production of the marketplace, they claimed, had been social progress, civilisation, and high culture. In making these claims, nineteenth-century exhibition chroniclers described and legitimised the evolution of the new middle-class, whose origin in trade and manufacturing, and elevation through hard work to leisure and security had, in the authors' view, fostered the boon of science and technology, forged empires, and revitalised the creation of fine art. The results, and increasingly the processes, of the production of goods, put on show at world's fairs, acted as metaphorical representations not only of the production of society and culture, but also of the manufacture of the self.

In these accounts exhibitions embodied the ideal individual life-path of every aspiring middle-class man; from uniformed raw material, through application and practicality, to spiritual, moral and economic wealth, and patriarchal authority. They

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encouraged the men (and women) of other classes to aspire to such progress as well. This educational aspect of exhibitions rested firmly on the centrality they gave to pure display. Display was what separated the exhibition from the bazaar. At a bazaar, objects were shown in order to be sold. At an exhibition, objects were shown to impress truth and knowledge on the minds of the viewers. Classification and other forms of visual order made sense of the panoply and confusion of the marketplace.

The foundation of this exhibition ideology was the belief that exhibitions created higher meanings out of objects. This was intrinsically linked to the rise of industrial capitalism. As Graeme Davison has argued, Marx's theory of the fetishism of commodities 'reached its apotheosis in the organisation of the Great Exhibition'. Objects came to take on the 'spiritual qualities of human beings.' In *Capital* Marx made much, in his descriptions of value, of the religious nature of commodity exchange. At exhibitions, sight became the most important sense for transmitting ideas. Objects rather than people took centre-stage. The imaginative relations between objects at the centre of the capitalist economy were acted out materially. The physicality and sensuality of exchange, so obvious in descriptions of bazaars, was transformed into a quasi-religious veneration of the commodity.

Exhibitions' high claims rested on banishing direct sale on the exhibition floor. Exhibitors were even banned from displaying prices. These rules were especially vigorously enforced in Australia, where assertions of 'civilisation' and 'culture' seemed more necessary and less certain. Both the major exhibitions held in Australia prior to the EWI, the Adelaide Jubilee Exhibition of 1887 and the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition of 1888, saw the prosecution of exhibitors for selling on the floor.

Thomas Richards, in his complex study of Victorian advertising, combines Marx's identification of the commodity as the repository of capitalist meaning with

76 Davison, 'Festivals of Nationhood', p. 160.
Guy Debord’s Situationalist reading of spectacle in modern culture to construct an argument about the centrality of exhibitions, and the Great Exhibition in particular, to the rise of consumer culture. By banishing the price tag the Great Exhibition directed the gaze of the visitor away from the ‘price’ towards the object, encouraging instead an individual engagement with calculating the value of each commodity. The Exhibition ‘thus fostered what can be called a transparency of exchange: though it was not set up to sell things, it let things sell themselves.’

By preventing goods from being sold on the floor, ‘the Exhibition was in fact all the more influential’.

The Exhibition succeeded precisely because it elevated the commodity above the mundane act of exchange. In the Crystal Palace a commodity was not merely an object of exchange; it was ... a concentrated aesthetic assault on the senses of the consumer, a consolidated image, a visible ideal, and an object of contemplation.

The exhibition, then, allowed the commodity to transcend itself. At the bazaar, this transcendence could not take place. Goods were cried and sold, exchange was clearly visible, the response to objects was social rather than individual.

The men who organised and offered contemporary commentary on the nineteenth-century international exhibition were keen to distance their displays from bazaars. Patrick Geddes, in his famous study *Industrial Exhibitions and Modern Progress*, argued that the exhibition must be viewed ... not merely as an extensive bazaar with attached places of amusement, but as a central museum of industry; too vast and costly for permanence, but all the more fully illustrative of production, and of social progress in every respect.

James P. Boyd commented on the Paris Exposition of 1900:

There were on view at that grandest of all Expositions, collections illustrative of the products, industries, social organisation and institutions of the nations, but the excellence and instructive value of the Exposition would have been impaired if it had been limited [sic] to bazaar, promenade and display features merely, and had not been made to embrace also the great truths and golden lessons of life spoken through the lips of learned interpreters to the students of the arts and crafts of the nineteenth century.

In exposition rhetoric, it was 'great truths' and 'golden lessons' which separated the bazaar and the exhibition. Such a separation was largely an illusion, not least because

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women's fund-raising often financed great international expositions such as the Philadelphia Centennial International Exhibition of 1876.\textsuperscript{83} Many exhibitions, particularly those of a national rather than an international nature, also often incorporated fetes to raise funds for pertinent charities, or allowed sales of goods, although usually with large doses of qualification or justification.\textsuperscript{84}

While in reality the difference between exhibitions and bazaars may not have been so clear, ideologically the distinction was great. International exhibitions were separated from bazaars historically and in terms of their relationship to commerce. Both these differences rested on the construction of the exhibition as marketplace which had shed its negative baser associations and entered high culture, as a space which could transcend commerce altogether, at the same time as it proved commerce to be the source of high culture itself.

An idealistic belief in the all-pervasive power of the exhibition to overcome the selfishness of commercial rivalry and international conflict was as common in exposition rhetoric as ruthless economic competition and rampant nationalism was in exhibition practice. Paul Greenhalgh has identified a disjunction between exhibitions as 'physical phenomena', and the 'conceptual apparatus for the justification and explanation of them'.\textsuperscript{85} The 'reasons' for committing large sums of money and space to exhibitions had to be 'carefully constructed and profoundly ideal'. He identifies five perennial 'moral justifications' for exhibitions: a 'celebratory circumstance', 'Peace amongst nations, Education (especially of the masses), Trade, and Progress'.\textsuperscript{86}

While all of these ideals were interrelated, the idea of trade, argues Greenhalgh, was 'at the theoretical core of exhibitions'. Trade had created Western power and continued to maintain and extend it. Exhibitions made visible links between religion, imperialism and capitalism in order to explain the 'naturalness' of that power, and to prove its superiority over alternative forms of social, political and economic order. As

\textsuperscript{84} See for example Charles Lowe, \textit{Four National Exhibitions in London and Their Organiser}, T. F. Unwin, London, 1892.
\textsuperscript{85} Greenhalgh, \textit{Ephemeral Vistas}, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{86} Greenhalgh, \textit{Ephemeral Vistas}, pp. 16-17.
'Helix' claimed of the Great Exhibition of 1851, the 'divine inspiration' had created the diversity of 'climate, geography and peoples':

for the purpose of exchanging their various productions; thence grew up commerce, i.e. mutual buying and selling, with competition or mutual self-seeking following in its train. ... As the wind carries winged seeds over the earth, so commerce carries arts, and civilisation, and humanity as a consequence.\(^{87}\)

The exhibition was not only the pinnacle of that process, the plant grown from the seed, but it was also the wind, the vehicle through which commerce might extend its civilising power.

One of the best examples of this type of understanding is James P. Boyd's lengthy essay on the 'Origin and Growth of Expositions', contained in his detailed study of the Paris Exposition of 1900.\(^{88}\) Boyd, like many Victorians, believed that the exposition was a form unique to the 'closing decades of the nineteenth century', the most 'potential of civilizing agents', representing a pinnacle of human evolution.

The genius of man has not been able to invent a more general, complete and wholesome appeal to the refining and elevating instincts of individuals, communities and nations than the International Exposition.\(^{89}\)

Since 1850, Boyd argued, the international exposition had 'taken on its most modern form of unselfishness and institutional liberality', to become 'co-operative historic and educational society whose membership embraces the world.\(^{90}\)

Commentators like Boyd implied a gradual evolution of the form at the same time as they championed the exhibition as man's penultimate creation. As a symbol of progress, the exposition represented a reconciliation of the two greatest forces of nineteenth-century ideological authority: tradition and innovation. In his essay, Boyd traced the history of the exhibition from the 'primitive fair' to the 'school for all-world scholars', emphasising a trend away from sale and exchange to pure display.\(^{91}\)

In Boyd's conception, it was exactly the commercialism of the fair which not only created the attractions of amusement and escapism, but also sowed the seeds of the higher culture of learning by looking. As fairs became associated with 'kingly

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favor', and commerce broadened its own horizons, they came 'gradually' to 'lose their commercial spirit and value for something more lofty and pervasive.' The fair 'now lacked the stimulus and selfishness of commercialism':

It was still to be a thing devoted to the material, but to the material in conjunction with the intellectual. The mart idea was to pass away, but the show idea was to bloom more luxuriantly than ever. Amusement there might be, but it would be that afforded by witnessing the wonders of genius and skill. Interchange of thoughts was to be substituted for interchange of wares.\textsuperscript{92}

The international exposition was the pinnacle of this evolutionary process. 'What institution grander and more all-embracing than this!' he exclaimed, 'What higher evidence of liberality and enlightenment! What so conducive to universal peace and progress.'\textsuperscript{93}

In order to sustain this idea of universal progress, however, and simultaneously maintain the superiority of Western culture (or more specifically English, French, German or American imperial power) it was necessary to construct a symbolic hierarchy of marketplaces at exhibitions. The goods of 'less evolved' countries were displayed in a manner which suggested a lower form of commercial exchange. Eastern nations in general, and colonised countries in particular, often found their productions on show not in the manner of the European exhibits, but in a bazaar within the exhibition. At the Great Exhibition of 1851 the extensive exhibits of India and Turkey, for example, were shown in a manner intended to conjure or duplicate the Eastern bazaar.\textsuperscript{94} At the Paris Exhibition of 1889 the Egyptian exhibit, built by the French as a 'carefully chaotic' Cairo street, 'arranged in the haphazard manner of the bazaar', 'disgusted' and 'embarrassed' the Egyptian delegation.\textsuperscript{95} These types of display did not simply exoticise and 'other' Eastern nations by differentiating them from the more ordered displays of the West. It implied their lower evolutionary

\textsuperscript{93} Boyd, The Paris Exposition of 1900, pp. 5-6.
\textsuperscript{94} For an analysis of India at World's Fairs see Carol Breckenridge, 'The aesthetics and politics of colonial collecting: India at world's fairs', Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 31, no. 2, April 1989, pp. 195-216.
\textsuperscript{95} Mitchell, 'The world as exhibition', pp. 217-236.
status by suggesting their economic 'underdevelopment' as well as their racial 'inferiority'.

But there was another set of exhibitors between the 'other' and the 'centre'. In colonies with predominantly European populations like those in Australasia, the idea that 'stages' of cultural evolution related to economic progress caused acute problems. Colonial exhibitions made what to many international commentators seemed pathetic, artificial, or overwrought attempts to prove the colonies were on a cultural par with the rest of the Western world. Australian exhibition organisers often found it harder to confidently disguise the real economic reasons they held exhibitions behind exhibition ideology, perhaps because in newer countries even greater concern existed about the materialism and self-interest of the growing culture. Colonial exhibition organisers had an interest in showing that trade in primary materials was not detrimental to the growth of culture, and in proving, along the lines of Boyd, that this type of exchange produced high culture as well as 'basic' life in the colonies. They were also, in many ways, trapped by the fact that at exactly the stage they were arguing this line, a quarter of a century after Britain and France had established and refined exhibition ideology, high culture and low culture were undergoing significant changes. Mass production and mass entertainment, and the emergence of consumerism, had again shifted the relationship between commerce and culture.

A good gauge of the colonial response can be found in the work of R. E. N. Twopeny. Twopeny, a man perhaps better known to present-day historians as the author of *Town Life in Australia*, described himself as 'formerly secretary of the South

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96 As Robert Rydell has shown, anthropological exhibits which aimed to prove 'ideas about human progress along evolutionary lines' depicted 'grades of culture'. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, pp. 98-101. See also Annie E. S. Coombes, "For God and for England": Contributions to an image of Africa in the first decade of the twentieth century’, *Art History*, vol. 8, no. 4, December 1985, pp. 453-66.

Australian Royal Commissioners at the Paris, Sydney, and Melbourne International Exhibitions, and promoter and manager of private venture exhibitions at Adelaide, Perth, and Christchurch. In 1883 he published a pamphlet proposing that an Australasian Exhibition be held in London at some time in the near future.98 His influence over colonial exhibiting was profound and long-lasting. Like all exhibition organisers, Twopeny had numerous practical and idealised objects for his scheme. The practical ones included attracting population and capital to the Australasian colonies, and extending the market for Australian frozen food. The more ideal (and the more fully expressed) embraced drawing the 'sister colonies' together by 'presenting the first model of a Federal Australasian Government'; and 'arousing a national Australasian patriotism, which shall have its foundation in our attachment to the mother country.'99 Behind this rhetoric of family and imperialism, Twopeny's greatest motivation lay in attempting to stem the tide of trade and population between Great Britain and America, 'a foreign soil', and redirect it to Australasia.100 He was adamant, however, that the function of an exhibition was education to this end, not the sale of goods.

Exhibitions were considered by many commentators to be a more comprehensive and comprehensible educational tool than any other. James P. Boyd described the international exposition as

an historic book, whose scenic pages mirror the past with a fidelity unapproached by the most truthful pen. It is a scientific volume, whose material presentations astound with their bewildering variety of forms and uses. It is an art treatise, whose realistic chapters impress far more deeply than written theories of color and tone, brush and chisel. It is a pulpit, rostrum and school, whose silent objective speech is more eloquent than that syllabled by lip and tongue.101

Twopeny's exhibition would be an historic book, a scientific volume, an art treatise, a pulpit, rostrum and a school of Australasian life. It would prove the elevated nature of Australasian progress by being the purest of exhibitions:

99 Twopeny, Australasian Exhibition, p. 3.
100 Twopeny, Australasian Exhibition, pp. 3-4.
Twopeny's proposal, even more so than Boyd's history, was eager to overtly link the benefits of visual display to trade and progress. That increased trade was his primary motivation was expressed openly, more openly than might have been the case in Europe, but Twopeny was keenly aware that his exhibition needed to avoid direct association with trade. He made strenuous efforts to distinguish the exhibition and the bazaar, firstly on the grounds that the exhibition was ordered and classified, and the bazaar chaotic; and secondly that the exhibition was a display which took advertising and not sale as its intention, and thereby transcended the bazaar because its claims were made on the mind rather than on the purse (or perhaps more truthfully, on the purse through the mind).

This was not, in his view, something Australasian exhibitions previously had managed to achieve. The exhibition Twopeny envisaged would be of an 'entirely different character from any hitherto held'.

Nothing is further from my mind than the idea of holding an Exhibition of the ordinary humdrum kind. ... [S]uch an Exhibition would fail to attract. An Exhibition, such as I propose, would not be a mere dead museum or bazaar, but as nearly as possible a living representation of Australasian life, scenery, manners, industry and resources.

This would be achieved by virtue of the fact that exhibits would not be presented as subjects for admiration in the abstract, but a personal interest would be excited in them by giving such particulars concerning their production as would appeal to the eye and imagination.

This appeal would be stimulated by classification, because 'an undifferentiated mass of anything', such as might have been on view at a bazaar, 'is meaningless and uninteresting, but directly you classify the component parts of the mass the meaning becomes clear, and interest is at once aroused.' Under such a scheme of display, an object would become to a visitor (invariably male in Twopeny's view), a living thing, speaking in distinct and unmistakable tones of a far off land, where the conditions of life are easy, where home is reproduced, where English

102 Twopeny, Australasian Exhibition, p. 7.
103 Twopeny, Australasian Exhibition, p. 4. Italics in original.
104 Twopeny, Australasian Exhibition, p. 5.
105 Twopeny, Australasian Exhibition, p. 5.
habits and customs prevail, and where many industries are prosecuted with success.\textsuperscript{106}

Displayed in this way at exhibitions, objects became animate, embodying whole sets of cultural and economic meanings. The material came to express the ideal. In Twopeny's view the exhibition form was an active force which could affect men's thoughts, and influence their actions, purely by virtue of its immediate visual impact. Through the eye, the imagination was to be engaged, and through the mind's eye, the mind itself.\textsuperscript{107}

The educative function of the exhibition, particularly the role they played in educating the 'masses', rested on the power of the visual over the written.\textsuperscript{108} As Graeme Davison has convincingly argued, the exhibition embodied the idea of the 'object lesson', which 'postulated that people learned first of all by observation of everyday objects, secondly by comparison and classification, and only finally by abstract reasoning.'\textsuperscript{109}

The process of ordering and 'making sense' of the exhibits did not simply take place at the site of display. It had to be carried on in the minds of the visitors long after the exhibition had closed. As Kate Brannon Knight commented on the World's Columbian Exposition:

\begin{quote}
In the white heat of enthusiasm generated by the magnificence of the World's Fair as a spectacle, it was impossible to remember that men are influenced more by appearances than by realities, and that national glory, rather than gaining a fragmentary knowledge of things to be seen, is the object of expositions. It was equally impossible to realise that

"Time, who in the twilight comes to mend
All the fantastic day's caprice,"

would gently weave these fragments into a delightful, unbroken remembrance, infinitely more satisfactory to the possessor than any written reminder of opportunities forever lost in the swift progress of those enchanting weeks.
\end{quote}

The very ephemerality of exhibitions added to the idea that the only form in which exhibitions survived was as memories, greater than words, which had been impressed upon the mind. By its very nature, Knight argued, '[t]he literature of the World's Fair must consist of impressions', because the fair itself was 'the greatest of illusions'.

\textsuperscript{106} Twopeny, \textit{Australasian Exhibition}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{107} Twopeny, \textit{Australasian Exhibition}, pp. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{108} See Bennett, \textit{The Exhibitionary Complex}, pp. 68-9. See also Harris, 'Museums, merchandising and popular taste', pp. 56-81.
\textsuperscript{109} Davison, \textit{Festivals of Nationhood}, p. 159.
Exhibitions not only *seemed* imaginary to visitors while they gazed upon them, they *were* partly imaginary, constructed into the fancy of exhibition goers, which became the conduit through which it was hoped (as Twopeny explained) to implant higher truths and solid ideas into the rational and reasonable part of the human mind. The exhibition, reported Knight, 'with its thousand lights and shades alternately dazzled and uplifted the beholder.' [Figure 1.4] \(^{110}\) Another visitor to the Chicago fair, Denton J. Snider, concurred with her opinion. 'The vast multitude of details', he commented in his *World's Fair Studies*, 'as yet more or less chaotic, must be reduced to order, before the event can become our intellectual property; the floating mass of images, recalled and reproduced by the thousands, must be united and held together through their idea ere they can become truly our spiritual possession.'\(^{111}\)

How did women take part in these complex negotiations of spirit and matter? What opportunities and difficulties did these ways of conceptualising exhibitions present to women in the nineteenth century?

While exhibitions largely represented the masculine world, they also seemed to offer tremendous possibilities to women. The culture of consumption that exhibitions helped to shape targeted the domestic market and offered women the illusion of power and agency through the purchase of commodities. The universality that exhibitions presented as their central defining feature meant women could not be overtly excluded as contributors. As exhibitors, women found a means of publicly displaying their creativity and skill. The exhibition world's idealism and utopianism made it a respectable place for women to show their work, to visit and learn, as well as a potential vehicle for women's own visions of the future.\(^{112}\) The potential for self-education that a massive and ordered collection of objects and unique experiences offered to women, largely separated from other learning opportunities, was enormous.


While this thesis focuses more on the use of exhibitions by women organisers and exhibitors, it is important to touch briefly on their broader significance to women visitors. Throughout the history of the international exhibition women appeared in many ways. The female form was featured as a symbol of abstract ideals and the embodiment of nations, in statuary, allegorical painting, and medal design [Figure 1.5]. Real women were organisers, fund-raisers, exhibitors, workers and visitors. Each of these activities provided women with different positions from which to negotiate aspects of femininity. As Greenhalgh has argued, exhibitions also offered 'one of the first and most effective cultural arenas ...[to] express ... their misgivings with established patriarchy.' The origins of some of these opportunities lay in the figure of the female exhibition visitor. As visitors, women experienced personal feelings of freedom and enlightenment, as well as glimpses of the potential power of being both a target and an agent of consumption. But women visitors also took on a significant role in one of the exhibition's primary social functions: the refinement of the public.

Women were avid exhibition goers. It is possible that the majority of visitors to the Great Exhibition held in London in 1851 were women. Certainly the figures relating to season tickets show that middle- and upper-class women and men displayed an equal interest in repeat visits to the Crystal Palace:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of tickets sold</td>
<td>25,605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of season tickets sold to men</td>
<td>13,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of season tickets sold to women</td>
<td>12,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of a season ticket (men): £3 3s. 0d.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of a season ticket (women): £2 2s 0d.</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The difference in the cost of tickets also implied an attempt on the part of the Exhibition's commissioners to encourage female attendance. No figures exist for the number of times a visitor used their season ticket between May and October 1851, but contemporary illustrations of the courts almost always feature large numbers of women looking at the displays [Figure 1.6].

What do we know about women's thoughts as they gazed into the exhibition kaleidoscope? Neil Harris has argued that exhibition architecture represented an attempt to mediate public and private space. Women visitors too were experiencing exhibitions in ways which subtly combined the public and private worlds. In 1852 Rebecca Raworth, a book-binder, wrote to her brother on the gold diggings in Australia:

Did you hear of the wonderful great Exhibition in 1851. I went to see it in two days it was a wonderful thing. I went in the room that contained the New South Wales things [sic]. What curious boats and weapons of war. I thought about you dear Brother and wondered whether your eyes had beheld any of the objects I was looking at.

Not only is this letter a very poignant reminder of what unexpected emotional effects objects shown at exhibitions might hold for visitors, it also highlights a very private experience of a very public event. While this was not necessarily a purely feminine reaction, it is an insight from a woman that illuminates the inner world of exhibition goers, emphasising sensations of wonder and awe, as well as personal imaginings.

Similar sentiments were shared by genteel colonial women who visited the international exhibitions of the 1870s and 1880s. In her novel The Three Miss Kings (1891) Ada Cambridge describes the experiences of three young women at the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880 [Figure 1.7]. Mrs Duff-Scott, their elderly chaperone, begs them to give up book-learning and spend some time at the exhibition:

You will have never had such a chance to learn something of the world. ... There are a great many things for you to learn that all the books in the Public Library could not teach you. ... [C]ome and learn what your fellow creatures are made of. Make a school of the exhibition while it lasts.[118]

Mrs Duff-Scott's idea of exhibition was predominantly a public one, the girls would learn about 'social science'. But the three Miss Kings themselves experienced a far more personal and private education.

[T]o our girls it was an enchanted palace of delights - far exceeding their most extravagant anticipations. They gave no verbal expression to their sentiments, but looked at each other with faces full of exalted emotion, and tacitly agreed that they were perfectly satisfied. ... A longing took possession of them all in the same moment to steal back to-morrow -- next day -- as soon as they were free

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116 Harris, 'Great American fairs and American cities', pp. 118-22.
again to follow their own devices -- and wander about the great and wonderful
labyrinth by themselves and revel unobserved in their secret enthusiasms.119

This sense of personal freedom, coupled with the enjoyment of solitude, secrecy and
freedom from the gazes of others, is at odds with the assumption that the world of the
exhibition was entirely an ordered, regulated or public one. The experience of the
visitor, particularly the female visitor liberated from everyday feminine life, reveals
that even the biggest, most structured exhibition made space for, even relied on, the
intimate responses of individuals to objects, by combining the public and personal
realms. Nevertheless, any freedom or agency this might imply was mediated by the
masculine ideology of world’s fairs, and the overall authority of the male gaze.

A 'short sermon for sightseers', prepared for the Pan-American Exposition
held in Buffalo in 1901, advised its readers: 'please remember that when you get
inside the gates you are a part of the show'. The idea that exhibition visitors were
themselves 'exhibits' of a kind has recently been much discussed by exhibition
historians, largely in the context of educating the manners of the masses.120 Tony
Bennett's elucidation of a Victorian 'exhibitionary complex' has brought Foucauldian
and Gramscian insights into discipline and social control to bear on museums and
exhibitions. He has outlined the manner in which these institutions represented the
'development of technologies of vision which rendered the multitude accessible to its
own inspection.' Exhibitions, he argues, taught the populace the correct way to behave
by using transparency and visibility to encourage self-regulation.121

Women of all classes were to be the vessels of this learning, because their
allotted ideological role involved the regulation of social behaviour. Yet women's
behaviour were also presented as proof of the intractable uncouthness of the working
people. The 'vulgarity' of the lower orders was epitomised in the press through

119 Cambridge, *The Three Miss Kings*, p. 102. Cambridge herself spoke of the two Melbourne
exhibitions with great delight in her autobiography *Thirty Years in Australia*, (first published 1902),
120 See Harris, 'Museums, merchandising and popular taste', pp. 58-9; Audrey Short, 'Workers under
121 Bennett, 'The exhibitionary complex', pp. 86-8. See also Davison, 'Festivals of nationhood', pp.
163-4.
descriptions of working-class women who breastfed their babies inside the exhibition building, in full public view.\textsuperscript{122} The paradox of femininity as both a moralising and degrading influence, already observed in connection with bazaars, was also present in depictions of women's involvement in exhibitions, and similar practices were invoked to limit and control its potential dangers.

While the bazaar might have been banished from the exhibition in an effort to elevate and ennoble the proceedings, its effects lingered in the reception accorded to some women visitors. Representations of the Great Exhibition are revealing of what was to become an exhibition paradigm, the notion that women visitors were themselves on display. Accompanying the rather sanctimonious and superior 'vision of respectability' women were supposed to exert on their families was the sexualised gaze of men examining women visitors. While somewhat resembling ogling at the bazaar, it lacked the element of active female involvement or flirtatious exchange. This was a sport for men alone. Two cartoons from the book \textit{The Great Exhibition Wot Is To Be} show different types of women classed as part of the animal kingdom [Figure 1.8]. One featured some young men sizing up some wide-eyed young women is surmounted by the caption 'numerous lady birds will be exhibited guarded by a Dragon Fly and followed by Spiders'.\textsuperscript{123} It seems men came to the exhibitions as much to look at and size up pretty girls as they did to inspect steam engines and stuffed frogs.

The power allocated to women as agents of respectability at exhibitions was obviously a limited one, but nevertheless it created a portal through which women might be able to grasp the levers of the exhibition dynamo. As Elsbeth Heaman points out, in her study of women's involvement in Canadian fairs, 'women and exhibitions

\textsuperscript{122} Greenhalgh, \textit{Ephemeral Vistas}, pp. 31 and 174; Tony Bennett, 'The shaping of things to come: Expo '86, in his \textit{Birth of the Museum}, p. 225. For an Australian example see Twopeny, \textit{Town Life in Australia}, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{123} From \textit{The Great Exhibition Wot Is To Be or Probable Results of the Industry of All Nations in the Year '51 Showing What is to be Exhibited Who is to Exhibit it in Short How its all Going to be Done by Vates Secundus' (Who Can See Thro' a Stone Wall as Well as His Neighbours)'} [sic], Published by the Committee for the Society for Keeping Things in Their Places, [n.p.d.], 1850, [sic page numbers].
shared function as well as form: both exerted a refining influence.' She explains, quoting Kenneth Burke, that 'women and exhibitions were each a "constitution" for humanity and promised to remake the world in their own image, creating a better world: they were "the very substance of the present" and "an exhortation about what might be".' As Heaman puts it, exhibitions 'provided women with a back door into the public sphere.'

As a result of their role as engines of social refinement, and their idealised and quasi-religious ideology, exhibitions held considerable appeal for genteel women interested in showing 'women's work' in the late nineteenth century. At exhibitions, unlike at bazaars, sexual objectification for exhibitors was kept at a minimum (in theory if not in practice, as will be seen). Objects spoke for women rather than women having to show themselves. Of course, such an arrangement also worked to confirm the ideological split between the public and the private spheres, by reiterating a sense of unease about women's appearance in public and on display.

Exhibitions struggled to rise above the taint of the marketplace, the show, and the material world. They were conceptualised by panegyric writers as places of idealised and abstracted thought, of transcendence and reverence, almost religious in nature, an atmosphere in which women might have expected to feel comfortable. The ways in which the rhetoric, if not the reality, of exhibition culture emphasised the creation of a spiritual, elevating, ordered, controlled, empowering, creative and educational marketplace, meant that women made extensive use of the form, particularly as visitors and exhibitors, in the period leading up to the turn of the century. For these reasons women chose exhibitions as a form with which to make wider claims about women's work, but also why their choice was fraught with practical and ideological difficulty.

125 Heaman, 'Taking the world by show', p. 600.
Vashti’s daughters: Women and international exhibitions

Get up a side show for yourselves, pay for it yourselves, and be -- happy.126

Elizabeth Duane Gillespie, organiser of the Women’s Pavilion at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition 1876.

The male organisers of the great nineteenth century international exhibitions were fond of quoting a passage from the opening of the Old Testament’s Book Of Esther, describing a grand feast called by the mighty king Ahasuerus:

3 In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him:  
4 When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days.  
5 And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king’s palace; ...  
8 And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man’s pleasure.127

This, they claimed, was the first exhibition.128 To the feast at Shushan the new kings of industry and empire traced the genesis of their own palaces, cathedrals for a commercial age. The biblical reference sanctified the new temples, great aspiring spaces of iron and steel iced with plaster in classical shapes, monumental wedding cakes celebrating the marriage of art and industry, civilisation and progress. In bright bursts of ephemeral ecstasy, expositions embodied the consummation of commerce with spirituality, trade with tradition, and consumption with religion. But even more potently, they represented the union of middle class men, newly risen, with real economic and political power. Accordingly, the biblical quotation climaxed with the gratification of ‘every man’s pleasure’.

But the chapter does not end there. It continues:

9 Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus.

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126 Elizabeth Duane Gillespie, organiser of the Women’s Pavilion at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition 1876, quoted in Weimann, The Fair Women, p. 4.
127 King James Bible, Old Testament, Book of Esther, ch. 1, vs. 1-8.
128 See Linda Young, Let Them See How Like England We Can Be: An Account of the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879, MA Thesis in Historical Archaeology, University of Sydney, 1983; and Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, introduction.
On the seventh day of his feast, the king called Vashti to 'shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on.' She refused. The king was incensed, and wise men of the kingdom noted with disapproval that if such behaviour was tolerated women generally would come to 'despise their husbands', and be the cause of 'much contempt and wrath'. So a royal decree was issued, banishing Vashti, and commanding that 'all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small':

22 For he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house.

Vashti's story is a symbolic one for the women involved with international exhibitions in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. From the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 women established for themselves separate spaces within the great palaces of art and industry and showed their work in specialised women's buildings. Their efforts, like Queen Vashti herself, were viewed as ornamental and decorative by exhibition men, secondary to the substantial achievement represented by the rest of the fair. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton said of the building at Philadelphia: 'the Woman's Pavilion on the centennial grounds is an afterthought, as theologians claim woman herself to have been.'

Like Vashti, exhibition women refused to do the men's bidding, and simply be adornments. Exhibitions became sites for feminine assertion and feminist declarations. But still, the overarching law of men's rule in their own house held true. International exhibitions gave women only limited access to autonomy and authority. So, from the 1880s, women all over the world sought to be queens of their own kingdoms by creating women's exhibitions.

Visitors could always find examples of the work of women at international exhibitions. However between 1851 and 1900 a great change occurred in the way women's work was shown. At the Great Exhibition of 1851, for example, the ladies

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of Van Diemen's Land showed their preserved meats, woolwork, painting and
collections of algae alongside the exhibits of their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{130} But from the
late 1870s, the Tasmanian women's exhibits were separated from the rest of the
colony's display and shown self-consciously as 'women's work' in the women's
buildings and ladies' courts at exhibitions at home and abroad.

The impetus for this innovation was a moment of national celebration. The
Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition marked a century of American independence.\textsuperscript{131} It
was to be a show of confidence and unity, but in 1873 there was little of either in
evidence, and next to no public enthusiasm or financial support for the enterprise. The
Centennial Board turned, as so many men had before them, to women to help raise the
necessary funds. A Women's Centennial Committee was established to coordinate a
national effort, headed by Elizabeth Duane Gillespie. Gillespie had played a significant
role in the Philadelphia Sanitary Fair of 1864, a bazaar which had raised more than \$1
million dollars in support of the Union Army during the American Civil War.\textsuperscript{132} In
exchange for their exertions, the Women's Centennial Committee requested 'a
department in which woman's work will be alone exhibited' at the Exhibition.

The display will be most instructive and suggestive. It is easy to see how many
valuable hints will be given to those who examine this collection, which is
intended to group the evidences of the skill and ingenuity of womankind.\textsuperscript{133}

Gillespie hoped that such an exhibit would provide encouragement and inspiration to
women workers.

We desired to give to the mass of women, who were laboring by the needle and
obtaining only a scanty subsistence, the opportunity to see what women were
capable of obtaining unto in other higher branches of industry; and to do this
effectually, we felt that these exhibits must find place in a special space set apart
for them alone.\textsuperscript{134}

The women organisers recognised that was impossible to completely separate the work
of men and women, and were supportive of women exhibitors who desired to show

\textsuperscript{130} Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations 1851, Official Descriptive and
Illustrated Catalogue, First corrected edition in three volumes, London, Spicer Brothers/W. Clowes &
\textsuperscript{131} Rydell, All the World's a Fair, ch. 1.
\textsuperscript{132} Virginia Grant Darney, Women and World's Fairs: American International Expositions 1876-
\textsuperscript{133} Darney, Women and World's Fairs, pp. 20-21.
\textsuperscript{134} Darney, Women and World's Fairs, p. 22; see also Mary Cordato, Representing the Expansion of
Woman's Sphere: Women's Work and Culture at the World's Fairs of 1876, 1893, and 1904, PhD
their work beside the work of men. Gillespie was quick to emphasise that women 'did not shrink from competition with the works of men', but eagerly grasped the opportunity for their work to be shown separately as the work of women.135

By June 1875 the women of America had gathered more than $125,000 for the Exhibition, and immeasurably increased interest in the affair. In the same month they were informed by the Centennial Committee that there was no room in the main building for a women's exhibit. Gillespie would recall:

the utter misery of those first moments, for the women of the whole country were working not only from patriotic motives, but with the hope that through this Exhibition their own abilities would be recognised and their own works carried beyond needle and thread.136

The cost of financing a separate building was $30,000. It was raised within six months.137 The resulting Woman's Pavilion housed more than 600 exhibits, a library, an art gallery, a kindergarten, and a Baxter steam engine which powered two looms and the printing presses of the New Century for Woman newspaper [Figure 1.9].138

But despite representing a symbolic triumph of female organisation over masculine authority, the Pavilion was not well-received by suffragists. Lucy Stone of the American Woman Suffrage Association wrote that when women 'voluntarily give to work for aggrandizement of the very power which degrades them they are only objects of contempt.'139 Elizabeth Cady Stanton criticised the Woman's Pavilion as unrepresentative of the reality of women's lives. A true representation, she said, would have included evidence of women's oppression and struggles against injustice.140 The National Women's Suffrage Association held 'alternative' displays in downtown Philadelphia, showing discriminatory laws, tracts, and books, accompanied by meetings and protests, intended to show women's political degradation.141 As proof of this, on 4 July 1876 Susan B. Anthony and five other suffragists presented a Declaration of Rights for Women to the master of ceremonies at

135 Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, pp. 47-8.
137 Darney, Women and World's Fairs, pp. 27-30.
138 Weimann, The Fair Women, p. 3.
139 Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, pp. 59-60.
140 Darney, Women and World's Fairs, pp. 46-47.
141 Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, pp. 60-61.
the Exhibition's Independence Day celebrations, a gathering to which they had officially been refused entry. Anthony then went outside and read the Declaration to a receptive crowd. 'While the nation is buoyant with patriotism, and all hearts are attuned to praise, it is with sorrow we come to strike the one discordant note', she said, claiming the women of 1876 had 'greater cause for discontent, rebellion and revolution than had the men of 1776'.

The significance of the Woman's Pavilion for American feminism has been assessed in dissertations by Virginia Grant Darney and Mary F. Cordato. Both examine the Philadelphia Exhibition in the context of women's involvement in American world's fairs between the creation of the Woman's Pavilion in 1876, and the decision of women organisers at the St Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 to fully integrate women's work into the fair as a whole. Both define the women's exhibits as feminist. However they suggest very different interpretations of feminism and separatism as a feminist strategy over this period.

Darney's work focuses heavily on the organisational struggles faced by women involved in international exhibitions. She uses the 'differences in the role and function' of these boards to 'illustrate a shift in the conception of female culture from gender segregation -- identification with predominantly female groups and female issues -- to gender integration and individualism.' While Darney says the fairs 'have been recognised as examples of female institution building', she also documents the 'eventual demolition of those institutions as well.' Darney identifies the significance of the Philadelphia Fair to American womanhood as public proof of women's organisational capacities, and as a boost to sisterhood and the exchange of ideas. She cites the New Century For Woman:

If women lacked heretofore the element of solidarity, the united purpose to help each other and themselves, the knowledge of its usefulness is coming now. ... A

142 Weimann, The Fair Women, p.4.
143 The two theses are Darney, Women and World's Fairs, and Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere.
145 Darney, Women and World's Fairs, Abstract.
new sense of their direct responsibility in human society is being revealed to them.\footnote{Darney, Women and World's Fairs, p. 44.}

The exhibit itself revealed what Darney calls the 'contradiction in the position of American women'.

If, as Victorian ideology held, woman was the passive help-meat, the moral guide and delicate creature, she most certainly would not need or be interested in a practical display of accomplishments.\footnote{Darney, Women and World's Fairs, p. 42.}

Darney's interpretation suggests that any exhibit of women's work inevitably contained an 'impossible contradiction', not just in its efforts to represent the work and role of women, but also in the part played by women in the organisation of exhibits. The needlework display 'prompted the greatest controversy among observers', because it 'illustrated both the stereotype of the leisureed unproductive women and the strength of a female culture, formed within the restrictions of American society.'\footnote{Darney, Women and World's Fairs, p. 40.}

While Darney constructs a contrast between the female 'institution building' and the feminist movement at Philadelphia, Cordato sees two different feminist strategies. Cordato's analysis extends beyond the organisational structures of the women's boards to embrace the exhibits, the exhibitors and the social and political context in which the fairs took place. By focusing on women's culture as a legitimate element of feminism, Cordato is able to open up the feminist possibilities of a display of women's work. Cordato argues that by 'reshaping and extending traditional womanly values rather than rejecting them' the organisers of the Woman's Pavilion were able to 'ease or at least modify the tensions and confusion associated with a changing industrial world order'. For them, 'domesticity was not a stifling or oppressive ideology that was logically opposed to the autonomy and advancement of women', but a 'dynamic multi-faceted concept that allowed Centennial women an opportunity to express themselves creatively and intelligently, to move confidently in public and private space, and to broaden the scope of women's roles and behaviour.'\footnote{Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, p. 24.}

\footnote{Darney, Women and World's Fairs, p. 44.}
\footnote{Darney, Women and World's Fairs, p. 42.}
\footnote{Darney, Women and World's Fairs, p. 40.}
\footnote{Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, p. 24.}
Cordato shows how through 'separatist institutions' such as the women's buildings at world's fairs, their promoters achieved a collective consciousness based on womanly ideals. This consciousness assumed an explicitly political dimension, a dimension that held genuine feminist potential. Through an elaboration of womanhood, fair women aimed to strengthen the bonds of sisterhood, to increase woman's confidence and choices, to win social, economic and legal advancement, to abolish unfair restrictions discriminating against their gender, to encourage sexual harmony, and to gain influence, leverage and freedom for all women in and outside the home.\(^{150}\)

She asserts that the Women's Centennial Committee clung to deeply rooted, clung to deeply rooted, feminine identities associated with the tradition of separate spheres. Their challenge to patriarchal power and privilege was indirect and gently subversive, asserting the worth of womanly creativity and virtue in reordering society.\(^{151}\)

The organisers of the Woman's Pavilion 'had no intentions that their exhibits should compete with those of male participants or should serve as propaganda appeals for equal rights for women in the marketplace or public sphere. Activities of the pavilion, no matter how unfamiliar or how untypical for women at the time, remained wholly consistent with the values of true womanhood.'\(^{152}\)

Cordato locates the decision of the promoters 'to insist upon a classification based upon gender rather than work' as a response to 'rapid transformations taking place in the larger social and economic order'. The impact of industrialisation, secularisation, urbanisation and commercialism, Cordato argues, had led to the 'erosion of once familiar domestic tasks'. Women 'found themselves confused over a breakdown in traditional roles and values.' The concept of separate spheres, embodied in the creation of women's buildings, 'promised stability and order in times of flux.' The idea of selfless, virtuous, domestic woman was the perfect counterpoint to materialistic and competitive man whose strong and rational nature was synonymous with unsettling changes.\(^{153}\)

The women's building, and the women's culture it represented, became a 'positive unifying force' which suggested that women of different backgrounds and classes 'shared common qualities and life experiences defined by gender.' The organisers at the Philadelphia Exhibition 'presented a delicate, yet determined, illusion of harmony'

\(^{150}\) Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, p. 12.
\(^{151}\) Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, p. 26.
\(^{152}\) Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, pp. 48-9.
\(^{153}\) Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, pp. 48-51.
within their pavilion, aiming to do away with divisive forces such as class, race, and ethnicity, and 'eliminate the bleaker areas of female work associated with industrialisation'. They also excluded the potentially divisive voices of suffragists. Cordato argues that while the organisers 'undoubtedly supported many of the demands of the women's rights movement', they 'differed on the question of political rights, for the logic behind the claim of political rights was different from that proposing an expansion of women's culture.'\textsuperscript{154} Suffragism and women's culture, she argues, could not be reconciled because one advocated equality and individualism, and the other separatism and solidarity.

A close analysis of exhibitions of women's work in colonial Australia suggests that, in a somewhat different cultural context, these two elements were combined in the local feminist movement. The Australian experience of the latter part of the nineteenth century differed from the American one in several crucial ways. By the 1880s the colony of NSW was beginning to industrialise, but it had not experienced the enormous and rapid changes seen in Europe and America. Nevertheless, while the factories and department stores did not yet dominate the urban environment, the anxieties which followed in the wake of industrialisation and consumer culture \textit{had} arrived, transmitted at speed by telegraph and steamship. Colonists shared in the fears of their fellow Victorians about change, at the same time as news of technological and industrial advancement made them worry about falling behind. Colonial women knew, by the same means, that the changing 'position of women' was a subject of debate overseas, and that their sisters were organising and debating women's future. The colony did not have an organised suffrage movement until 1891, but discussion of women's role and employment was a significant issue in the press from the 1870s. When they did emerge, colonial suffragists argued, with some success, for the enfranchisement of women on the grounds of their difference as well as their equality, from arguments about tradition as well as innovation. The organisers of exhibitions of women's work in colonial Australia shared the dilemmas and opportunities of fair

\textsuperscript{154} Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, pp. 63-64.
women the world over, but they were profoundly affected by particularly colonial
concerns. Complicating and driving wider social debate was an emphasis on the
problems of class fluidity and colonial identity.

When colonial women showed their work at international exhibitions between
1851 and 1876, it appeared as evidence of colonial civilisation and uniqueness, in
combination with the other exhibits signifying Australasia’s richness in raw materials
and appeal to the prospective immigrant. This aspect of colonial exhibiting history is
examined in detail in chapter 6.

The first colonial ladies’ court exhibition appeared at Australia’s first
international exhibition, the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879. Similar courts
appeared at the exhibitions held in Melbourne in 1880-1 and 1888. Unlike their
American counterparts, the Australian ladies’ courts were not prompted by a desire on
the part of women to assert their cultural authority. Nor were they offset by a
significant debate from an organised feminist movement. Philadelphia had added the
idea of a women’s exhibit to the international exhibition, and the colonists followed
suit. Male commissioners or committees of elite ladies were given the responsibility of
finding exhibits, and the resulting display was intended to show that the civilisation of
the colony and the gentility of the colonists could be measured, in part, by the products
of its women. The courts were dominated by fancywork, needlework, and decorative
arts, proof of domesticity and refinement. Evidence of cultural and social status was
derived from the ‘taste’ and ‘artistry’ of the women’s work. In keeping with genteel
ideology it was ‘taste’ rather than ‘skill’ that was the measure of ultimate refinement.

*Massina’s Popular Guide to the Melbourne International Exhibition 1880-1* described
the Ladies’ Court as a ‘perfect bazaar’, too large and too alien to the male mind to merit
a detailed description.

We must, however, point to the palpable evidence of industrial art of a very high
order, the absence of a taste for which so many homes are rendered bald and free
from ornament.155

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155 Robert P. Whitworth, *Massina’s Popular Guide to the Melbourne International Exhibition 1880-
The 'ladies' page' of the *Sydney Mail* described exhibits in the Ladies' Court at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition similarly, commenting also on the 'artistic powers possessed by the amateur workers' as compared to the few professionals, who excelled in skill.\(^{156}\)

The Sydney International Exhibition summarises the connections between exhibitions, colonialism, civilisation and women's work well.\(^{157}\) The exhibition cantata stated the aims of a colonial international exhibition succinctly:

*Shining nations let them see*

*How like England we can be.*\(^{158}\)

Opening the exhibition, Lord Augustus Loftus described how the exhibition had given the 'young and aspiring sister colonies of Australasia ... a glorious purpose to achieve the highest walks of civilisation'.\(^{159}\) The *Australasian* newspaper explained that the exhibition 'denotes the stage that we have reached, and marks an era in our growth', held as it was in Sydney, a city that had 'sprung up to its present stage of growth and civilisation' in less than a century [Figure 1.10]. Far overshadowing ... the interesting products of art and industry...', it claimed, was the spectacle of these communities of the Anglo-Saxon race striking their roots deep, and carrying their growth and blossom high and luxuriant on the shores of a vast continent only reclaimed from desolation, solitude and barbarism, within the memories of our fathers.\(^{160}\)

One measure of this progress was the work of women and children. In the catalogue's introduction to the Ladies' Court, it was stated that:

Everything that conduces to the moral and material well-being of mankind -- everything that denotes genius in art, intelligence, science and skill in workmanship had its place marked in the Exhibition. It was but natural that the handwork of our women and children should have a place in its turn, to show the degree of merit that appertains to it, and to enable us to note the progress consequent on instruction and education.\(^{161}\)

On the whole,

the Ladies' Court formed a very praiseworthy display [and] showed a very creditable standard, rendering it highly desirable that ladies' work should be encouraged by regular annual exhibitions, which would have the effect of stimulating the exhibitors, and of raising the standard of such work to a degree still higher, and attaining that perfection in graceful conception and artistic taste,

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157 *See Young, Let Them See How Like England We Can Be*, pp.138-143.
159 *Official Record of the Sydney International Exhibition*, p. lxxii.
161 *Official Record of the Sydney International Exhibition*, p. 517.
The *Official Record* focused on the colonial woman's need for education and practice in the womanly arts, implying they were at present of a rather poor standard.

The Ladies' Court was an 'appendage' of the Art Department, and as such did not receive an official classification numeral. The exhibits in the court had been gathered through the 'taste' and 'gallantry' of one of the Commissioners, Mr Alger. The appointment of women judges, first at Sydney in 1879, and then at Melbourne in 1880 and 1888, inferred not only that only women could judge women's work, but that some women were especially qualified in terms of taste and refinement to judge others, nevertheless these 'ladies' juries' were always supervised by a male judge.

The work gathered in 1879 was held up as a measure of colonial women's taste and skill but judged both harshly and patronisingly. Many of the exhibits were described as 'gaudy', and 'defective', lacking in conception, style or originality. The Berlin woolwork was singled out by the judges as especially appalling. One of the few surviving exhibits from the Ladies' Court, Rosina Starkey's 'Scene from Henry VIII', received a first order of merit as the 'best wool-worked picture exhibited' [Figure 1.11]. Nevertheless, the *Herald* complained that 'the bright glaring colouring gives the whole a common look'. Of a waxed paper and material flower arrangement under a glass dome, made by Mary Ann Andrews of Kogarah, the judges noted '[t]hese flowers are well made, having good appearance'. This praise was somewhat diminished by the additional comment that this was because the leaves used had been imported, ready made. Although many school girls exhibited their plain sewing, the

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162 Official Record of the Sydney International Exhibition, p. 517.
163 Young, Let Them See How Like England We Can Be, p. 138.
164 Official Record of the Sydney International Exhibition, p. 517.
168 Official Record of the Sydney International Exhibition, p. 519, also quoted in Centenary of the Sydney International Exhibition 1879, p. 43. The flowers survive in the collection of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences.
bulk of the exhibits were examples of fancywork and decorative arts, specially made for exhibition. Some were bravura displays of ingenuity and extravagance. Mrs M. Alexander showed 'a large lily made of lobster shell, together with waxwork models of a blancmange and a wedding cake', while Miss Ada Wilshire of Ashfield managed to incorporate rockmelon seeds, shark's teeth, petrified snails and quandongs into her work.169

Ironically, around 20 per cent of the exhibits in the Ladies' Court were the work of men. It was, as Young put it, the 'nature of the exhibit rather than the sex of the exhibitor that determined its classification'.170 Women also continued to exhibit in the general section of the Exhibition. Mrs Sutor of Bathurst showed gold in quartz in the minerals section, while Mary Sanderson exhibited cleansing cream in the chemicals section, Mrs Pale displayed surgical belts amongst the medical exhibits, and one winemaker in the NSW court was a woman.171 Some of the articles in the Ladies' Court were for sale in aid of charity, including lace by the yard.172 There was no comment made about this introduction of the 'bazaar element' into the Exhibition. This would not prove to be the case nine years later when the Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair opened in Sydney.

Conclusion

The concentration of women's work in one space at international exhibitions created opportunities for comparison between women across a diverse range of activities, as well as for the judgement and estimation of women as a sex. It allowed for the creation of a universal ideal of 'women's work', and opened 'the work of women' as a subject for discussion. It was also intended by the women organisers of these displays to suggest women's contribution to society and culture. Yet separation was a strategy used both by feminists and by men and women who had no interest in redefining

169 Young, Let Them See How Like England We Can Be, pp. 140-1.
170 Young, Let Them See How Like England We Can Be, p. 139.
172 Young, Let Them See How Like England We Can Be, p. 142.
femininity or the public sphere. Separation could enhance feminist possibility but it could also reinforce gender roles, it could confirm commonly held beliefs about women as well as contest, adapt, or modify them. It could surprise or stabilise, challenge or reassure.

But the very creation of women's buildings and ladies' courts at international exhibitions also implied women's separation from the 'real' work of the world. Women's courts at international exhibitions inevitably raised questions about the relationship between women and 'the world', 'real work', 'progress' and 'human endeavour'. At the same time the women involved in creating them had to work within a male-dominated organisational structure and make women's work fit into a masculine classification system. The palace of the Vashti story remained firmly the domain of the kings and princes. As Sydney wit Sappho Smith put it in 1888:

A hapless idiot...wrote recently to a daily paper suggesting that as women had had an exhibition men should have one also. Brilliant suggestion isn't it? Are we not always having "Men's Exhibitions"? Which runs shows like our "International," Adelaide "Jubilee" and Melbourne "Centennial" exhibitions, but men?173

This thesis is about a new way of showing women's endeavours that took the separation of women's work at international exhibitions one step further: the women's exhibition, organised and shaped entirely by women to fully express 'women's work'. Unlike Vashti's banishment, this total separation of women's exhibits was self imposed. The organisers of women's exhibits created women's worlds on their own and to their own design. The next chapter follows Vashti, no longer a queen, out of the king's palace and into his empire.

Figure 1.1

Maria Caroline Brownrigg née Blake, [*An evening gathering at "Yarra Cottage", Port Stephens*], 1857.
Figure 1.2

Samuel Hill, ['Husband and wife, pointing at a craft object'], c.1860.
Gelatine silver print, from the photographic collection of the Macleay Museum, University of Sydney.
Albert Janco. ["View of people at an exhibition or bazaar, Diamond Creek-Hurisbridge"], 1910-18.
Photograph from the collection of the State Library of Victoria, H 82.184/152 PCV LTEN 165.
B. W. Kilburn, part of the Austrian exhibit in the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building of the World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893.

Sydney International Exhibition 1879 bronze medal, awarded to Martha Wright for woolwork.
Collection of Martha Sear.
The colonial court at the Great Exhibition, London 1851.
Figure 1.7

*Melbourne International Exhibition 1880, interior looking South.*
From *Australasian Sketcher*, 23 September 1880, p. 281.
The 'Ornithological Department' of the Great Exhibition, London 1851.

From the The Great Exhibition Wat Is To Be or Probable Results of the Industry of All Nations in the Year '51 Showing What is to be Exhibited Who is to Exhibit it in Short How its all Going to be Done by 'Vates Secundus' ('Who Can See Thro' a Stone Wall as Well as His Neighbours') [sic], Published by the Committee for the Society for Keeping Things in Their Places, [n.p.d.], 1850, [n.p.n.].
Figure 1.9 (a)

*Woman's Pavilion at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition 1876.*

Figure 1.9 (b)

*Art in the Woman's Pavilion, Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition 1876.*

The Garden Palace, centrepiece of the Sydney International Exhibition 1879.
The "Australian" International Exhibition Building, Sydney 1879, issued with the Graphic illustrated newspaper, London.
Chapter 2
Exhibition *and* bazaar: The Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair, Sydney 1888

*Through the whole gay space of the Exhibition the work was the outcome of feminine industry, and resource, and taste. The lordlier sex have too great an inclination to claim all the work of the world as their own. Yesterday the members of that sex were admitted to a section of that work in which they have absolutely no part but that of wondering and appreciative bystanders. Such a position was a novelty to men, and for the matter of that, for women too. In ordinary exhibitions the work of women is swallowed up by the immensely greater work of men, just as in life the reward of the action, which is in the greater part the result of women's influence is claimed and obtained by men.*

*Sydney Morning Herald, 3 October 1888.*

The Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair (EWI) held in Sydney in October 1888 was an almost exclusively feminine space. It was organised by women. Almost all the exhibitors were women. It was staffed by women, and even featured a women's choir performing the works of women composers. The EWI was not the women's contribution to a larger display, like a women's building or a ladies' court. It stood alone as a self-contained, self-sufficient, independent women's world. By so doing it suggested a model for women themselves, as unconstrained and self-reliant. Its confident separateness was not intended to imply women were disconnected from the world, but that they were capable of moving within it with a justifiable assurance, inner resourcefulness, and recognisable capability. The display was both a reiteration and a reinterpretation of universal femininity. It drew on existing connections between women and the traits of industry, nobility and responsibility, to legitimise a range of choices women might make, or be forced to make, about their lives, such as whether

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1 *Sydney Morning Herald, 3 October 1888, p. 5.*
to take up paid employment or enter public life. The Exhibition was not an overt statement about women's rights. Instead, it had much in common with the 'subversive' challenge to patriarchy identified by Mary Cordato in connection with the Philadelphia Women's Pavilion. Nevertheless, its complete separatism, only previously witnessed at women's exhibitions in Bristol in 1885 and Brighton in 1887, was an innovation, a clear choice provoked by women's exclusion from the colony's centennial celebrations, as well as by an emerging public assertion of feminine solidarity associated with the newly-formed Queen's Jubilee Fund for Distressed Women.

The motto of the EWI, that all labour was noble and holy, was general enough and, it was hoped, ideologically powerful enough, to embrace a large and diverse group of colonial women across the divisions of race and class, as well as a range of views about women's position and future. Unlike its sister exhibit at the Philadelphia Centennial, the NSW centennial women's exhibition was not offset by a large suffrage movement, or a significant public critique of male dominance and women's oppression. But this was coming; the Exhibition drew together most of the women who were beginning to articulate feminist ideas, as organisers, exhibitors and commentators, women who would go on to found the feminist organisations of the 1890s. It also attracted large numbers of women who had no interest in improving women's political rights. Its significance to the development of Australian feminism lay in its construction of women as a distinct group in colonial society, with their own interests, concerns and views; in bringing the 'woman problem' into sharp focus at a defining cultural moment; and in establishing communication between women interested in changing Australian society and the lives of Australian women.

The display's separate but interconnected spheres were the Exhibition of Women's Industries and the Centenary Fair. The event's organisers chose to communicate their ideas about women's work through both an exhibition and a fair. Initial plans for a grand bazaar in aid of the Queen's Jubilee Fund for Distressed Women were expanded to embrace larger themes, and given added impetus by the
approaching centennial. The resulting event had dual aims. First, it was organised to raise money for the new Fund. Second, it was intended to show the variety of work women did in the colony, and 'still further develop, encourage, and increase their sources of employment and their usefulness'. The form of the display gave material expression to these aims. In the Old Exhibition Building at Prince Alfred Park a diverse collection of objects arranged in classes, forming the Exhibition proper, was surrounded by the stalls of the Centenary Fair, where other examples of women's work were sold at a profit for charity [Figure 2.1]. In drawing together the best qualities of bazaar and exhibition, sale and display, the all-female organising committee intended to maximise opportunities and benefits to all women workers. Their decision to combine the two forms, however, was unexpectedly controversial.

Despite being connected to the most powerful people in NSW, including the Governor's wife, the EWI came under severe and sustained criticism from all quarters of the colonial press. Much of this criticism, addressed in the following chapters, was framed by debate on the incompatibility of exhibitions and bazaars. By 1888, the bazaar and the exhibition were well established display forms with powerfully opposing ideologies. The charity bazaar was a Christian paradox: an opportunity both for fund raising and flirtation, while the exhibition had taken up the pure and idealised high ground of a religion. Together they served a symbolic as well as a practical function, clearly demarcated along the lines of gender.

The exhibition appeared to offer a positive and refined space to Victorian women. The EWI organisers believed, as M. L. Manning put it in an article on the display, that exhibitions were 'common neutral ground' on which women could perfect 'legitimate aspirations'. They looked to the exhibition to do for women's work what it did for masculine commercial enterprise: to idealise and legitimise labours as diverse as laundry and painting, typing and darning. At the same time they hoped to

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2 Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair Sydney 1888 (hereafter EWI), [Prospectus], [n.p.d.], p. 3.
draw on the exhibition’s transcendent marketplace to crack open a whole new sphere of women’s employments, on the basis that the public sphere was now civilised and evolved enough for any woman, no matter her rank or station, to venture into it safely.

In practice, the EWI showed that women could not effectively combine the two modes of display. The event was met with an avalanche of criticism, much of it centring on the idea that the women organisers had seriously erred in trying to bring together an exhibition and a fair. As the Daily Telegraph argued:

The two things, a representative exhibition and a selling bazaar, are incompatible, and between the two, women’s industry ... comes to the ground.  

By holding an exhibition and a fancy fair under the same roof, the organisers of the EWI were really only doing what exhibition committees had done since 1851: attempting to combine entertainment and education, and sale and display. But in laying claim to the exhibition form as a whole, by creating a ‘women’s exhibition’, they had also transgressed the boundaries of gendered display.

The range of press criticism suggests responses were informed more by gender than by political or social affiliation. Predictably, the Bulletin spared nothing in its criticism:

after a week or two ... the affair will dwindle down to its natural condition of an unattractive, unrecompensative parody on a big bazaar.

More surprisingly, a similar critique emerged from sources whose support might have been expected. At the opposite end of the spectrum from J. F. Archibald’s outrageous and masculinist journal was the Australian Christian World. It surmounted its EWI paragraph with a weighty question in large black capitals:

EXHIBITION OR BAZAAR?

The article which followed concluded with some severity:

If the affair is a bazaar, where everything is subordinated to driving a trade and taking cash, let that be plainly made known, and intending visitors can act accordingly. But if it is indeed an Exhibition which the public are supposed to look through for their satisfaction, they should be spared any annoyance from well-meaning but troublesome stall keepers.

4 Daily Telegraph, 26 October 1887, p. 4.
5 Bulletin, 20 October 1888, p. 12.
6 Australian Christian World, 18 October 1888, p. 458.
While their overall arguments were different, both the *Bulletin* and the *Australian Christian World* drew on well-accepted ideas about the bazaar to make them.

The *Bulletin* used 'bazaar' as a term of disparagement, conjuring clichéd images of frippery, triviality and flirtation to attack the display as proof of unwomanly forwardness and feminine incompetence. Furthermore, along with the *Tribune*, the *Bulletin* published cartoons mocking the emasculation of men who visited the EWI in a manner similar to that already seen in bazaar literature. It invoked the male gaze to contain the feminine power of the display, in the same way as that gaze was utilised at bazaars, attempting to ridicule and defuse the statements made through the Exhibition by sexualising the women involved. For a man, it declared, there was 'nothing whatever of attraction except the girls.'

The *Australian Christian World* suggested that, for the visitor, the true worth of the women's work represented in the Exhibition was diminished or obscured by the distraction of the Fair. The bazaar was a place to buy and sell, the exhibition a place to look and learn. These distinct goals were, in its view, not compatible. Such a blunder on the part of the organisers revealed, in the minds of critics, women's incompetence and unprofessionalism, as well as their failure to understand the conventions of display. Even a woman journalist sent to report on the EWI by the *Town and Country Journal* concurred in this opinion. 'J.L.'s account dwelt at length on what she saw as the silliness and ineptitude of the ladies running the show, epitomised by the reaction accorded to her as a journalist inspecting the Centenary Fair:

I fled from the stalls in disgust ... for I found that the words "I came as a press representative" were no protection from solicitations to buy. In fact they seemed to have no meaning whatever to the ears to which they were addressed.

For a woman writer, eager to make it in the masculine world of journalism and keen to distance herself from too close an association with stereotypical female behaviour, the bazaar was a dangerous place. In her criticisms "J.L." expressed the hostility of the

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7 *Tribune*, 12 October 1888, p. 9; *Bulletin*, 3 November 1888, p. 10.
press generally, although with an added edge, the result of her own sex and choice of occupation.

The most overtly critical voices argued that the display was no more than a bazaar, and that it had therefore not sufficiently developed to be called an exhibition. In the 'Sydney News' column of the Goulburn Herald the correspondent concluded of the EWI that 'the whole thing ..., as an exposition of women's industries, is a giant farce.'

'It is a big bazaar for Sydney, but a poor imitation of the world's fair over the border.'

The idea of 'imitation' was also resonant in other papers. The ultimate implication of much of the press response was that a women's exhibition merely mimicked the 'real' world's fairs that men created. A woman's exhibition, it was suggested, could only ever be a bazaar.

Underlying most of the criticism was a fear of women's independence, a fear that men were failing in their 'duty of protection', and a mistrust of cross-class unity constructed on the basis of gender. The women organisers of the EWI developed their display from the resources and materials available to them: the problems and possibilities of the bazaar and the exhibition, the spiritual energy of philanthropy, the momentum of the centenary, the gift of their own voluntary labour, and the untapped talents of the women of Sydney. They built an imaginary structure for women's work that combined the exhibition and the bazaar, as well as elements from the home, the art gallery, the factory, the conservatory, the museum, and the concert hall. Rooms and cabinets in that structure were divided up, and New South Welshwomen encouraged to fill them. The entire colony was then invited to inspect the grand women's palace. This chapter explores the early stages of its construction. Its framework was supplied by both the exhibition and the bazaar, although the organisers modified the plans to accommodate women's work. But the foundations of the EWI lay elsewhere, in the

10 Goulburn Herald, 13 October 1888, p. 2.
11 For similar comments see also the Bulletin, 20 October 1888, p. 12; and the Daily Telegraph, 9 October 1888, p. 6.
new philanthropy of the Queen's Fund and the celebrations of the colony's first century.

Jubilee and Centennial: The origins of the EWI
The EWI had its origins in two major civic celebrations held in rapid succession: the Queen's Jubilee of 1887 and the New South Wales centennial of 1888. One honoured a century's progress in the Australian colonies. The other marked the fact that a large proportion of that progress had taken place during the reign of a female monarch. The symbolic possibilities of such a juxtaposition were not lost on the colony's leading ladies. Both celebrations provoked indecision, vacillation, awkwardness, and doubt from the colony's chiefs. Twice, femininity came to the fore to salvage some meaning from colonial confusion and ambivalence. The Queen's Jubilee Fund, founded at a tumultuous loyalty meeting in June 1887, enshrined a new form of charity, run by women with a view to encouraging female independence and paid employment as a solution to the failures of male protection. Plans for a grand bazaar in aid of the Fund expanded to embrace the idea of an exhibition in the centenary year after it became clear NSW had lost the opportunity to host the Centennial Exhibition to Victoria. Women's exclusion from the rest of the celebrations was at odds with a growing sense of optimism amongst the women of Sydney's bourgeoisie, who, at the EWI, stepped confidently into the public sphere to raise a standard both for their colony and for their sex.

The EWI was initiated in 1887 by Lady Carrington, wife of the Governor of NSW, as a major fund-raising activity for the newly established Queen's Jubilee Fund for Distressed Women. An understanding of the aim and structure of the Fund is essential to understanding how the EWI came into being, and the way its organisers chose to combine an exhibition and a bazaar to promote its interests. The bazaar represented the best way to raise money for philanthropy. The exhibition suggested myriad ways in which women could earn their own livings. By incorporating both these possibilities,
the EWI materially embodied the aims of the new Fund, which had been founded in extraordinary circumstances a year earlier.

Sixteen months before the opening of the Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair, the Exhibition Building in Prince Alfred Park had been the scene of a very different gathering. June 1887, the Jubilee month, had seen major social disturbance in Sydney, as the unemployed, freethinkers, radicals, secularists, socialists and republicans noisily disrupted meetings called to arrange the celebrations which would attend the commemoration of Queen Victoria's fiftieth year on the throne.\textsuperscript{12} These demonstrations culminated in a massive loyalty meeting held in the Exhibition Building on Wednesday 15 June, at which the Queen's Jubilee Fund for Distressed Women was founded. The Queen's Fund was viewed by its organisers both as the ultimate vessel for the expression of the loyalty of the colonists and as a calming conclusion to a turbulent meeting [Figure 2.2].\textsuperscript{13}

The proposed fund had emerged from a series of meetings called by Lady Carrington in the first half of 1887 with the dual aims of presenting an address to the Queen from the women and girls of NSW, and starting 'a Women's Jubilee Fund for the relief of widows and orphans'.\textsuperscript{14} They brought into being a fund 'not designed to

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\item \textsuperscript{12} For a more detailed analysis of events, see Martha Sear, 'Femininity that calmed the crowds: Lady Carrington at the Queen's Jubilee celebrations Sydney 1887', \textit{Journal of Australian Studies}, no. 52, 1997, pp.10-19.
\item \textsuperscript{13} See \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 16 June 1887, pp. 5, 6; \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 16 June 1887, pp. 4, 5-6. Evidence suggests that the Queen's Fund founded in Victoria by Lady Loch appears to have been connected to precedents set in England, rather than a concerted effort between the governor's wives of the Australian colonies, see 'Establishment of the Queen's Fund', in E. E. Moms, \textit{Memoir of George Higinbotham}, (n.p.d.), Melbourne, 1895, pp. 277-81. There was also a Queen's Fund in Queensland, but the comparatively small sum it raised meant that it was modified to provide a scholarship for the higher education of women instead. By 1891 the three respective funds stood at: Queensland £750, Victoria £10,000, NSW £17,000, see \textit{Proceedings of the Second Australasian Conference on Charity, Held in Melbourne, From 17th to 21st November 1891}, Charity Organisation Society of Melbourne/Robt. S. Brain Government Printer, Melbourne, (1892), p. 133.
\item \textsuperscript{14} This was seen as a singularly appropriate way to celebrate the widowed Queen. On Saturday 23 April 1887 Lady Carrington brought together what she called her 'Ladies' Committee', consisting of Lady Darley (wife of the Chief Justice), Miss Parkes (daughter of the Premier), Miss Stephen (daughter of the Lieutenant Governor), and the Mayoress Mrs Riley. In the weeks that followed Lady Carrington interviewed the heads of the churches in NSW, had 'long conversations' with other women about charitable institutions, and sought the advice of several 'representative gentlemen' about the legal and organisational details of the proposed fund. On 3 June she chaired a second meeting, this time made up entirely of men, including the Governor, the Chief Justice, the Lieutenant Governor, the Cardinal, the Archdeacon, the Rabbi, the Mayor, and several members of parliament. See Lady Cecilia Margaret Carrington, Marchioness of Lincolnshire, \textit{Diary} 1887, Australian Joint Copying Project, Carrington Papers, Reel 14, entries for 23 April 1887 and 2 June 1887; Preliminary Meeting Friday June 3 1887, in Minute Book, Queen's Jubilee Fund Records 1887-1968, ML MSS 4645; 'History of
add one more to the list of our charities’. Rather, the Queen’s Jubilee Fund would be self-supporting once it had accumulated a large enough principal through the fund-raising efforts of the women of the colony. This sum would be invested, and the ‘interest only’ would be ‘devoted to the relief of Women of all sects and classes, independently of nationality or creed, who may, from time to time, be in need of relief or help’. The Fund therefore distinguished itself from run-of-the-mill charity work on several important grounds. It would not rely on continuous fund-raising activity, but on the careful management of both the investment and the fixed sum which it was possible to allocate in one year. It would fund women irrespective of their class or religion, and only provide one-off payments of money or equipment (such as sewing machines or mangles), not pensions or doles.

With a principle of responsible management at the core of the Fund’s activity, it was imperative that the structure of the organisation reflect business as well as benevolence. To this effect three groups were formed, the first two to manage the principal, and a third to distribute the annual interest. The first was a General Committee, presided over by Lady Carrington, which initially consisted of the colony’s leading men and their wives. When the first circular was printed in late 1887, the ratio of women to men on this committee was fairly equal, with 68 women and 75 men. The actual month-to-month running of the Fund was the business of the Representative Executive Committee, which was again presided over by Lady

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15 Preliminary Meeting Friday June 3 1887, in Minute Book, Queen’s Jubilee Fund Records 1887-1968, ML MSS 4645.
16 Membership included the Chief Justice, the Lieutenant Governor, the Lord Cardinal, the Archdeacon, the Premier, the Mayor, the Rabbi, several clergymen and members of parliament, a number of businessmen, and ‘their wives; the Mayors and Mayoresses for the time being of all cities, towns and boroughs, and the clergy of all denominations, and the wives of clergymen throughout the Colony, and such ladies and gentlemen ... as desire to be included therein, with power to add to their number.’ History of the Fund, in First Annual Report of the Queen’s Jubilee Fund 1889, p. 17.
Carrington, but was considerably smaller. It was made up entirely of men involved with private enterprise and public representation.\textsuperscript{17}

These two committees ran the fund until early in 1889, when the £5,875 profit from the EWI was added to £10,131 9s. 5d. collected by subscription, and the resulting £16,000 was invested in the Commercial Banking Company, Sydney, 'at fixed deposit, bearing interest at the rate of 5 and 5 1/2 per cent., payable quarterly.'\textsuperscript{18} The final meeting of the General Committee, held on March 12 1889, accepted the Draft Bill and By-laws for the control of the Fund, which enacted that the management and distribution of the income of the said Fund shall be controlled by a Council of Women to consist of twenty-two members'.\textsuperscript{19} This council was made up of the wives and daughters of the men who constituted the upper-echelons of the General Committee, and to a slightly lesser extent the Representative Executive Committee. All had held positions on the General Committee of the EWI. The all-female Council appointed its own honorary secretaries and treasurers, and was monitored by a triumvirate of male trustees (Figure 2.3).

The appointment of the Council finally enshrined in the structure of the Queen's Fund the fundamental abstract aim of the organisation, which had proved a great spur to its foundation, that 'women should help women'. This aim pervaded all aspects of the work and structure of the Queen's Fund, as well as adding considerably to its rhetorical power. As the Hon. S. A. Joseph put it, 'the women of the colony were to do the work ... As to the men, it was their duty to subscribe'.\textsuperscript{20} The construction of 'suffering womanhood' attended to by a 'sympathetic sisterhood' was central to the ideology of a charitable enterprise which was not only practically administered by women, but assisted women solely.

\textsuperscript{17} 'This committee also incorporated the three honorary treasurers and two honorary secretaries. 'History of the Fund', in First Annual Report of the Queen's Jubilee Fund 1889, W. M. Smith, Sydney, 1890, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{19} 'History of the Fund', in First Annual Report of the Queen's Jubilee Fund 1889, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{20} Daily Telegraph, 21 June 1887, p. 6.
The genteel women involved were responsible for sensitively tending to the emotional distress of their poorer 'sisters', at the same time as they were expected to manage claims and financial responsibility in a hard-headed business-like fashion. They were extremely conscious of the need to legitimise their actions within the masculine arena of business practice as well as within the boundaries of respectable femininity. 'Realising fully the responsibility that has been laid upon them' the first report noted, 'the Council are thus particular in drawing attention to their mode of procedure'. At the same time, Lady Carrington closed the first report of the Queen's Fund by quoting the words of one of the speakers who articulated the 'mission' of the Fund at the inaugural meeting:

... wherever the black shade of calamity falls; wherever the life is made hard and almost unbearable by grinding pressure; wherever woman's bound spirit bleeds with inward anguish—there will this Fund minister, so far as it has the power, to soothe broken hearts and to brighten human lives.

The sense that all women were united by their relative powerlessness, and by the weight of feeling, was made explicit at the first annual meeting of the Fund, where Lady Carrington expressed a hope that endowments would increase, 'so that the hand of sympathy which we are anxious to stretch out to our sisters in distress may be a strong and helpful one.' This was a task peculiarly suited to women, who in administering the fund had shown a 'tender regard ... to the feelings of those who were the applicants' when making enquiries, 'so that no sore feeling had been left.'

An acknowledgment of feminine sensibility was central to the Council's construction of their work as 'conscientious care', combining sound management with emotional responsiveness, as well as to the Fund's claims that it did not duplicate the work of any other organisation.

This was of crucial importance, as the Fund was formed at a time when charity and benevolence were undergoing significant social and structural change. These changes fell broadly into two related categories. One, as Stephen Garton and others

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21 First Annual Report of the Queen's Jubilee Fund 1889, pp. 3-5.
have shown, was the increasing application of scientific principles to charity work. Scientific charity, Garton argues, saw a removal of power from the hands of women, who had previously been the most active agents of philanthropic social control, and placed in the hands of scientific experts and professionals. The second was the attempt to centralise charity work, in order to prevent opportunist from taking advantage of a number of unconnected sources of funds. These two causes led to the increasing role played by the state in providing basic welfare at the turn of the century.²⁶

The Queen's Fund can be seen as a transitional charity in this overall scheme. Its main aim was to 'help women help themselves', to offer indirect payments for machinery or materials, but nevertheless it often made payments more directly, for rent or debt. It recast philanthropy from 'begging' for funds, to 'investing' and 'managing' them. It was a centralised charity, administered by women in a scientific and business-like fashion. By engaging with contemporary discourses about scientific management and efficiency, and merging them with more traditional aspects of women's charitable work, the women involved with the Queen's Fund sought to raise the status of women's work for charity and legitimise and justify their activities in the public sphere. In the scheme of women-run and directed charities the Queen's Fund fell somewhere between the church charities (which funded by case) and organisations which emerged in the 1890s like the Women's Industrial Guild (which set up depots where women could sell their work). It suggested to women that paid employment, not a hand-out, was the answer to poverty.

At the end of the nineteenth century, as the Queen's Fund shows, the women involved in charitable work in NSW, and public work in general, thought work itself was the best solution to social ills. Work was seen as ennobling, as a path to self-respect and independence. The phrase 'enable applicants to earn their own living' was a refrain throughout Queen's Fund literature. Nevertheless, women were encouraged to take up work well within the boundaries of femininity, usually carried out within the home.\textsuperscript{27} The fund promoted paid employment as a way to 'enable the applicants to make a fresh start in life and to preserve a certain amount of self-respect.'\textsuperscript{28} An emphasis on 'work' and 'self-respect' seems to mark out the middle-class nature of the Queen's Fund. The women and men involved in its organisation promoted the ideology and social understandings of middle-class life, although they stretched and modified them in order to justify encouraging individual women without male support to become financially independent by earning their own living.

The Queen's Fund, noted the first circular, would extend relief to women 'of all classes of society, from the humblest to the distressed gentlewoman'.\textsuperscript{29} The Council's rules and by-laws defined more narrowly who was worthy of help. Two 'classes' of women were ineligible for relief, 'indigent ladies who have relatives able to support them', and 'infirm aged women, who must eventually go into an asylum or hospital to end their days, and who are only living on charity.'\textsuperscript{30} The categories of women the Fund was keen to aid, on the other hand, represented those who due to circumstances beyond their control had fallen outside of these networks of support:

(a) \textit{Young Widows} with large families dependent upon them.
(b) \textit{Widows} struggling to earn their own livelihood.

\textsuperscript{27} Despite these aims, however, under the strain of economic depression the Fund found itself under increasing pressure to respond to present need rather than future independence. This was reflected in the way in which funds were allocated. Between 1889 and 1900, the vast majority of Queen's Fund payments went to payments of rent arrears, debt, passages 'home', or for immediate needs such as food or clothing. However, the payments which received the greatest publicity, in the pages of reports or at council meetings, were made for the purchase of sewing machines and laundry equipment such as mangles. Other activities funded included numerous payments for 'starting an applicant in a small business', and at least one case where a woman was given money for a course in midwifery. \textit{Annual Reports of the Queen's Jubilee Fund}, 1889-1900, passim. The midwifery example comes from the Papers of Sir Edward Knox, Queen's Fund 1890-1897, ML MSS 98/34, p. 167.

\textsuperscript{28} The fund received an average of three hundred applications per year. \textit{Fourth Annual Report of the Queen's Jubilee Fund} 1892, W. E. Smith, Sydney, 1893, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{29} First Circular, in Queen's Jubilee Fund Records 1887-1968, ML MSS 4645.

(c) Poor Governesses, single or widowed, trying to earn their own livelihood ...
(d) Indigent ladies, friendless, and unable to support themselves ...
(e) Married women, whose husbands are either in an asylum for the insane, or have
deserted them not less than one year, or are incapacitated for work.31

What all of the categories had in common was the absence of men, or of men who
could fulfil their masculine duty of support and protection.32 They represented women
who were deemed physically capable of working for their own living.

Despite the rigidity of these categories, the Fund was not, in its allocation of
payments, advocating that women should seek masculine protection. Rather, it paid
women to support themselves. The Fund aimed to help those who were already
helping themselves through paid work. Its female-only funding system recognised
women’s management of the domestic economy, their responsibilities to others, at the
same time as it encouraged women to become involved in the wider colonial economy.
There was a recognition which accompanied this support that women were already in
an economically weak position. The poor woman especially was described as ‘too
heavily handicapped in the struggle for life’.33

But while the Queen’s Fund was based on the idea that all women were
vulnerable once they were thrust powerless into the marketplace, it put forward
involvement in poorly paid home industries such as laundry and piecework as a
solution to that vulnerability. What it offered women was independence in the context
of a broader set of dependencies, on the market, on supply and demand, on the orders
of employers and the whims of consumers. According to the Fund’s ideals, the
inestimable difference between bad wages as a seamstress and next to nothing from a
handout was ‘self-respect’. That this was promoted as a worthy aspiration by the Fund
reflected the way in which ‘work’ was positioned as an intermediary between the
money economy and a feminised economy of morality. When they received money
from the Queen’s Fund the women assisted were also represented as the beneficiaries

31 Queen's Jubilee Fund, Rules and By-Laws, rule 25.
32 Nevertheless, this had limits. When a when a woman supported a ‘drunken husband’, the Fund
would not support her. ‘The Queen’s Fund was meant for women, not men’ stated Mrs Morris at the
Australasian Conference on Charity. Proceedings of the Second Australasian Conference on Charity,
p. 133.
of unique and priceless gifts: liberal individualism, feminine sympathy and middle-class respectability. It was this appreciation of 'work' as a redemptive ideal that underpinned the development of the EWI. The Sydney Morning Herald stated that the exhibition's aim was 'to see the dependent made independent, and the unprotected made able to protect themselves'.

Overall, the colonial press supported the Queen's Fund. The Sydney Morning Herald was representative when it stated of the Fund 'there cannot be any objection to it on any grounds whatever'.

The specific nature of the fund is a strong thing in its favour. Many poor women in distress would have resort to such a fund who would not care to seek relief from a general benevolent society. The worst suffering is often found in cases where widowed women are striving hard to bring up their children, and fighting poverty and semi-starvation all the way.

But vehement criticism came from the Bulletin, which accused the Fund of being elitist, and of taking from the poor to fund distressed gentlewomen.

The Bulletin's attitude was best summed up in its continuing joke about the changing name of the Fund. 'While they are trying to raise subscriptions' it claimed 'they will call it the "Women's Fund", when they have raked in the cash, they will call it the Queen's Fund again.' On the cover of the issue of 12 November 1887, Phil May expanded this idea into a full-page cartoon. May depicted two different hats, one labelled 'Queen's Fund' surmounted by a crown, and a plainer one bearing the sign 'Woman's Fund'. Two pendants showed the 'Queen's Fund' hat being proffered by one lady to another, and the 'Woman's Fund' hat being offered by a clergyman to a more plainly-dressed (and presumably lower-class) woman. Between the two was a small illustration of a thin snobbish lady in a ribbed hat saying to a more portly old woman in a cap: 'it is the same, only we call it the QUEEN'S FUND in Pott's Point'. Dominating the page was a caricature of Bishop Barry winking and pointing to the 'Woman's Fund' hat being tipped into 'Queen's Fund' hat [Figure 2.4].

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34 Sydney Morning Herald, 3 October 1888, pp. 8-9.
37 Bulletin, 12 November 1887, p. 1. The Bulletin considered the Fund to be a 'superhuman cadge on behalf of ladies who once held high positions', Bulletin, 5 November 1887, p. 12. It cited as an example the case of a 'totally destitute' old woman supporting an 'idiot and helpless daughter' who had been denied funds by a 'vice-regal ... personage', Lady Blank. Bulletin, 11 August 1888, p. 13.
suggested that 'ladies' used the word 'woman' to deceive working women into a sense of sisterhood when in reality they wanted to use the Fund for their own purposes. This accusation would haunt the EWI.

The Bulletin pointed out the central contradiction of the Queen's Fund: its class bias. It was Bishop Barry who, in the words of the Bulletin 'gave away the great and aristocratic project' of the Fund when he said:

He knew there was a large amount of distress among women, and especially amongst those who enjoyed the advantages of high education and had been in high social positions. ... It was a kind of distress which commended itself rather to a special form of relief---it ought not to be dragged before public meetings, or manipulated through public organisations. It required a fund that would work quietly and unostentatiously, and would give the real distress the privilege of proficiency as well as of sympathy.38

It was following this speech that the Bulletin began criticising the Fund in earnest. The Phil May cartoon described above followed an editorial entitled 'Blighted by a Bishop', which complained that Barry had 'fatally' breathed upon the project like the 'Angel of Death'. 'The Bishop', it claimed, virtually defined the Queen's Fund as an arrangement by which a calculating set of rich and parsimonious snobs are to dispense lordly charity among a refined clientele at the expense of the poor---by which the decayed female swell who has come to grief through a want of cerebral tissue is to receive charity on good, old English principles, while BILL SMITH'S or TIM FLAHERTY'S wife, whose pennies are cadged to keep the "Queen's Fund" going, may starve in the gutter because, forsooth, she never held a high position.39

Undoubtedly, Barry's words made explicit one of the main motivations which lay behind the foundation of the Fund, anxiety about female economic vulnerability, an anxiety which was deemed to be greater for those furthest removed from work and the marketplace. The Fund represented an awareness on the part of even secure and well-off genteel women that they too could be affected by the vagaries of fate and the market, and a recognition that provisions needed to be made for the possible eventuality. For this reason, the Fund became popularly associated with helping 'distressed gentlewomen' rather than 'distressed women'.

There was some justification for the Bulletin's scorn. The organisers assumed that the Queen's Jubilee Fund for Distressed Women was a universal charity because its promise of work, feminine sympathy, and 'self-respect' was universal. That is, it

38 Sydney Morning Herald, 25 October 1887, p. 3.
39 Bulletin, 5 November 1887, p. 5
rested on a universal femininity - stoic, silent, selfless, and suffering - which was not divided along class lines. But at the same time, the Fund projected a sense that much of the 'anguish' of 'distressed women' stemmed from their heightened awareness of class and status, of disjunctions between income and 'inherent worth'. As the Daily Telegraph paraphrased, it would assist those 'to whom privacy was almost as much as the help they received'.

This emphasis on status and emotions, rather than on economics and wages, as well as its refusal to grant continuing payments, meant that the Queen's Fund limited its involvement with those who were incarcerated in 'poverty's prison', and focused its attention on assisting those its organisers believed might step out of the cycle of poverty back into 'normal life'. Its standard for living was an inherently respectable and middle-class one, albeit one modified to include a financially independent working woman, and in some cases a family without a father.

The fund-raising efforts of the Queen's Fund confirmed its middle-class nature, but also the increasing visibility of women, and women-centred public activity, in Sydney immediately prior to the centenary year. Initially, the 'best practical mode of obtaining, as nearly as possible, universal support from all classes of the community' was considered to be the establishment of 'large Local Ladies' Committees' in each suburb or town, and arranging through these 'a "house to house" canvas'.

As an incentive to donors, the owner of the Sydney Morning Herald J. R. Fairfax offered to make public their generosity by publishing subscription lists free of charge. In July Mr Dibbs suggested that banks be approached to put subscription lists on their counters. Over the following year, the Fund expanded its fund-raising activities, reducing approaches to private individuals and aiming instead to make money through more public activities. These included a Pain's firework display in the Domain, from

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41 First Circular, in Queen's Jubilee Fund Records 1887-1968, ML MSS 4645.
42 Minutes of a meeting of the General Committee 20th June 1887, in Queen's Jubilee Fund Records 1887-1968, ML MSS 4645.
43 Minutes of a meeting of the Executive Committee 1st July 1887, in Queen's Jubilee Fund Records 1887-1968, ML MSS 4645.
which the Fund received 15% of the gross proceeds, and a day in January 1888 on which P&O put the RMS Britannia on show at an admission fee. But the most successful of these fund-raisers were the concerts organised by the local Ladies' Committees of various suburbs, including Ashfield and Waverley, and a fancy fair at Exhibition Building in November 1887.

The most interesting fund-raising effort of the Queen's Fund during its first year was the Women's Concert, held in the Great Hall of the University of Sydney on the 26th of August 1887. Organised by women prominent in the colony's cultural life, Ethel Pedley, Emmeline Woolley, Mrs Theodor Bossen, Mme Charbonnet-Kellerman, Mrs Carl Fischer, Mrs Fitz-Simons, Miss Gertrude Fischer and the mayoress Mrs Alban J. Riley, the concert featured women performers only, including the 120-strong St Cecilia choir. The concert was considered a 'novelty' not simply because of it had been 'entirely organised and carried out by the "fair sex"', but also because "lady stewardesses" graciously attended to the seating of the audience. The concert sold out and made a profit of more than £100. It is not hard to see the Women's Concert as the main precursor of the Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair. Its 'women only' focus, at the levels of organisation and participation, set it apart from

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44 Minutes of a meeting of the Executive Committee 14th October 1887, in Queen's Jubilee Fund Records 1887-1968, ML MSS 4645.
45 Minutes of a meeting of the Executive Committee 19th December 1887, in Queen's Jubilee Fund Records 1887-1968, ML MSS 4644.
46 Lady Cecilia Margaret Carrington, Diary 1887, entry for 12 October 1887. See also Daily Telegraph, 13 October 1887, p. 6, 15 October 1887, p. 6; and Sydney Morning Herald, 2 September 1887, p. 6, 13 October 1887, p. 2.
47 Daily Telegraph, 10 November 1887, p. 6. At the same time, almost the same group of women were fund-raising on behalf of the planned Women's College at the University of Sydney, see Jeannette Beaumont and W. Verge Holle, Letters from Louisa: A Woman's View of the 1890s, Based on the Letters of Louisa Macdonald, First Principal of the Women's College, University of Sydney; Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1996, pp. 36ff.
48 Daily Telegraph, 27 August 1887, p. 7; Echo, 26 August 1887, p. 5, 27 August 1887, p. 7; Sydney Morning Herald, 24 August 1887, p. 5; 27 August 1887, p. 12. Early in 1883 Miss Ethel Pedley, who had trained in London as a violinist and singer, brought together a chorus of ladies for a concert to benefit the National Shipwreck Society organised by Miss Emmeline Woolley, daughter of Dr John Woolley the first principal of the University of Sydney. Woolley was a talented pianist and composer who had also studied in Europe. The group decided to keep singing together and became known as the St Cecilia Choir. The choir sang regularly for charity, and Pedley and Woolley composed several pieces for the group, the musical scores of which are now in the collection of the Mitchell Library. See Sydney Mail, 29 June 1895, p. 1319.
49 Sydney Morning Herald, 27 August 1887, p. 12.
the other benefits and fund-raising activities, and placed it nearer to the ideal nature of the Fund itself, run by and for women.

The genesis of the EWI, which came even closer to materially representing the Fund, is not entirely clear. Most accounts written after the event credit Lady Carrington with having the initial idea. Lord Carrington's diary contains a marginal note, composed in an older or different hand, next to his contemporary entry for 29 October 1888, closing day, which begins:

This exhibition was first thought of and arranged by Lady Carrington herself and was carried out by her to a most successful termination by her aided by a band of most capable and devoted assistants.  

The first mention of the EWI in her diary was in the entry for 19 October 1887, when she reported she was 'busy thinking about a meeting to be held on Monday next to start the idea of having an Exhibition and Fair held here in the spring of next year', but the minutes of the Queen's Fund suggest that the idea of an exhibition was already being considered as early as August of that year. The inspiration may have been the women's sections of the Edinburgh or Glasgow Exhibitions of Industry Science and Art, held in 1886 and planned for 1888 respectively. Lady Carrington had been approached by the organisers of both displays about the possibility of obtaining colonial exhibits of women's work. There does not appear to be a direct connection

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50 Charles Robert, Lord Carrington, Marquess of Lincolnshire, Diary 1888, Australian Joint Copying Project, Carrington Papers, Reel 14, entry for 29 October 1888.
51 Lady Cecilia Margaret Carrington, Diary 1887, entries for 19 and 22 October 1887.
52 On the 8th of August, a Mr R. Septimus Pryce had written to the Representative Executive Committee of the Queen's Fund through Miss Leroy 'offering his gratuitous services in event of any kind of exhibition being held in the interests of the Fund'. Minutes of a meeting of the Executive Committee 8th August 1887, in Queen's Jubilee Fund Records 1887-1968, ML MSS 4645. At the meeting held on the 19th of September a letter was received from 'Mr Astley re proposed Exhibition of Women's Work'. Minutes of a meeting of the Executive Committee 19th September 1887, in Queen's Jubilee Fund Records 1887-1968, ML MSS 4645. Lady Carrington recorded in her diary that an 'important' meeting of the Executive Committee on the 14th of October had 'talked about a Bazaar and other methods of bringing in money'. Lady Cecilia Margaret Carrington, Diary 1887, entry for 14 October 1887.
53 In February 1886, she made a brief note in her diary: 'Lady Martin, Lady Stephen and Sir Alfred to tea to talk over a letter I had from the sec. of the Edinburgh Exhibition. The Edinburgh International Exhibition of 1886 incorporated a 'Women's Section' the object of which was to show what women are doing in the industrial world of Great Britain', see Women's Industries: Edinburgh 1886, International Exhibition of Industry Science and Art, I. & A. Constable, [Edinburgh], [1886]. Introduction. It would appear that the Council organising this display approached Lady Carrington in an effort to include colonial women's work. Although Lady Carrington does not appear to have mobilised an exhibit, she did send word to the convention of women held in conjunction with the exhibition that governesses were not required in the colonies. Lady Cecilia Margaret Carrington, Diary 1886, entry for 8 February 1886.
between the women's exhibitions held in Bristol and Brighton and the Sydney display, but it is not unlikely that Carrington or others in Australia could have heard about them through family contacts or newspaper reports. Similarities of style, and the repeated use of the word 'industry' in the exhibitions' titles, suggest at least some cross-fertilisation [Figure 2.5].

The idea of holding an exhibition of women's industry in Australia probably emerged largely from a combination of the incessant discussion of exhibitions in relation to the coming centennial, and the novelty of holding 'women's' versions of popular events, like concerts. At any rate, on Monday the 24th of October, Lady Carrington wrote, was a 'very busy day':

At 11 o'clock (sic) had a meeting of about 100 ladies to discuss the advisability of holding an Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centennial Fair the proceeds to go to the Queen's Fund. A resolution was unanimously passed to say it should be held in September or October next.55

This meeting was addressed not by Lady Carrington, but by Lord Carrington, Mr Gotthelf, the Mayor, and the Anglican Primate, Bishop Barry. The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Queen's Fund, which was held at 4pm on the same day, recorded a similar resolution, prefaced by a self-effacing remark from the President that she had convened the EWI meeting 'at the request of several ladies'.56 From that date, Lady Carrington's diary contained at least one comment a day relative to the setting up of the EWI.

The organisational structure of the Exhibition essentially replicated the organisation of the Queen's Fund. The Exhibition was entirely organised by women under the presidency of Lady Carrington, and the vice-presidency of Lady Darley, Mrs

54 The Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries was held in Bristol in 1885. Its organisers reported that the exhibition had a 'double origin': some women in Bristol have strongly felt the need for more means of technical teaching for girls; some strongly feel, also, the need for more direct political influence for women. The industrial and political position of any given portion of the community act and react on each other: hence the two lines of desire coalesced in the effort to in some measure, if possible, raise that standard of estimation for women's work.' See Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries in Queen's Villa, Queens Road, Bristol, 1885, [Report and Balance Sheet], [n.p.d.], p. 2. The records of this exhibition are held in the archives of Gorton College, Cambridge. For an account of women's activism in Bristol in this period see Ellen Malos, 'Bristol women in action, 1839-1919: The right to vote and the need to earn a living', in Ian Bild (ed.), Bristol's Other History, Bristol Broadside, Bristol, 1983, pp. 97-128.

55 Lady Cecilia Margaret Carrington, Diary 1887, entry for 24 October 1887.

56 Minutes of a meeting of the Executive Committee 24 October 1887, in Queen's Jubilee Fund Records 1887-1968, ML MSS 4645.
Fairfax, and Lady Martin. An Executive Committee of eighteen attended to overall exhibition coordination, with the assistance of treasurers Mrs George Cohen and Mrs T. A. Dibbs, and secretaries Mrs Alban J. Riley and Mrs W. Carl Fischer. A General Committee of one hundred and twenty ladies comprised the delegates for each exhibition department, the superintendents of fair stalls and entertainments, and their helpers. An all-female administration was justified as essential on the grounds that only women could properly manage an exhibition of women's work.

The EWI built on and expanded the fledgling women's network established by the Queen's Fund. The idea of connecting all the women in NSW through one great organisational effort was an attractive one. It was hoped that the smaller groups would pull together all the women in the community and promote women's industry in the separate regions as well as helping to unite the colony as a whole. Although in the end only one major local exhibition was held, in Newcastle, the formulation of an enterprise that linked women from the most remote country town with women in the city and ultimately the woman in Government House represented a powerful ideal, consistent with the overall style of the Carringtons' governorship.57

The identification of the EWI with Lady Carrington connected it to the 'classless' camaraderie that characterised Lord Carrington's governorship, and the unimpeachable genteel femininity of his wife. The Carringtons provided a new form of social leadership in NSW between 1885 and 1890. Lord Carrington was a popular governor in difficult times, and his appeal stemmed mainly from the image that he was tactful, sociable and, most of all, unaffected.58 The generally supportive colonial press often printed stories which implied Carrington had the 'common touch', and was as much at ease talking to a labourer as to a lord of the realm. Carrington himself seems

57 A small local display of exhibits to be sent to the EWI was held in Croydon in September 1888, see Sydney Morning Herald, 21 September 1888, p. 7. The Newcastle Exhibition of Women's Industries opened in the new brewery building on 20 September 1888, see Sydney Morning Herald, 21 September 1888, p. 8; and Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner's Advocate, 8 September 1888, pp. 1 and 4, 13 September 1888, p. 5, 20 September 1888, p. 4, 21 September 1888, p. 7, 22 September 1888, p. 5, 24 September 1888, p. 5, 25 September 1888, pp. 5 and 9, 26 September 1888, p. 4
to have encouraged such an image, dressing in civilian clothes for public ceremonies such as the opening of Centennial Park, and recording with pleasure in his diary the words of a shearer he met on a tour of the country, who told him 'you are quite different to what I expected: we thought you were a Lardy Da but you seem very civil.'\textsuperscript{59} Indeed, this appears to have been quite a deliberate strategy on the part of the vice-regal pair. Lady Carrington, in one of the few personal comments in her diary, described how 'proud' she was of her husband at the ceremony of laying the foundation stone of the new parliament house in Sydney in centennial week 1888:

> He has done well and it proves the way he has hitherto gone to work in identifying himself with the people of N.S. Wales & not always being the Governor! has been the right way & that in no way has he lowered the dignity of the office.\textsuperscript{60}

Carrington's popularity was lampooned regularly in the \textit{Bulletin}, but even at the highest pitch of anti-imperial sentiment and complaint about the vice-regal salary, the paper only directly charged him with being 'nice'.\textsuperscript{61} Elsewhere Hop drew him as the 'idol of the hour' on a pedestal engraved 'I opes I give satisfaction', surrounded by smaller images of the Governor engaged in various working-class popular pastimes, including organ-grinding, boxing and cock-fighting [Figure 2.6]. In one, a man enquired of another whether he has asked Lord Carrington to the fight. 'So I did ax him but he said he can't come havin' accepted a previs invitation to a dog-fight the same evenin' was the reply.\textsuperscript{62} The humour of these images certainly came from the incongruity between the Governor's supposed rapport with the working classes, and the respectable grounds upon which this 'camaraderie' was actually established: official visits, openings, and tours of the country. But at the same time, Carrington's eagerness to please everyone was correctly identified as having its expression through an engagement with working class masculinity and colonial egalitarianism.

\textsuperscript{59} Charles Robert, Lord Carrington, Diary 1888, entry for 15 September 1888. See also \textit{Bulletin}, 31 December 1887, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{60} Lady Cecilia Margaret Carrington, Diary 1888, entry for 30 January 1888.

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Bulletin}, 25 September 1886, p. 5. On p. 9 it was also reported that 'At Albury Agricultural Show Lord Carrington made himself agreeable to every beast he saw. His Excellency can't help it—it's his good nature.'

\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Bulletin}, 14 August 1886, p. 15.
Lady Carrington, on the other hand, contributed to a reconceptualisation of colonial society by representing idealised femininity. Where Lord Carrington demystified the role of imperial representative by breaking or dispensing with official conventions, her role became one of fostering class harmony through social ritual, most often through 'at homes' at Government House. These events, it was repeatedly stated, were of a most representative character, as they included people of all ranks and classes.'

All are welcomed with a kindly smile, and none approach without being charmed by the polite and unaffected reception accorded to them.63

But at the same time as the Carringtons 'identified' themselves with 'the people' of NSW - he through his masculine energy, and she through her feminine work - what they brought to the office of 'governor', and to the make-up of 'society' itself, was a firmer association with middle-class values and middle-class people. Although he had a title and inherited land, and was a close friend of the Prince of Wales, Lord Carrington enjoyed telling poor boys of 'his own family's humble origins in eighteenth-century trade'.64 An 'advanced liberal, even a Radical' he brought colonial liberals, such as the Windeyers, closer to the heart of vice-regal power than ever before. The Carringtons broadened the definition of what 'society' constituted, putting older landed families like the Macleays, and those associated with imperial structures such as the Navy like the Fairfaxes, on equal footing with those who had risen to positions of authority or wealth, as politicians, businessmen, merchants, lawyers and public servants. This was perhaps inevitable as the colonial bourgeoisie became increasingly more prominent, but the Carringtons were sympathetic agents in their rise to social and cultural status as well as economic and political power.

Lady Carrington intended her EWI committee to be both genteel and representative. Because of its connection to the colony's elite a place on the exhibition's organising committee was a sign of status. While Lady Carrington occupied the presidency, and Lady Darley (wife of the Chief Justice), Mrs Fairfax

(wife of the Rear-Admiral) and Lady Martin (whose husband had been a politician, lawyer and Chief Justice), the positions of vice-presidents, the Executive Committee of eighteen contained the wives of politicians, merchants, aldermen and engineers. The General Committee of one hundred and five also included the wives and daughters of bankers, dentists, builders, university men, surveyors, barristers, public servants, businessmen, and soldiers.65 The Daily Telegraph described it as a 'thoroughly representative one' including 'ladies from the fashionable, charitable and working sections of the community'.66 It is not apparent that working class women played a major role in the central organising committees, although it is possible they formed smaller local groups to carry out the work. Once the exhibition opened it was criticised for excluding 'real working women', as will be seen in the following chapters. But despite its largely genteel make-up, it appears there were still clear status divisions within the General Committee. The Evening News claimed that there were two 'types' of women in the organising committee, and that the more 'elite' group monopolised the first half of the show when there were more opportunities for public attention and prestigious associations with the vice-regal party.67

There were also significant differences of opinion within the committees. Although firmly bourgeois in its make-up, the EWI drew together women from diverse backgrounds with divergent views about women and their role in society. While it can be safely assumed that the more 'progressive' women were to be found running the Exhibition rather than the Fair, we cannot say that all the exhibition organisers agreed with each other about what direction the display should take. Much of the skill and diplomacy of Lady Carrington's presidency, so often remarked upon, flowed from a need to balance the contrasting opinions of a large number of women. This was a situation that had never before been seen in Sydney: women debating together about women's work and role, and how to represent and enhance it. The exhibition

65 EWI, [Prospectus], p. 2. For the final make-up of the committees see Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair Sydney 1888, Official Catalogue: Corrected and Revised Edition, John Sands, Sydney, 1888, p. 5.
67 Evening News, 10 October 1888, p. 6.
represented a range of opinions rather than a completely homogeneous whole. The overall message had to be one general enough to be acceptable to all, without risking the chance for real impact by being bland, cacophonous, or simplistic. The combination of exhibition and fair created the possibility for compromise as well as full expression of a range of views.

The various committees met monthly, and although no minute books have survived, the details of discussion are recorded in the columns of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The initial work of defining, structuring and ordering the display took place in the latter part of 1887 and the earlier part of 1888. On 3 November 1887, with Mrs Fairfax, Lady Carrington saw the Premier Sir Henry Parkes about the Exhibition. He was 'very kind about it & took my paper away to think over it before giving his answer'.\(^\text{68}\) He replied positively, with advice and the names of ladies who might be interested in assisting with the display. His interest was essential to the project [Figure 2.7]. Lady Carrington replied that his 'countenances and support means everything, and without it, I for one, would not have moved further in the matter'.\(^\text{69}\) The committees were appointed at a meeting at the Town Hall on the 29th of November, and it appears that appointments to the positions of treasurers, secretaries, and delegates for the eight departments, had been made before the end of 1887.\(^\text{70}\) On 13 January 1888 Vice-President Lady Martin and Honorary Secretaries Mrs Riley and Mrs Carl Fischer formed a deputation and met officially with the Premier to discuss possible grants and allowances. The rest of January was dominated the centennial celebrations, and work did not begin in earnest on the Exhibition until February, when a meeting settled that the display would open on the 2nd of October 1888.\(^\text{71}\)

The EWI took on a special significance in the context of the centennial. In October 1888 the *Daily Telegraph* claimed that:

\(^{68}\) Lady Cecilia Margaret Carrington, Diary 1887, entry for 3 November 1887.

\(^{69}\) Lady Carrington to Sir Henry Parkes, Sir Henry Parkes Correspondence, vol. 6, pp. 217-20, ML MSS A876. One of the ladies Parkes mentioned must have been Emmeline Byrne, who wrote to him declining to take part on 11 November 1887, Parkes Correspondence, vol. 3, pp. 351-354, ML MSS A873.

\(^{70}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 November 1887, p. 11.

\(^{71}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 March 1888, p. 6.
In the small part played by this colony in celebrating the Centenary of Australia the Women's Industrial Exhibition...may justly claim to be the leading function. It has what all the rest of our celebrations lacked, namely, a distinct meaning in relation to the event with which it is associated. In the exhibition is illustrated what the first century of Australian life has done towards solving for itself the complicated and perplexing problem of providing for the excess of feminine population, a question which is at present growing with the growth of all civilised countries.72

While the exhibition was criticised in the press for being snobbish and exclusive, it was praised and supported by the same papers for its role in the centennial celebrations.73 The women's exhibition seemed somehow more fitting and better organised than most of the other events. In 1888 it was the ladies of Sydney who salvaged colonial pride in New South Wales. This was despite the fact that up until the exhibition opened they had not played any significant part in the celebrations.

Reading the president's address at the opening of the display, Lady Darley spoke of how the Exhibition was 'the only portion of the Centennial Celebrations in which the women of New South Wales have had any distinct recognition'. Darley was right. In 1888 women of all classes were actively excluded from the celebration of colonial pride and nascent nationalism [Figure 2.8]. This is not to imply that they were entirely absent, for as many women attended the opening of the Centennial Park as men, but that, to use Darley's phrase, women received no 'distinct recognition' for their contribution to the colony's development, or of the role they might play in the nation's future.75 As the author of Sydney Morning Herald's opinion column, 'As You Like It', commented 'We have done all the centenniating, and they [the women] have been expected to be content to only look on'. This, in his view, did not reflect well on the progress of the colony.

It has been said that the civilisation of a nation may be gauged by its treatment of its women. If the saying be true, I fear that even in our hundred and first year we cannot congratulate ourselves at having arrived at a high pitch of civilisation in New South

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72 Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1888, p. 4.
73 See for example the Tribune, 28 October 1887, p. 6.
75 While real flesh-and-blood women might have been missing from the celebrations, the 'feminine' was not. There was constant discussion of the 'mother country' and the 'mother colony', and New South Wales was often represented as a youthful maiden. See Margaret Anderson (ed.), When Australia Was a Woman: Images of a Nation, Western Australian Museum, Perth, 1988.
Wales. If there be one thing that is remarkable about the late centennial or centennial festivities, it is our persistent refusal to recognise the existence of the ladies.\footnote{76} The columnist wondered if the exclusion of women from the celebrations, however, was intended as a 'protest against the new fashion---also intended as a protest---of those funds, meetings, exhibitions of industries, and the like, from which the ladies have of late been excluding ourselves.'\footnote{77} The EWI was a protest. It cleverly turned women's exclusion from the rest of the centennial into the exclusion of men from the centenary's most successful event, driving home the point that women were a significant force in colony.

The organisation of the centennial in New South Wales was a fiasco. Colonial rivalry, changes in government, conflict between capital and labour, ambivalence about the convict past, and the nearness of the Queen's Jubilee, meant that no firm plans were put in place until late in 1887.\footnote{78} Prior to that Premiers Jennings and Parkes dithered over what would be the most fitting way to celebrate the colony's first century. After Sir Patrick Jennings had rejected the idea of an international exhibition, Melbourne claimed it, to the dismay of many in New South Wales who felt that the colony had somehow forfeited its 'honour and position' to the southern upstart.\footnote{79} Daniel O'Connor M.L.A. even went so far as to describe the loss as 'unmanly'.\footnote{80} The proposal to hold another exhibition, even one dedicated only to women's work, salvaged some colonial pride, while avoiding giving the impression of a masculine

\footnote{76} *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 February 1888, p. 10.

\footnote{77} The exclusion of men from the Exhibition of Women's Industries prompted only one letter of protest, see *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 November 1888, p. 5.


\footnote{79} The centrepiece of the proposal was the 'proclamation of a Carnival Season from January 23rd to February 7th', during which it was hoped the Prince of Wales would open the Water Supply Works, or as the Bulletin called it, the 'Bondi Sewer'. *Bulletin*, 4 September 1886, p. 1; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 August 1886, p. 10; 5 December 1886, p. 8; 6 December 1886, p. 3.

\footnote{80} *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 August 1886, p. 6. Into this atmosphere of disappointment and creeping anxiety, Sir Henry Parkes put forward his rather more ambitious plans for the New South Wales celebrations. The keystone of Parkes' proposal was the erection of a giant State House, part museum, part mausoleum, which would stand in the new Centennial Park, as a memorial to the great men of the colony's first century. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 June 1887, p. 12; 28 June 1887, pp. 3-4; 1 July 1887 pp. 3 and 6-7.
intercolonial competitiveness. Genteel women were able to capitalise on this moment of possibility. The *Daily Telegraph* noted at the opening of the EWI that:

The undertaking owed its origin to the determination of a number of ladies ... that an exhibition of some kind should be held in the capital of the mother colony in celebration of the Centenary of Australia.⁸¹

The women of NSW seized the opportunity to connect their work to the idealism of the exhibition and the poignancy and power of the historical moment.

The decision to expand the Queen's Fund bazaar into an exhibition stemmed from a will on the part of the women involved to do more than just raise money to aid women workers, but to educate them and the colonial community about what they could do. The gap left by governmental indecision about the centennial allowed the women's plans to embrace even larger symbolic significance. Its novelty value meant it was held up as an example of colonial innovation, advancement and uniqueness. In the centennial chaos, the EWI shone as an example of meaningful, useful work prosecuted with diplomacy and drive. Tired of inept and pompous politicians, the colonists revelled in the irony that it was the women who would strike the final, and some thought only, triumphant note in the mother colony's first birthday.

There was great enthusiasm amongst genteel women as a result of the conflation of the EWI and the centennial.⁸² They believed that the new women of Australia might play a more visible and more valued role in the 'nation' than their mothers had. In May of the centenary year the Woman's Column of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, speaking of the exhibition, asked if there was not 'something about this year 1888 which seems to mark it out as specially a woman's year.' The women of the future, the columnist imagined, would look back on that date as having seen the 'first crack in the eggshell of social opinion' from which the 'emancipated woman ... was to emerge'.⁸³ The women involved in the EWI recognised the huge potential of connecting women's future to a future vision for the colony [Figure 2.9]. The colonists were uncomfortable about looking back, fearful of the convict taint.

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⁸¹ *Daily Telegraph*, 3 October 1888, p. 5.
⁸² For a description of similar emotions on the part of American women in 1876, see Cordato, *Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere*, pp. 38ff.
Concerns about cultural comparison and social conflict marred the present. The EWI closed the centennial year with a vision of an enlarged future, both for women and for the colony as a whole. Even a leader published in the *Australian Star* on the subject of the women's exhibition, conceded the exhibition served a 'national' function.

If we are to have an Australian nation, its people will eventually develop distinct characteristics, and as women will play an important part in the formation of these, the better we educate her in refinement and taste, the more noble and praiseworthy these national characteristics are likely to be.\(^8^4\)

The women of the organising committee meant to suggest women were more directly involved than that. This link between womanhood and 'nationhood' would be a defining feature of all Australian exhibitions of women's work that followed.

**Exhibition and Fair: constructing the EWI**

*What the Exhibition is expected to accomplish in an educational or a national sense, the Fair will do in a financial sense, for in this department lies the hope of the Committee for their profits.*\(^8^5\)

From the introduction to the EWI's *Catalogue*.

While the Queen's Fund had suggested a fund raising fair and an educational exhibit, the centennial gave the exhibition idea prominence and power. How did the women's committees, drawing authority from their origins in charity work and confidence from their special centennial year, bring together the two forms to make their Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair?

The structure of the EWI simultaneously divided the Exhibition and the Fair, and blurred the distinction between them. The committee's reasons for doing this were based on an awareness of what exhibitions and bazaars meant in Victorian culture, and an effort to use and redefine those meanings to match women's work and benefit women workers.

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\(^8^4\) *Australian Star*, 2 October 1888, p. 4.
\(^8^5\) EWI, *Catalogue*, p. 12.
Separating the exhibition and the bazaar

Once the organising committee had been decided to add an exhibition to the Queen's Fund bazaar, there was a conscious distinction made between the exhibition and the fair. The event's title, the 'Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair', kept the two halves of the affair deliberately separated. This distinction was prompted by recognition of the differences between the forms. The Exhibition was a space to realise the idealised goals of education, the elevation of women's work, and the enlargement of women's sphere. It did this by ordering, classifying, and judging the widest possible variety of women's work. The Fair on the other hand was an attraction, a place for amusement and profit.

The Centenary Fair was described by the EWI's organisers as 'the outcome of the feelings of many who ardently desired to help in the good cause, but who shrank from the ordeal of a competition or exhibition'. The Fair, 'comprising all varieties of useful and ornamental needlework, under clothing, and fancy goods of the newest and most attractive kind', was made up of 16 individual stalls run by various groups from around Sydney. 'THE CENTENARY FAIR', proclaimed EWI advertising, 'includes a collection of useful and ornamental articles for all sections of home decoration, all so artistically arranged as to invite the least interested visitor to give attention, and at once convert indifference to admiration.' At the bazaar, an impression was made with delightful and artistic profusion, not ordered wonderment.

When 'J.L.', correspondent for the *Town and Country Journal* described these stalls,
she utilised the language of panoply and abundance common to descriptions of bazaars:

Fans of every imaginable shape, turned into wall-pockets and bags, and gaily trimmed with ribbons, mats, tiles, tea-cosies, plaques (beautifully hand-painted), card-trays, vases (some of them "trimmed" with ribbons in accordance with the present craze), shells painted in delicate colors, were all piled up in profusion. There among the quaint-looking ornaments were rolling-pins, gold-painted and ribbon-decked, tambourines painted in colors, gridirons, and milking stools.91

Another paper commented on the 'bewildering abundance' apparent at every turn.92 Novelties included a fish pond and a Parisian bon-bon stall. It was claimed that 'so rich and varied a collection of goods has hardly before been got together in a charitable cause.'93 More than 250 volunteers a week staffed these stalls, and the Fair also embraced a Tea Room, where visitors were served by unpaid 'lady waitresses'.94 Despite the 'lesson' of the German Fair, where 'gambling' had been banned, there were numerous raffles, and an art union, which offered chances of winning jewellery, needlework, and a patchwork quilt.95

The role of the Centenary Fair was not only to trade women's work and other goods for money, but to attract visitors to the EWI as a whole. For this reason Department IX Music and Dramatic Entertainments was grouped with the Fair rather than the Exhibition.96 Delegate for music, Miss Woolley, organised a series of concerts which were held in a specially constructed hall inside the Exhibition Building. These concerts each took a different theme, with the intention of coaxing visitors to return each evening or afternoon for the new programme.97 Concerts centred around musical forms, such as 'grand ballads', countries like Italy, Germany and France, women performers and composers, and Australian artists and composers. On the

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92 Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1888, p. 5.
93 Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1888, p. 5.
94 Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1888, p. 5.
95 Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1888, p. 5.
96 EWI, [Prospectus], p. 4.
97 Julia Suttor of Bathurst, visiting Sydney in October 1888, wrote in her diary: 'Flo sang in the choruses a great many in the Concert room they must be making a lot of money a shilling to go in and another for the concert, and went to the Exhibition with Bella and Mrs Hurst we went all over the Building not nearly so full as Saturday the Concert room was the great attraction it was full.' Julia Frances Nina Suttor, Diary, 1888, ML FM4/1390, entries for 9 October 1888 and 15 October 1888.
whole they featured women artists and conductors. Mrs Lark presented plays, often acted by amateurs, in the same hall, mainly comedies such as 'Done on Both Sides', 'The Happy Pair', and 'My Uncle's Will', which told the tale of an elderly gentleman who 'hopes to found an "asylum for insane dogs"'.

Besides giving NSW an exhibition for the centennial year, the EWI represented a claiming of the exhibition by and for women. The organisers drew four main elements from the exhibition form to promote 'women's industry'. First, its profound idealism was used to advance the idea that all women's work was 'noble and holy'. This construction is discussed in depth in the next chapter. The universalism of exhibitions helped suggest that all things on show that women did were work, and promote the idea of shared womanhood. By creating a classification system, the organisers revealed that women's work could be classified, but not under existing schemes. Inventing a new system implied that the world was not always organised with women in mind. Competition, as chapter 4 shows, asserted that women's work could be judged on the basis of defined rules and generally accepted notions of merit, skill and taste. For the Exhibition's women organisers the sensation that they were doing something innovative was a source of creativity and optimism. Knowing they had a clean canvas to begin work on was both a challenge and an inspiration. They began by devising an organisational structure which could meet those challenges.

The Exhibition was divided into 'seven competitive departments', each of which had their own committee which was represented on the Executive Committee by a delegate. Mrs Gurney was the delegate for two departments, I Needlework and Lace, and II Knitting &c.. Mrs Carl Fischer, who was also one of the general secretaries, took charge of Department III Domestic Industries. Department IV Mechanical Work had Mrs Fairfax, one of the Vice-Presidents as its delegate. Mrs Windeyer was responsible for Department V Educational, and Lady Carrington was delegate for Department VI Horticulture and Floriculture. The final department, Fine

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98 Sydney Morning Herald, 4 October 1888, p. 2; 6 October 1888, p. 3; 11 October 1888, p. 2; 16 October 1888, p. 2.
99 Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1888, p. 5.
Arts, was superintended by Mrs J. R. Fairfax, wife of the owner of the Sydney Morning Herald. Delegates were responsible for issuing rules about exhibition and competition within their respective departments. They were also involved with creating internal divisions within the general classification, called sections, sensitive to the requirements of each particular department. These divisions were the grounds upon which objects would be displayed and competition between women workers would take place.100

What differentiated the work sold in the Fair and the work on show in the Exhibition most clearly was a sense of order and objectivity, constructed in the most part through the adoption by the women organisers of a system of classification. As Foucault has shown, classification and ordered display as concepts and practices have had their own authority as a form of knowledge in Western culture since the Enlightenment.101 As has been discussed in the previous chapter, much of the cultural authority of exhibitions sprang from the inter-related concepts of classification and pure display.

The EWI's classification was a modified version of a schema used in an international exhibition in the same year. There is a striking similarity between the prospectuses of the EWI and the Women's Art and Industry Section of the International Exhibition of Industry, Science and Art held at Glasgow in 1888.102 In design and lay-out the prospectuses appear closely related. The classifications are broadly similar, but also contain a number of interesting differences, discussed below. The Sydney women pushed the separation of exhibitions and formulation of a distinct classification for women's work one step further, to create a uniquely colonial exhibition of women's work. The general rules, however, are identical, the Sydney exhibition simply substituting different dates and places into the Glaswegian

100 EWI, [Prospectus], p. 3.
102 Women's Art and Industry Section of the International Exhibition of Industry, Science and Art Glasgow 1888, Prospectus, Maclure, Macdonald & Co., Glasgow, [1887?].
scheme. This cannot be explained as mere coincidence, or as standard exhibition practice. It suggests that the classification and organisation of the EWI was modelled on the proposed display of women's work to be held in Glasgow in 1888. This came about because Lady Carrington was in contact with the exhibition's organisers. The link was the Countess of Rosebery, the Convener for England and Wales of the Women's Art and Industry Section, who later forwarded a number of articles from the Glasgow display to Sydney to be shown at the EWI, most notably (and most controversially) a pair of Queen Victoria's corsets. It can be safely assumed that the Countess of Rosebery sent Lady Carrington the Glasgow prospectus, with a view to gathering an exhibit of colonial women's work, and that Carrington in turn put forward the prospectus of this exhibition as a blueprint for the NSW display.

This model underwent some modification when applied in a colonial context. While the general rules stayed the same, the classification was amended. While the first three classes of the Glasgow classification, I Needlework and Knitting, II Lace, and III Mechanical Work, roughly coincided with the departments I, II and IV of the EWI (differing mainly in Glasgow's special emphasis on lace, an effort to encourage a local industry in Scotland and Ireland), the final classes bore little comparison. Where the Scottish classification prioritised the industrial aspects of artistic work, excluding what might have been described as the 'leisure arts' and creating two classes to contain art in its practical application (one to encompass 'Decorative work and furnishings--Carving on Wood, &c.', and one devoted to 'Painting, Drawing and Engraving'), the

103 All packages, for example, were to be 'distinctively marked' with the letters of the exhibition enclosed within a diamond. All 'cases, counters, platforms, screens, partitions,' were not to 'exceed the following dimensions:-- Showcases and Partitions, 10 feet above the floor. Counters, 2 feet 6 inches above the floor. Platforms, 1 foot above the floor.' All 'sign boards must be black with gold letters.' While these are specific examples, wording of the two sets of rules was exactly the same throughout. The organisers of the EWI omitted one rule from the Scottish list: rule 3, which indicated that 'Indian, Colonial, and Foreign Exhibitors must communicate direct with ... the Hon. Secretary of the General Committee.' Women's Art and Industry Section of the International Exhibition of Industry, Science and Art Glasgow 1888, Prospectus, rule 9; EWI, [Prospectus], rules.

104 See Bulletin, 20 October 1888, p. 12; Daily Telegraph, 6 October 1888, p. 4; Evening News, 11 October 1888, p. 6.

105 Also, the Glasgow classification was intended to apply internally to national exhibits (for example the French or Russian displays) shown separate from one another. The NSW Exhibition used the classification in a more universal way. Foreign exhibits were subsumed into the general categories.
colonial exhibition asserted the importance of home work (Department III Domestic Industries), education (Department V Educational), outdoors work and gardening (Department VI Horticulture), and the pursuit of the high arts (Department VII Fine Arts). The Australian exhibition was evidently more concerned with establishing feminine involvement with the engines of progress and civilisation in a young colony: domesticity, education, taming the environment, and fine art.

It is important to note that the organisers of the EWI not only adopted but adapted the classification system of an international exhibition to shape their enterprise. But it is also important that they did not adapt a general exhibition classification but one devised to be applied specifically to the work of women. By so doing, they demonstrated their assumption that women's work differed substantially from the bulk of work shown in the general displays at international exhibitions. Rather than divide women's labour according to a classification system based on scientific universalism, beginning with raw materials and working up the evolutionary ladder to fine arts, the organisers of the EWI concurred with the Council of the Glasgow exhibition when it asserted the need to invent a completely different classification for women's work.

Nevertheless, the act of classification itself brought with it some of the status-enhancing aspects of organising objects on a scientific basis. Sorting women's exhibits into an exhibition classification legitimised women's work by linking it to scientific order and rationality. Using these divisions as a basis for classification set in place the structures and groupings through which work could obtain further status by being judged 'the best in its class'. The emphasis on competition, which flowed from classification, was premised on a belief that the value of women's work could be measured on objective grounds.

While competition set standards and encouraged women to meet them, 'improving' them through measurement and reward, another section of the Exhibition aimed to educate women by encouraging them to emulate work which had already attained high status. 'In each of the Departments, I to VII inclusive,' noted the Prospectus,
there will be a non-competitive section, contributed to by private collectors, the
museums, art galleries, &c., consisting of art treasures and article of various kinds
which will greatly add to the attractive and instructive object of the Exhibition.

The loan collection in these sections of the various departments' it continued, 'will not
be restricted to women's work.'\footnote{EWI, \textit{Prospectus}, p. 3.} The loan exhibits predominantly featured
watercolours and other examples of fine and decorative arts lent by ladies, but also
contained a collection of native work sent by the King of the Hawaiian Islands,
Japanese and Chinese objects, as well as Lord Carrington's collection of sporting
pictures. As these examples imply, the loan exhibits served a dual function. In the first
instance they were displayed to stimulate and inspire women workers to higher efforts.
But it was also intended to attract a type of visitor to the EWI who might not have been
expected to attend, but who, it was implied, had a lot to learn about women's work -
men.

The loan section, aligned with the educational work of the Exhibition, also had
traditional associations with charity fund-raising. The loan exhibition, where a small
number of objects were put on show and an entrance fee was charged for a specific
cause, was a display form that inhabited the boundary between exhibition and
bazaar.\footnote{EWI, \textit{Catalogue}, pp. 145-151.} Of higher status than a bazaar because of its separation of high art or
decorative art from direct sale, it was a form of fund-raising favoured by the higher
classes and educational institutions, and rose to great popularity in the last quarter of
the century.\footnote{In June 1895, for example, a Loan Exhibition was organised (by three women including Margaret
Windley) to liquidate a debt owing on the building of the Women's College at the University of
Sydney. See \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 3 June 1895, p. 3; 1 June 1895, p. 7, and Beaumont and Hole, \textit{Letters
From Louisa}, pp. 65-6, 80. For a contemporary overseas example see Providence Art Club,
\textit{Exhibition of Lace, Damasks, Miniatures, and Fans: Open Thursday, March 19 1885.} J. A. & R. A.
Reid, Providence R. 1., 1885.}

While the loan exhibits could be seen as a buffer zone between the Exhibition
and the Fair at the EWI, this division was never entirely clear cut. Excess exhibits
from the Exhibition were sold at adjacent stalls. The refreshment area was a section of
Department III Domestic Industries, which supplied the women cooks (many of whom
were engaged elsewhere in competition), as well as co-ordinating the volunteer
waitresses. Displays of cooking and table decoration, ambulance work, bootmaking and spinning, and lectures organised as part of the Education Department, all existed simultaneously as exhibits and as attractions. So while the separation of bazaar and exhibition allowed the organisers to draw on the best elements of both in the name of women's work, the combination of the two was intended to enhance their higher message.

Combining the exhibition and the bazaar

From the outset the organisers of the EWI also envisaged a unified display made up of two different but complementary parts: the Exhibition and the Fair. These two parts would work together to form the overall display. The internal division which the EWI contained, between exhibition and bazaar, functioned, in the eyes of the organisers, to obtain the maximum benefit for all kinds of women's work. The Exhibition performed an educational function, showing women and men the range and importance of women's work in the colony in an attempt to stimulate and enhance women's status in new fields of employment as well as in more traditional work. The Fair brought visitors to see the display, and raised funds which would be channelled through a women's council to destitute women in NSW. But the organisers were also willing to blur the boundaries between the two forms, or 'break' the ideological rules altogether, in order to maximise the positive effects of the EWI on women workers.

The EWI's layout both separated and merged the Exhibition and the Fair [Figure 2.10]. The Centenary Fair best represented traditional femininity and accepted notions of women's work in the public sphere. On the simplest level, the bazaar was attractive. It had enormous popular appeal, and its frills and embellishments made the Exhibition's claims for women's increased employment and role in the public world more palatable and less threatening to an audience that needed to be 'won over'. The Fair literally surrounded the Exhibition in the hall, softening the harsh clatter of the factory girls' machines. Luring visitors inside, past the buffer zone of familiarity, the Exhibition cleverly extended traditional femininity into new and unexpected areas.
But the organisers of the EWI also blurred the distinction between exhibition and bazaar in more obvious ways. They deliberately broke the rules of exhibition practice by allowing women exhibitors to price and sell their work. This was intended as an encouragement to paid workers, particularly in the needlework, knitting and lace sections. The exhibition gave these women not only a chance to advertise but to sell their work. This was necessary compensation for needlewomen and outworkers, who, the organisers knew, could hardly be expected to devote hours and materials purely for the sake of admiration.109

The women organisers of the EWI realised that the woman exhibitor differed markedly from the (usually male) exhibitor at international exhibitions. There, men of manufacturing, agriculture, and trade with large numbers of employees showed the products of their businesses. They could absorb the cost of time and labour that went into producing the objects for display, for the ultimate benefit outweighed the comparatively small expense. Most women’s industries were smaller and less lucrative. A needlewoman who spent a week on a beautifully embroidered tablecloth lost a week’s earnings, at a cost to herself for materials. These women were usually self-employed or dependent on outwork, isolated in the home and unable to show or advertise their skills by anything other than word of mouth. The Exhibition brought such workers (needlewomen, laundresses, ironers) together and gave them presence as a mass. The EWI took place in a period that witnessed increasing labour organisation, and industrial action by tailoresses.110 It did not, however, encourage it

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110 In 1888-9 women made up nearly two thirds of the colony’s registered clothing trades workforce. However Bradon Ellem notes: ‘Early unionism in the Sydney clothing trades was confined to males who had served an apprenticeship... In New South Wales women remained as isolated as in Britain. Even in relatively prosperous times they had not been unionised.’ See Bradon Ellem, In Women’s Hands? A History of Clothing Trades Unionism in Australia, University of NSW Press, Kensington,
exhibitors to band together. In true capitalist style, it brought them into competition with one another for prizes and sales. But nevertheless, the Exhibition presented an unparalleled, and otherwise unavailable, opportunity for sale and advertising to marginalised women workers.

The success of this strategy can be measured by referring to the EWI catalogue. The organisers allowed exhibitors to state whether they were amateurs, whether they wanted to sell their work for the Fund or for themselves, or whether they wanted to exhibit only. Of the 841 competitive exhibitors in the Needlework and Knitting Departments, around half were women who described themselves as 'in the habit of sewing for some payment'.\(^{111}\) In this, the Exhibition was doing more than simply reflecting and representing the unrecognised labour of women in the clothing trade. The figures imply that quite significant numbers of women who earned their living considered it worthwhile to enter the Exhibition. They signify a perceived benefit for needlewomen in exhibiting, one boosted by the possibility of sales from the floor of the exhibition hall.

The organisers of the EWI sought to encourage both the poor needlewoman and the lady embroiderer to contribute their work, apparently with equal success. As Rozsika Parker has suggested, needlework was both an art that united women across class, and an expression of social distinction.\(^{112}\) As a public display of such work the EWI inevitably raised this fundamental contradiction. Combining and separating the Exhibition and Fair gave the organisers a framework to represent both the universality and the variety of women's work. But the inherent contradiction this construction both recognised and sought to nullify would re-emerge continually throughout the

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111 EWI, *Catalogue*, Departments I and III.
112 Parker, The Subversive Stitch, introduction.
exhibition's short life. The facade of the women's palace was fragile, tenuously adhered to the exhibition superstructure, and worryingly liable to fall apart.

Conclusion
A visitor to the Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair looking down into the body of the hall from the galleries would first have been dazzled by the kaleidoscopic bustle below. After a moment, her eyes slowly adjusting could begin to distinguish elements from the mass of colour: the blurred arc of the lone spinning wheel, a waving palm, the bobbing top of a ladies' hat. Then, shifting her focus, she could begin to see the show as a whole.

From above, it would be easy to separate the Exhibition from the Centenary Fair that surrounded it. In the exhibition, shawls, caps, slippers and jams were carefully arranged in glass-topped showcases. Inquisitive schoolgirls peered at them. In the fair, the same stuff piled up high on overflowing tables. Acquisitive gentlemen could be spotted bidding for it.

From below, the distinction would not be so easy to make. Examining the collection of dried grasses in the Education Department it would have been hard not to be distracted by the delighted cries of anglers at the prize fish pond. Looking up from the dressed doll display to the toy stall nearby would have made a purchase seem almost irresistible. Squinting through the warping showcase glass to read the price tag on an award-winning lace collar might set gloved fingers counting the coins in a purse.

The EWI's organisers brought together the exhibition and the bazaar in this way to maximise benefits to all women workers, paid or unpaid, in the private or the public spheres. By doing so they reconceptualised the marketplace not only to include women's work, but to be changed by it. The EWI created, momentarily, a marketplace defined by women where women, their occupations and preoccupations took centre stage. The exhibition was chosen as the space to reveal and legitimise women's work and achievements through ordered display. The exhibition form also implicitly
constructed a marketplace freed from baseness, one in which women might expand and increase their 'employment and their usefulness'.

Spatially the Exhibition formed the ideological core of the display. The centre of the Exhibition Building was filled with examples of every kind of women's work from bootmaking to pie making - it presented women's work in all its variety, classified and judged according to established criteria. Where the Fair invoked women's moral responsibility and collective social authority because of its connection to charity, the Exhibition gave women's work nobility and substance. Where the Fair suggested women's selflessness, the Exhibition revealed their real economic and social worth and potential for self-sufficiency. Where the Fair turned women's leisure time into funds to aid poorer women workers, the Exhibition suggested new paid employments to women of all classes. Together, the organisers hoped, they displayed women's work in all its universalism and all its diversity. Their pragmatic goals were realised in material form: a woman might sew for charity or for a living, but she was equally a woman worker, noble and feminine, a real contributor to colonial society.
The Old Exhibition Building, Prince Alfred Park, [1870s].
From Views in Sydney, Queensland and South Australia, [n.p.d.], no. 20.
Petticoat Protection—Or, A Harbour of Refuge.

Lady Carrington offers Sydney's ruling men refuge from the approaching storm of republicanism and free speech, June 1887.

Phil May, 'Petticoat protection — or, A harbour of refuge', from the Bulletin, 25 June 1887, supplementary pages.
Figure 2.3

*Members of the Queen's Jubilee Fund for Distressed Women, 1889.*
From Mitchell Library Small Picture File - Portraits - Groups.
Bishop Barry performs the 'Queen's Fund trick', 1887.
SECOND EDITION.

Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries.

Get leave to work in this world — it is the best you get at all;

The Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries, Bristol 1885.
Cover of the Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries in Queen's Villa, Queens Road, Bristol, 1885,
Lord Carrington: 'The idol of the hour', 1886.
Hop, 'Caringtoniana', from the Bulletin, 14 August 1886, p. 15.
As an expression of gratitude to Parkes for his assistance, the organisers of the Exhibition of Women’s Industries placed his portrait on this milk-glass souvenir of the display.

Souvenir of the EWI, from the Dixon Collection, State Library of NSW, Pa 43.
The Centennial State Banquet held at the Old Exhibition Building in January 1888 drew together one thousand leading men from throughout Australasia. Not a single woman received one of these invitations.

Invitation to the State Banquet, issued to H. H. C. Le Souef (of the Melbourne Zoological Gardens). Collection of Martha Sear.
While women received no 'distinct recognition' in the centennial celebrations, NSW was often represented as a woman. This depiction of the young colony as an artist pondering future greatness is an especially interesting one in the light of women's own projections for the coming century in evidence elsewhere in the colonial press. 'Her hundredth', from the Tribune, 20 January 1888, p. 17.
Plans of the Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair, Sydney 1888.
Chapter 3
Industrious and industrial: Exhibiting women and work

From a merely spectacular point of view the [mechanical work] department is the most gratifying in the exhibition; and from a utilitarian point of view, too, it is of sterling work. The visitor wanders unhindered from the previous department devoted to domestic industries to that given up to mechanical work, but he is instantly conscious of a great change. The charming picture of domestic pleasures raised by a close observation of dainties presided over by Mrs. Fischer in a twinkling succumbs to another of harsher tones. Instead of seeing woman as the presiding genius of the home, she now appears as one of the many myriad of human atoms fighting and struggling for life in the eddies of the great vortex of trade. To the idealist the change is not a pleasant one; but to the philanthropist concerned in the settlement of the problem of discovering suitable employment for women Department IV. is an instructive study. With little inconvenience other than that caused by want of proper arrangement, he can contrast the various channels in which surplus female labor is absorbed. He can calculate the comparative values of each section and determine their hygienic qualities. In fact he has opened out to him a mine of information which could be gathered from no other sources than those afforded by the formation of an exhibition devoted to women's industries.¹

Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1888.

The boldest ideological claim of the Exhibition of Women's Industries was for an enlarged and ennobled vision of 'women's work'. Genteel femininity was contested from outside and from within, and middle-class women struggled to redefine their labour in order to maintain and extend their power and status. The EWI gave material expression to genteel women's reconceptualisation of women's work in response to industrial, technological and social change. Its materiality both contributed to and shaped its messages. The organisers of the Exhibition planned the display to reveal the diversity of women's work. Their harnessing of exhibition ideology and appropriation of the exhibition form was intended to universalise and ennoble women's labours. But the practical and physical aspects of exhibiting presented them with new challenges when applied to women's work. The paradox of 'displaying' gentility, the invisible

¹ Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1888, p. 5.
distinction between 'public' and 'private' spheres, and the contradiction of exposing femininity to an inquisitive and critical gaze, combined with wider concerns about factory work, domestic service, labour struggle and colonial progress, powerfully shaped the way women's work could be put 'on show' [Figure 3.1].

To middle-class male commentators the differences between the Mechanical Work and the Domestic Industries departments were stark. In contrast to the private sphere sanctuary of the home, Mechanical Work showed women's work for pay in the public sphere, 'industrial' women's work, in factories and workshops. The organisers, on the other hand, saw continuity rather than contrast between the Mechanical and Domestic Work departments. They drew no such distinction between paid and unpaid labour. They hoped the display would expose the hidden female contribution to the colonial economy through its literal exposure of women workers to the gazes of visitors. Above all, they sought to impress upon visitors the nobility and dignity of women's work.

Many nineteenth-century genteel women viewed work as the path to freedom, independence and self-respect, as a solution to their growing sense of uselessness and weightlessness under the joint effects of industrialisation, modernity and consumerism. As Sally Alexander notes in her study of the ladies of Langham Place, work was constructed by feminists as a path to self-fulfilment, a means of transcending sex, of claiming equality, and demanding a 'release from the subjection to and tyranny of men, [and] from the drudgery of domesticity'. Work was a powerful and ultimately masculine concept, vigorous, physical, aspirational. It was a term central to the entire culture, one both shared and contested by middle-class men and women striving to make their lives meaningful, and working-class men and women struggling to make their lives sustainable. The development of women's

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2 Sally Alexander, 'Why feminism? The women of Langham Place', in her Becoming a Woman, pp. 135-48.
exhibitions represented the efforts of genteel colonial women to use and redefine 'work' to benefit women as a sex.

The feminism of the EWI was based on a reinvention of 'women's work' to embrace positive qualities of transcendence, meaning and productivity. The organisers of the Exhibition claimed work for women, simultaneously universalising and feminising it. They sought to elevate women's activities by calling them 'work', invoking all the ideological energy of the term, yet they did not advocate work as a release from domesticity or an escape from femininity. Rather they hoped that a dynamic relationship might exist between 'women' and 'work', each enhancing and dignifying the other.

They also suggested that women's common involvement in work was a basis for united womanhood. Through its construction of women's work as a universal term, the EWI smudged the distinction between the 'public' and the 'private' spheres, between paid and unpaid labour, home work and factory work. By doing so it sought to equalise and legitimise a wide range of women's activities that conventional capitalism kept separated by hierarchies of value and status. This construction rested, however, on the transformative powers of a 'universal' femininity firmly fixed in universalised middle-class values. Women, it was implied, spiritualised and ennobled everything they did. 'Labour' and 'industry' spiritualised and ennobled hard work. For the ladies of Sydney, bringing these two ideas together offered the possibility of personal reward and the illusion of sisterhood. Within the EWI's feminine space, the benefits appeared to flow in every direction, to all women and all forms of employment. But beyond the brightly-lit interior of the Old Exhibition Building the construction of unity on the basis of work was fraught and ultimately unsustainable.

The EWI was organised to raise funds for a new charity, the Queen's Jubilee Fund for Distressed Women, which aimed to furnish the suddenly poverty-stricken with the equipment and resources to earn their own keep. But the Exhibition as a whole was intended as a lesson to all women that developing work skills was insurance against
hard times or sudden demotion. While the Exhibition reflected the cultural dominance of the ideals of gentility, it also revealed the depth of middle-class anxiety and uncertainty in the 1880s. Boom implied bust, and class fluidity could lead one down as well as up. Genteel women in particular, conscious of their precarious dependence on male providers, feared the potential for financial ruin. Seeking strategies to resolve these concerns, they turned to middle-class culture. The EWI represented an elaborate exposure and material expression of genteel women's invisible 'work', as well as an extended reworking of the very ideology that had shaped and created it.

Work was a point of particular tension and possibility in the lives of genteel women. Middle-class ideology propagated the ideal of the leisureed lady, and the separation of work and home, 'economic man' and 'domestic woman'. Feminist historians, including Patricia Branca, Anne McClintock, and Amanda Vickery have pointed out the contradictions and realities that lay behind the image of the leisureed Victorian middle-class housewife. Branca's study of servant numbers in middle-class homes suggested that the family income necessary to maintain enough servants to completely liberate the Victorian housewife was beyond the vast majority of households. McClintock built on Branca's findings to expose the 'labour of leisure' undertaken by middle-class women:

apart from a tiny, truly leisureed elite ... idleness was less a regime of inertia imposed on middle-class wives and daughters than a laborious and time-consuming character role performed by women who wanted membership of the "respectable" classes.

For most of these women, domestic work was accompanied by the 'historically unprecedented labor of rendering invisible every sign of that work.' The effort required to maintain large homes was enormous, yet 'a housewife's vocation was precisely the concealment of this work.' As McClintock puts it, housewifery became

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'a career in vanishing acts'; prestige was gained not through idleness itself but through 'a laborious mimicry of idleness'. The penultimate achievement of such a system was not the spectacle of leisure, but the undervaluing of women's work it represented.

In the light of McClintock's work, the EWI starts to look like a very radical claim. It explicitly and materially revealed the labour, energy and skill that went into housework. Indeed it went further, conflating both the factory and the home as workplaces, valuing the domestic equally with the public, exposing connections between the public and the private spheres, and creating the ideal of a universal sisterhood established on the basis of work. Genteel women took up a new act; they played at being workers, becoming Exhibition cooks, shop girls, ushers and tablemaids. Through all of these means they expressed their utter dissatisfaction with playing the part of idleness.

Genteel colonial women shared many of the ideals and experiences of women back 'home', but there were also some differences in their circumstances that made it possible for colonial women to publicly seek solutions to their private dilemmas. On the broadest level, work was an ideal that was visible and valued in colonial culture. Work appeared, in the 1880s, to be a bridging term upon which masculine egalitarianism might be based, although increasing conflicts between capital and labour were beginning to cast doubt on work as a singular, shared ideal. Promoting the idea of 'women's work' further exposed the instability of the term.

Work was a point of particular tension in colonial constructions of gentility because it was an intrinsic part of most women's lives. The effort middle-class women had to make to 'appear' leisured must have been especially great in the colonies, where marriage rates were high, families were large, and settler society placed numerous practical demands on women. The invisibility of the servant, outlined by McClintock

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8 McClintock, Imperial Leather, pp. 161-2.
as the inevitable corollary of the housewife's labour of leisure, was both intrinsic to and thwarted by the anxious debate over the servant question in the colonies. Continual public lamentation over the scarcity of good servants was a very public expression of the fact that most genteel women in the colony were far from idle, that they undertook domestic duties to a larger degree than might have been expected at 'home'. At the same time, class fluidity and the need to articulate the progress of the colony created an even more pressing need to assert the presence of the leisureed lady in colonial society.¹⁰

By the 1880s, Australian genteel women were growing impatient with this charade. Exhibitions of women's work gave public expression to that impatience, to the 'reality' of women's working lives, to a narrative that 'explained' how such unsatisfactory circumstances had arisen, and a new conceptualisation of women's work that connected women with the spiritualisation of labour enshrined in middle-class identity. This meant the bringing together of aspects of women's lives, and groups of colonial women, otherwise kept apart. In England, exhibitions of women's work deliberately excluded the leisure arts or domestic work that had little commercial application.¹¹ In New South Wales domestic industries and factory work, unpaid and paid labour, recreational and professional work, were displayed side by side, with the intention of valuing each equally as 'women's work'.

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¹¹ The Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries held in Bristol in 1885 was focused on professional work by women, no work shown was done for 'recreation or amusement only'. Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries in Queen's Villa, Queens Road, Bristol, 1885, Catalogue, Second Edition, J. W. Arrowsmith, Bristol, [1885], p. 7.
The realities of genteel women's daily lives in the colonies were translated into a noble new ideal of women's work that combined old-world values of industry and respectability, with new-world revisions of gender roles. Promoted in concert with the centennial this new work-based ideal could also form the basis of a feminine version of national identity. Author Ada Cambridge gave written expression to corresponding thoughts in her autobiography *Thirty Years in Australia*, although with a retrospective jaundice brought on by her experience of the end of a boom which had reached its peak in the centenary year. In her tirade against the 'State-made drones' and 'spurious workers' who caused the great strike of 1890, she championed the Australian woman 'above all' as the embodiment of a new Australian type.\(^\text{12}\) In the early years of settlement bush wives, 'from the highest to the lowest', made their homes 'with their own hands', while the squatter's wife, 'who later came to her town house and her carriage, did "all her own work" cheerfully "when she had to do it," and is rarely ashamed to acknowledge the fact.' Cambridge observed fervently that following the bursting of the boom, it was the women of the gentry who showed the spirit of the pioneers, not the men of the working classes.\(^\text{13}\) It was a similar juxtaposition of working ladies and working men on the grounds of social responsibility, dignity, and self respect, that underpinned much of the debate about work that surrounding the EWI.

The 1880s and 1890s saw enormous contestation over work as an idea and as an activity. The period witnessed the emergence of a powerful labour movement and was marked by claims and counterclaims about the colonies' right to be called a 'workingman's paradise', struggles over pay and conditions, and strikes in all areas of


\(^\text{13}\) The girls who had never had to work, who had seemed to live entirely for pleasure, who appeared to us eaten up with the frivolity of their luxurious lives, as soon as their great houses fell, instead of sitting down to mourn and weep, over-whelmed with the shame of such a tremendous social "come-down," turned to, like Britons indeed, to help their ruined fathers and to support themselves [sic]. In no faddy, fine-lady fashion either. They took the work that they could do, with no false pride about its being trade or otherwise, and at this day you may see them still at it, calm and business-like, never wanting favour on the score of having "seen better days," never so much reminding one that they have seen them. They run many tea rooms, or wait in them, or make cakes for them; they keep various little shops, are milliners and dress-makers, typewriters, dentists, all sorts of things.' Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia*, pp. 183-4.
industry and primary production.\textsuperscript{14} Into this climate, the elite ladies of Sydney pitched their arguments for the expansion, importance and worth of women's work. The organisers of the EWI were eager to reassure working men that women had no intention of taking their jobs. Their claims were largely based on the growth of markets for tasks women already performed. But the ideological battle over the moral and meaning of the term 'work' did pitch ladies and labourers into competition with each other. As the labour movement connected 'work' to physical labour and masculinity, the organisers of women's exhibitions sought to spiritualise and feminise it.

Positioned in between these two groups battling for ideological and material power was the working woman.\textsuperscript{15} The EWI represented an effort to encourage working women into an alliance with genteel women rather than working men. Its organisers sought to establish a feminised version of work as a common ground between industrial and industrious women. This involved making visible a wide variety of women's work, and justifying this diversity by placing primary importance on the way in which it was carried out.

While the EWI's organisers constructed 'work' as the answer to women's growing feelings of unease and disconnectedness, the Exhibition also contained a critique of technological and industrial factors identified as their cause. The choice of exhibits and their manner of presentation suggested that the progressive alienation of genteel women from production lay at the root of their frustration and powerlessness. The EWI presented visitors with a vision of women as producers not consumers, workers of the world, not idlers in the home. To do this, the organisers placed a special emphasis on showing the processes that lay behind the products on display. A


\textsuperscript{15} See Grimshaw, 'Was biology destiny?', pp. 83-4.
working kitchen became central to the display of domestic work. Mechanical workers, including factory girls, appeared as living exhibits in the exhibition hall itself. The spinning wheel and the stocking machine ran continuously side by side, symbolising both the old world and the new, women’s lost power and the possibility of power regained.

In so doing the Exhibition’s organisers were running counter to the spirit of the age, a spirit embodied in the exhibition as a form. Marx argued that under industrial capitalism, objects were imbued with the human attributes which had previously belonged to their makers.  

16 This ‘fetishism of commodities’, as Davison notes, reached its climax in the nineteenth century exhibition.  

17 Thomas Richards has identified the way in which the Great Exhibition of 1851 materially represented the new commodity culture. Objects appeared separate not only from the ‘mundane act’ of exchange, as was seen in chapter 1, but also from their methods of production.  

18 The way these articles had been produced differed drastically from the way the Exhibition re-produced them. Aside from a few moving mechanical parts, the commodities in the Crystal Palace were at a standstill; no one could possibly mistake the Crystal Palace for a factory.

Exhibitions were transcendent marketplaces precisely because they severed the direct connections between objects, their makers and their consumers. Individually the items on display functioned as symbols, collectively as abstracted ideals. But while for potential buyers consumerist desire was the source of imaginative reconnection with the commodities on display, workers found it more difficult to reestablish their role in the creation of goods.

This meant that while the exhibition was a powerful means for making tangible and reconcilable the invisible webs of ideology, it was not at all suited to displaying production. Instead it was ideologically constructed to strip away the importance of process and production from objects. This would prove to be a major problem for the organisers of the EWJ, who wished to trace the significance of exhibits of women’s work to the nature and spiritual quality of the labour that had produced them. The

16 Marx, Capital, vol. 1, ch. 1, sec. 4.  
17 See Davison, Festivals of nationhood, p. 160.  
meaning of the work shown lay in who had made it and how. Its primary significance, the very grounds for its inclusion, was that it was made by a woman. Its materiality was supposed to reveal women's hidden contribution to colonial society. Women's work was invisible because it was ceaseless, repetitive, and hidden in the private sphere; because it was connected to the creation of intangible things like character, society, and status; or because it or its value was denied by capitalism and patriarchy. The EWI was supposed to prove that women's tasks had value because it physically showed how they were skilled, based on ancient arts, or adapted to new technology. Its organisers' argument was that women's work should be valued more highly and expanded to embrace new occupations because it was how the work was done - with dignity, selflessness and nobility - that made it socially acceptable.

With its emphasis on modes of production, championing of skilled handiwork, and ambivalence about machinery, the exhibition revealed genteel women contesting similar ground to working people, who struggled throughout the century to find and assert the value of their labour in the face of technological and economic change. Put bluntly, increasingly it didn't matter who made a thing and how any more, and both working men and genteel women had something significant to lose in that equation. Broadly speaking, trade unionism and working men's claims to regular employment and fair wages were fundamentally focused on the control of production, and based on an assertion of the centrality of process to the meaning and value of work.

Through the discoveries of labour history we have a good understanding of how working people experienced and contested 'work' in late nineteenth-century Australia. By looking at women's exhibitions we can add a new set of players to that debate, genteel women who were involved in a similar, interconnected struggle over the ideology of work. But labour history also signals that the issues of importance to working women were not being addressed at women's exhibitions. Working women had a different definition of respectability and dignity to that of the Exhibition's organisers: good wages. To genteel women the EWI represented an intricate, ornate, and flexible ideological entity, but for working women this rhetoric of liberation
through work was little more than hyperbole, not a practical solution to their problems. Its organisers offered working women symbolic unity, not unionism, as a means to improve their position. While unity and support was not something working women were getting from male unions, they still did not take up the offer made by their genteel 'sisters' here. Close scrutiny of the display shows their scepticism was well grounded, but it is only fleetingly expressed in existing sources. Only professional women had the power to negotiate and challenge the organisers' strategies.

Fundamental to the gap between working and genteel women, unwittingly exposed by the organisers of the EWI, was the sexual division of labour. The Exhibition's emphasis on production was intended to define women's work as women's domestic labour as well as their paid employment. In this its organisers challenged one of the fundamental bases of patriarchy and capitalism, and had something in common with late-twentieth century feminists. Since the 1970s, feminists have asserted the importance of both production and reproduction to the creation of the labour process. As Ann Curthoys argues:

the sexual division of the labour market ... is neither a simple reflection of earlier pre-industrial, household divisions, nor something independently generated within the workplace or the labour market. Rather, it arises from the interaction between bio-cultural tradition and practices, on the one hand, and the specific institutions of individual capitalist production on the other. [It] is the product of a fundamental contradiction between the continuation of a family household structure and capitalist relations of production.

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19 Note, for example, Louisa Lawson's battle with male unionists in the printing trade over her employment of female compositors, see Allen, Rose Scott, p. 87. On radical labour approaches to the woman question see Patricia Grimshaw, 'The "equals and comrades of men"? To csin and "the woman question"', in Magarey et al., Debutante Nation, pp. 100-13.


21 Frances cites Ann Curthoys, 'The sexual division of labour: theoretical questions', in Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (eds), Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986, pp. 264-81, but the quote is not to be found in that article. Nor is it in Ann Curthoys, 'The sexual division of labour under capitalism', in Norma Grieve and Patricia Grimshaw
Numerous feminist historians have explored the 'symbiotic relationship between patriarchy and production'. However, while the EWI's organisers might, through the exhibition, have reached a level of awareness of the profound connection between production and reproduction in capitalist society, they did not have the theoretical sophistication to do much more than recognise and expose it. Nevertheless, their reconceptualisation of women's work would be one that both challenged and reinforced existing economic and social structures.

'Women's work' already had a meaning when the EWI organisers set about redefining it in 1888. It meant casual, 'unskilled', 'inferior', poorly paid, low-status work or even 'non'-work. The term already bound together paid and unpaid work, the home and the 'workplace'. But to genteel women it also had another meaning. 'Women's work' described the idealised activities of femininity. The EWI sought to alleviate the negative associations of the first meaning by connecting it to the positive transformations of the second.

What studying the EWI exposes is the effect of industrial change and the sexual division of labour on 'industrious', not industrial, women. Industrialisation was changing all women's relationship to production, their work, and the products of their


22 Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans, 'Gender and productive relations: Introduction', in Saunders and Evans, Gender Relations in Australia, p. 221.

labour. But these changes were manifested in different ways among different groups of women. Working-class women undertook a variety of paid employments in combination with their domestic duties. Genteel women's work lay not in the production of goods but in the production of meaning and identity. Gentility depended on the incompatibility between femininity and productive labour: genteel women's labour was by definition unproductive. It was constructed outside the marketplace, revolving instead around the maintenance of family and the home. Its value was defined by its intangibility rather than its materialism; it was performed by women as an expression of personal devotion as well as class identity and feminine ideals. In its genteel aspect, the value of women's work lay in the manner in which it was performed. Representing this would provide the EWT's organisers with their greatest challenge.

The organisers of the EWI sought to represent women's work, and their hidden contribution to colonial society. But the very means by which women's work was valued and validated, its connection with transcendent femininity, was invisible and impossible to show. At international exhibitions the material was spiritualised as the products of labour became commodities, taking on a new life of their own. The meaning of exhibits of women's traditional crafts - sewing, knitting, spinning, cooking - lay somewhere else, in their origins and the motivations behind their creation and execution. Brought together at a women's exhibition the objects collectively expressed the gender of their makers, at the same time as they symbolised 'women',

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'femininity', 'woman's work'. The viewer was constantly reminded that *a woman had made this*, and the Exhibition's many layers of significance flowed from that.

The EWI took up the potentially radical position of reconnecting workers with the processes of production. It placed profound meaning in labour in and of itself. It connected genteel women with meaningful labour and offered work as the path to self-fulfilment. It asserted plainly that women worked and exposed hidden women workers. But it was also inexorably caught up in middle-class values which in turn reinforced middle-class interests. By showing paid work like sewing and factory work as feminine and respectable it bolstered the continued employment and exploitation of women as women rather than as workers. By blurring the distinction between 'home' and 'work' it both revealed and reinforced the sexual division of labour. Furthermore, in exposing women's work and women as exhibits they opened them up to criticism, lifting the veil of mystery in which some of the ideological power and authority of femininity and the domestic sphere rested. They revealed the vulnerability of the domestic sphere, and the genteel woman, to the harsh realities of the 'outside world'.

The law of the universe: redefining 'Women's Work'

[A] Together the Exhibition represents more strongly than anything else possibly could the dignity of labour, all the more dignified because it is performed by the hands of the sex that has been esteemed in the world, and at not so far a date that memory is misty, dependent, and given over to domesticity or fashion exclusively.25

*Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1888.

[A] very large portion of our women seem to have roused themselves, and are willing to apply themselves heart and soul to all occupations, intellectual and industrial, that may come within their scope and are open to them. A great amelioration of the condition of the sex will be the result. It is to be hoped that the desire to work and to help will continue in ever-widening circles until all women are brought under its ennobling influence.26

*Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 November 1888.

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26 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 November 1888, p. 7.
The organisers of the EWI defined women's work as 'what women are capable of in every rank of life and in all departments of industry'. They sought to show that all forms of women's work were of equal worth, because they were all 'work'. The exhibition's motto was "Labour, all labour is noble and holy". Work was a concept already imbued with spiritual qualities: here it served simultaneously to elevate tasks which were invisible or unacknowledged, such as domestic work, and to justify women's increased employment in the public sphere. 'Work' as an ideal was applied to women's activities, at the same time as it was implied that femininity would sanctify any work that women took up. The Exhibition was intended to promote the idea that it was the way the work was done, with devotion and committed effort, that was central to the legitimacy of a range of women's activities, and the grounds upon which women's sphere could be expanded as well as elevated. Feminising and universalising work was also intimately connected to the EWI's projection of a universal womanhood across the chasm of class. But while the message was powerful because it seemed universal, it had a very specific origin in middle-class ideology. Through the EWI, genteel women thought they could turn middle-class rhetoric to all women's advantage. But for those without the material background or resources necessary to sustain or control such an ideology, its implications could be damaging.

The dignity and spiritual reward of 'well done duty' was already a significant element of Protestant, particularly evangelical, middle-class ideology. For abstract and practical reasons, genteel women had much to gain by feminising and universalising the term 'work'. In his discussion of the therapeutic roots of consumer culture, T. J. Jackson Lears has described a feeling of 'unreality' which surrounded the late Victorian bourgeoisie. Separated from productive labour, argues Lears, educated urban bourgeois men and women became engaged in what he calls a 'quest for "real

27 Sydney Morning Herald, 7 March 1888, p. 9.
28 EWI, Catalogue, p. 9.
life".  But when Lears identifies a 'loosening of the work ethic' associated with this quest, he perhaps speaks more about the men than about the women. Amongst the bourgeois women of Sydney in 1888 there was a positive grasping after the 'reality' of 'work', which turned conspicuous leisure into meaningful labour. In the Exhibition prize essay, Frances Gillam Holden cried out that 'far from hating work ... women ... take just the same honest pride and pleasure in downright work that many men do':

The human frame is made for work; and without work it can neither thrive nor prosper. Work is the very law of the universe; and women should have no exemption. Why should they? Why should they be denied the glow and thrill over accomplished difficulties; and the rest which is only sweet after toil?  

Self-conscious about their own 'parasitism', and sensitive to criticism that 'ladies' were in the main frivolous, scatter-brained and superficial, genteel women involved in the exhibition appropriated the association of 'work' with 'meaning' usually applied to men's occupations, and universalised it to include the full range of women's activities. The display was women's material claim to the moral and ideological power of work as an idea, a strategy intended largely to smooth the entry of genteel

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31 Frances Gillam Holden, 'Woman's work', Dawn, August 1888, pp. 9-11; September 1888, p. 7; October 1888, pp. 9-11. 'Undoubtedly, many women are now overworked; and this is a great evil. But it is because others are not taught the lessons here indicated, and live in wretched, frivolous idleness.' Holden, 'Woman's Work', p. 10. See also her Trained Nursing, F. Cunningham & Co., Sydney, 1882. Following her dismissal under a cloud from the position of 'lady superintendent' at the Children's Hospital in Glebe in 1887 after a confrontation with its male doctors described as a 'sex war', Holden was an extremely controversial figure. Her choice as winner of the essay competition was a politically loaded one. See Alison Bashford, 'Frances Gillam Holden and the Children's Hospital dispute, 1887: Woman's sphere, feminism and nursing', Women's History Review, vol. 2, no. 3, 1993, pp. 319-30; and Sue Forsyth, 'Victim or villain? A re-examination of the career of Frances Gillam Holden', in Individuals and Institutions in the History of Medicine: The 6th Biennial Conference of the Australian Society for the History of Medicine Conference Proceedings, Australian Society for the History of Medicine, Sydney, 1999, [n.p.n.].

32 See Miss Ellis's argument in her Exhibition lecture on the education of women, that women should be educated so that we should have ... less of the simpering, afternoon-tea-drinking, gossiping, lawn tennis loving and wayward mortal of today', reported in the Daily Telegraph, 4 October 1888, p. 6. See also Frances Gillam Holden's comment on 'the tremendous frivolity, whose fatal incubus is smothering and choking the womanhood of our days', in her Women's Ignorance and the World's Need: A Plea for Physiology, George Robertson, Melbourne, 1883, p. 210, quoted in Miriam Dixon, The Real Mattilda: Woman and Identity in Australia 1788 to the Present, (first published 1976), third edition published by Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1994, p. 210; For a contemporary feminist critique of 'parasitism' see Olive Schreiner, Woman and Labour, (first published 1911), republished by Virago, London, 1983.
women into paid employment, but one cast as of universal benefit to all women from
gentrified Potts Point to working-class Balmain.

The EWI prize certificate best illustrated the organisers' universalising aims
[Figure 3.2]. It featured vignettes representing each of the Exhibition's seven
competitive departments, wreathed by fern fronds, flannel flowers, and lilies in
honour of the President, Lily Carrington. There was a woman painting, a well-dressed
lady with a watering can, an old woman knitting, a young one weaving a basket, a
woman in an apron peering into a steaming pot, another sitting at a sewing machine.
The last, Florence Nightingale-like with a lamp, looked in on a sleeping patient. In the
centre an angel with a laurel crown descends amid heavenly rays. A spider and a bee
help her hold up a flying banner, emblazoned PATIENCE INDUSTRY AND GOD'S
GRACE.

The Exhibition expressed the dignity of all labour by displaying a diverse range
of occupations. Mary Cordato in her study of the Woman's Pavilion at the
Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition noted that 'women's work was understood by the
organisers to be a multi-faceted phenomenon that encompassed domestic, skilled or
professional, and community-related, voluntary achievements.' The same was true in
Sydney. As the Sydney Morning Herald stated in a leader on the exhibition, 'to give
dignity purpose and consequence to the life of any one man or woman, labour either
mental or physical must enter into it, whether it takes the form of the domestic arts, the
care of the sick, or technical, mechanical, artistic or literary effort. Each of these
types of work were represented in the exhibits and competitions. Domesticity was both
the foundation of claims to the dignity of labour, and an occupation set to gain from
the universalisation of women's work, as is discussed below. But the positive effects
of universalising 'work', it was hoped, would also hold true in the public sphere,
dignifying and ennobling women's paid employment. The Exhibition overall
suggested myriad ways in which women might earn an independent living. Writing,
nursing, teaching, typewriting, all forms of needlework, gardening, and photography,

33 Sydney Morning Herald, 3 October 1888, p. 9.
amongst other things, were promoted not just as leisureed or amateur pursuits, but as potential avenues of paid employment. There was also a great deal of attention paid to making visible the types of paid work women already carried out, particularly women's needlework and factory work.

The Exhibition displayed the diversity of women's work to the extent that it was physically possible and ideologically acceptable. Even an enlarged definition of women's work had its limits. The universal dignity of women's work did not extend to prostitution or other morally dubious occupations like bar work. The organisers were selective about what was shown, and circumscribed by practical difficulties, such as separating men's and women's work in some occupations. The Exhibition did not fully reflect women's activities in the colony, which were at that time being newly gauged and represented statistically by the Government Statistician Timothy Coghlan.55

In 1888 the number of females above the age of 16 in NSW was measured by Coghlan to be approximately 267,000. Of these, 194,850 'were engaged in various household duties, without wages', and 2,650 were dependant on the state. The remaining 69,500, or about 26 per cent, were wage earners. Their occupations as defined by Coghlan are broken down in the following table.

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55 On Coghlan and other aspects of women and the census see Katrina Alford, 'Colonial women's employment as seen by nineteenth-century statisticians and twentieth-century economic historians', Labour History, no. 51, 1986, pp. 1-10; Australians 1888, pp. 34-5, 37-8, 43; Desley Deacon, 'Political arithmetic: The nineteenth-century Australian census and the construction of the dependent woman', Signs, vol. 11, no. 2, 1985, pp. 27-47; Desley Deacon, Managing Gender: The State, the New Middle Class and Women Workers 1830-1930, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989; Desley Deacon, Reorganising the masculinist context: Conflicting masculinisms in the NSW Public Service Bill debates of 1895, in Susan Maguire, Sue Rowley and Susan Sheridan (eds), Debutante Nation, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1993, pp. 50-8.


37 The comparable figures for men are: number above 16, 381,000; number of wage earners 352,000. Coghlan, Wealth and Progress of New South Wales 1888-9, pp. 428-9.
Table 1: Occupations of female wage earners in NSW 188838

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number of women employed</th>
<th>Number of women employed as an approximate % of total women employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed in manufactories, needlewomen</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional work</td>
<td>5,400</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic work and attendance</td>
<td>36,000</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otherwise engaged</td>
<td>9,500</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To what extent did the EWI reflect these figures? Certainly the range and basic essence of the occupations listed by Coghlan were represented in some part of the Exhibition. The organisers intended this diversity to enhance the status of all women regardless of their situation, benefiting both the seamstress and the fancyworker by elevating the ideological value of their labour. But ironically their desire to do this reinforced the dominant definition of women's work and its associations with women's designated place in the home, thus reinforcing a sexual division of labour. The EWI combined the work of paid needlewomen; employed as part of the manufacturing system of factory work, piecework, outwork and take-home work; with genteel sewing and embroidery into one department. Domestic service and women's employment in the production and processing of food were subsumed into the department of domestic industries along with unpaid housework. The development of professionalism and involvement of women in trade was represented by the departments of education and mechanical work respectively, but their impact was also diffused throughout the entire exhibit. Professional exhibits stood beside those of amateurs. The activities of cooks, waitresses and shop girls were 'mimicked' by ladies in both the Exhibition and the Fair.

The universalism of 'women's work' helped the organisers ignore some of the inequities of the colonial economy. Diverse occupations were equalised more on the

basis of a moral claim than an economic or social right. This meant the display had limited benefits for the working women counted by Coghlan. Its wished-for tangible effects, built on intangible ideals, were minimal. The Exhibition tells us far more about the anxieties and aspirations of genteel women than the realities or experiences of their sisters in industry.

This should not, however, completely diminish the power or originality of the claim to redefine women's work as worthy, valuable and dignified, the source of independence, liberation and self-fulfilment. The genteel organisers of the EWI advocated a feminism that suggested that economic freedom was the path to female freedom. As one woman wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of the Exhibition:

*Is not society generally waking up to the fact that good work, well done, is no degradation to a woman, whatever her rank in life; and in the acknowledgment of this fact does not women's real emancipation lie?*\(^{39}\)

But while the organisers intended the Exhibition to show the diversity and significance of women's labour across the public and private spheres and across class, ultimately they obtained from the display the maximum benefit for their own class. By universalising and spiritualising 'work', and uniting it with another universal category, 'women', to form the powerful ideological construct of 'women's work', genteel women hoped to resolve some of the anxieties surrounding their role. On the one hand, they paved the way for their own entry, either through necessity or desire, into the paid workforce. On the other they combated claims of their own superfluousness and uselessness by arguing that the work they already carried out, largely unpaid and located in the home, had a value and status equal to other forms of work carried out in the public sphere for pay.

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\(^{39}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 May 1888, p. 7.
The home on show: Displaying domesticity

'The mass of women should be penetrated with a sense of the dignity and worth of common duties; should see that all work is of equal dignity, if done from right motives, for high aims.'


The processes of industrialisation, and the culture of consumption identified by Lears, had dealt genteel women a paradox in this period. Their role in the maintenance of class identity was proved by leisure and made meaningful by industry. At the same time, femininity was inextricably linked to domesticity and domestic work, yet the servants who maintained the middle-class home were growing scarcer and scarcer, lured from the hearth by jobs in the factories that made middle-class men rich. The reinvention of domestic work as 'work' at the EWI was a response both to genteel women's separation from meaningful labour, and their increasingly hands-on responsibility for domestic duties. But its organisers faced a difficult challenge in exposing the private sphere in the public in a search for validation and recognition. Making the invisible and the silenced seen and heard was the Department of Domestic Industries' fundamental challenge.

Domestic work especially was seen to gain from the equation of work with dignity, pride, and honour. Holden's essay idealised the lives of the 'common people', whose 'ordinary' lives connected them to 'reality':

If there is one lesson more than another pervading [George Eliot's] life teaching it is that all nobility, heroism, and pathos may be enwrapped in the neutral-tinted folds of common everyday life, and in the hearts and paths of simple working men and

40 Holden, 'Woman's work', p. 10.
simple working women. ... That is the lesson we need to learn. Loyally to recognise, and cheerfully to accept, the common prosaic offices of domestic life, and to glorify them by the devotion, intelligence, and thoroughness with which they are wrought out; to string the scattered duties of the days upon a golden cord of higher purpose...

Work was the beginning and the end of Holden's home lesson. Teach [women] ... that work, especially active physical work such as domestic services afford, is the saving salt of life, of sound wholesome being', she emphasised. The use here of 'domestic services' rather than 'domestic service' was the linguistic sidestep necessary to sustain the unity of 'woman' across the divide between mistress and servant.

The 'servant question' hung over the display from the very beginning. In March 1888 a correspondent to the Herald asked whether the Exhibition would 'minimise the long-standing and vexatious difficulty in obtaining suitable domestic help' or if it would in fact 'make matters worse in relation to household servants'. A later article published in the Woman's Column of the Sydney Morning Herald about the Domestic Industries Department of the Exhibition summarised the answer of the organisers:

In Australia, as in America, the servant difficulty is ever increasing, and the most effectual way to meet this is so to dignify and elevate work of all kinds as to lead the great middle class, who are unfortunately too much disposed to look with contempt upon efficiency in domestic management, to take pride in making themselves skilful workers, skilful cooks, able to teach the untrained servant girls of the present day.

By attempting to 'dignify' and 'elevate' domestic labour to the level of other forms of work in the public sphere, the organisers hoped to encourage more middle-class women to actively intervene in domestic management. The Exhibition was seen as an object lesson to apathetic middle-class housewives. In order to encourage them, domestic work was made to seem a more genteel and appropriate activity for the lady who increasingly had to do it herself. 'Every woman who shews skill in any industry is entitled to respect', the article concluded, 'and to the great majority the art of boiling

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44 Sydney Morning Herald, 8 March 1888, p. 12.
45 'The Exhibition of Women's Industries' under the 'Woman's Column', Sydney Morning Herald, 25 August 1888, p. 9.
a potato is of more value than to play a sonata, though ... both are equally attainable in
the same individual. 46

The Department of Domestic Industries attempted to give these ideas, and the
ideals of femininity, material expression. Although 'less ostentatious on the surface
than most others in the exhibition', Domestic Industries was considered one of the
most important of all the departments. 47 The Exhibition's organisers placed great
significance on domestic work as fundamental to womanhood, and did not shrink
from displaying the private sphere in public, but they faced serious difficulties in
representing its importance in an exhibition. Because cookery exhibits were
perishable, and the daily competitions and contributions to the Exhibition's dining
room so ephemeral, fear was expressed in the catalogue that the Department's 'true
position' at the core of women's essential femininity might go unrecognised. 48
Specific tasks had to be broken down and represented 'apart from home life'. 49 The
ideology of domesticity, with its emphasis on selflessness, unobtrusiveness, and
invisible influence had to be represented in a competitive display by products and
processes. Accordingly the Department was made up of two complementary parts, the
competitive exhibits and the working kitchen.

Proofs of housewifely skill were to be found in the exhibits. The Department's
tables in the Exhibition displayed loaves of bread, butter moulded in many patterns,
cheese and cream cheese, preserved fruit, jams and jellies of every kind, pickles,
chutneys, gravies, bacon, eggs and honey, cakes, puddings, rolls and pies,
confectionary, soups, salads, menus and bills of fare. The miscellaneous section
included pomades, powders, home-made disinfectants and soaps. The Campbelltown
apiary displayed an active beehive. In laundry work, nearly thirty women (including
the appropriately-named Mary Anne Boiling) showed various examples of washed and
ironed shirts, collars, linen and underclothing. Competition took place in every

47 Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1888, p. 5.
48 EWI, Catalogue, p. 69.
49 Sydney Mail, 6 October 1888, p. 714.
imaginable concoction from biscuits and mince meat to wedding cake. Lady Darley donated a special award for best 'Vienna schintzeler', Lady Denison one for best clear starching, and Alban J. Riley Esq., M.L.A., offered a £1 prize for the best-grilled chop. 50 The exhibitors ranged from professional cooks and laundresses, to lady amateurs, working women, country women and schoolgirls.

The display had a powerful model in the tradition of competition in cookery at agricultural shows. What made it different was that here the exhibits, individually and as a whole, were intended to be representative of higher ideals of domesticity and womanliness. Shows were the province of rural women, women of a lower status than the genteel city women who organised the EWI. The 'women's industries' sections of local shows offered country women the chance to compete with each other for honour and prizes. While probably partly intended by local agricultural societies to encourage women's interest in shows, and prove that feminine influence extended even to the remote bush, the events were eagerly anticipated each year by many isolated women as points of recognition and moments of camaraderie and companionship. The genteel city-based organisers of the EWI echoed aspects of this existing structure for the public display of women's domestic work, modifying it to make it an expression of middle-class respectability and housewifely skill, as well as universal sisterhood.

But the organisers also believed that the skill and worth of women fulfilling their domestic duty had to be shown in action. The Exhibition's kitchen fulfilled this function. Tuesday the 9th of October 1888 was a typical day in the EWI kitchens. In the morning, a band of women, baskets filled with eggs and milk and flour, waited by the exhibition building door to take part in the day's cookery competition. Miss Gertrude Fischer, daughter of the delegate for the domestic industries department, emerged victorious from the battle to create the best breakfast dishes. Then, as they did every day during the course of the Exhibition, a troupe of enthusiastic amateurs took over the kitchen to turn out luncheon, dinner and tea for swarms of hungry visitors,

50 Sydney Morning Herald, 29 October 1888, p. 3.
appetites whetted by the cases of cakes in the hall. Ladies swapped places at the stove with their harassed and hard-to-get cooks, while gentlemen's daughters played tablemaids in crisp uniforms of butcher's blue. In the concert room, Miss Ramsay Whiteside, a professional cooking teacher, gave a demonstration in 'dainty dishes', following on from her successful displays of high class and cottage cookery [Figure 3.3].

The working kitchen and cooking competitions put the normally hidden activities of the kitchen on public display. On the simplest level, this indicated to all that the production of a cake or the orchestration of a dinner did not just happen, it involved a complex range of practical skills carried out with experience and flair. The openness of the kitchen also suggested its use as a teaching tool: it educated women about how they might improve or enhance their domestic skills.

But in their eagerness to embrace the new scientific cookery, and show the extent to which ladies could perform domestic tasks, the organisers exposed the students to the glare of the public eye. This ultimately achieved the reverse of what had been intended. The kitchen came to be seen as proof that genteel women were incompetent, bumbling amateurs in the domestic arts. A columnist in the Bulletin noted

In connection with the now rapidly approaching Women's Industrial Exhibition, I see that Elliot Bros., the wholesale chemists, have offered a prize for the best made cakes! How extremely natural that chemists should wish to encourage amateur cookery, isn't it?.

Increased amateur cooking, it joked, made for an enlarged market in patent remedies for indigestion. Cartoonist Hop made fun of the lady cooks ridiculous efforts to complete the simplest of domestic tasks [Figure 3.4]. In his cartoon, Miss Emily Stadgers won first prize for bun baking. One of Miss Stadger's buns 'was tested by being fired out of a cannon at a 4 inch plank at 100 yards. The plank got the worst of it.' Miss Tabitha Todhunter won a gold medal for boiling an egg, and Miss Susanna


MacGooley was pictured wrist-deep in gelatinous mess. "Fancy getting one's hands all messed up with that horrid dough!", she exclaimed. But at the centre of the cartoon was the image of a gagged man with a black eye, tied to a chair and nursing a baby. Looming over him was the dominating Mrs Henry Peck, the first prize winner in husband-taming, wielding a hot iron. The cartoon mocked one of the Exhibition's central ideological planks, the strength of domesticity, by reworking it into women's domestic power, a domineering threat to masculinity. The cartoon also drew attention to the responsibility of looking after baby, something the Exhibition's organisers sidestepped in the construction of the display.

The most telling exclusion from the EWI's picture of universal womanhood was the near invisibility of motherhood. Holden's prize essay had described woman's 'great work' to raise up such a standard, that she may train a noble generation, to reproduce in the fierce light of the public gaze: in the senate and the forum, in the counting house and the mart; as pioneers and statesmen in church and science; the practical thoroughness, the purity of thought, speech and action; the honesty, the generous instincts unconsciously imbibed from her in the ductile and absorbive days of infancy and youth.

Yet the sustained and explicit discussion of childrearing and marriage so much in evidence at the 1876 Philadelphia Exhibition was notably absent. The care of the family underpinned the display, whether that meant creating a good home, or working to feed hungry mouths. But proportionally it was barely present at the EWI, barring an essay topic in the Education Department on 'Women as the wives or mothers of rulers' and a lecture on kindergartens in the entertainment program, and rarely mentioned in Exhibition literature or commentary. A 'labour of love', it seems to have proved too difficult to 'show'. Perhaps also, motherhood was not yet opened for debate in Australia in the same way as domestic work was. The EWI was not going to open this discussion. It is possible to read the silence over women's maternal role at the Exhibition both as a conscious decision to draw a line protecting some aspects of the

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53 Bulletin, 3 November 1888, p. 10.
54 Holden, 'Woman's work', p. 11.
55 Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, ch. 2.
private sphere from scrutiny, and an unconscious affirmation that it did not need to be justified to men or explained to women.  

In the organisers' view, the Domestic Industries Department offered solutions to domestic dilemmas, as well as larger problems of 'Women' as a sex undivided by class, through its practically-realised yet highly idealistic message of pride and dignity in common duties which otherwise passed unnoticed and unacknowledged. It was considered essential to reveal that the modern woman as 'equally at home in the kitchen as in the ballroom', or, it might have been added, the hospital, factory, or studio. It was equally crucial to show that she would not neglect her home duties and lose her 'essential' femininity by going out to work. Rather the domestic offered a foundation for movement into new fields of work and aspiration. As Holden put it:

Is it not plain ... that every woman's life-training should be based upon a practical knowledge of housework? Upon that foundation let any noble superstructure be raised which personal talent dictates, and Providence allows. Let a woman's duties as a woman form the broad, wide stable base; then let a beautiful pyramid of intellectual acquirement aspire majestic to the very skies.

But the assertions of Holden's essay, and the Exhibition itself, were underpinned by a fear that women's domestic skills were deteriorating, and that consequently their moral authority was under threat. Why were women becoming disillusioned with their domestic role, dismissive and neglectful of their housework?

The spinning wheel and the stocking machine: change at the EWI

The EWI also offered a telling critique of changes to women's work and role over the course of the nineteenth century. One of the most significant roles for exhibitions in this period was to display 'progress'. The EWI was no exception. But its female organisers presented a reading of progress against the grain of dominant masculinist interpretations. In contrast to liberal evolutionary models, which suggested women would rise and fall on their own 'merits' as 'mankind' hurtled towards a glorious technological future, exhibition women presented a more ambivalent response to

56 Holden, 'Woman's work', p. 11.
57 Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1888, p. 5.
58 Holden, 'Woman's work', p. 11.
59 Greenhalgh, Ephemeral Vistas, introduction.
machinery and change, suggesting that women were both freed and oppressed by industrialisation. The contrast between old and new symbolised by the spinning wheel and the stocking machine was used to great effect to represent this ambivalence.

At the opening of the EWI Lady Darley read Lady Carrington's presidential address to the assembled crowd. It outlined 'the origin and aim' of the Exhibition:

The Centenary of Australia, following her Majesty's Jubilee year, necessarily led to a consideration of the vast changes which science and invention have wrought in the two periods, and with a justifiable pride in the knowledge that the great progress which has been made in the Empire to which we belong has been accomplished in the reign of a woman sovereign, it seemed that the centenary was a fitting occasion to demonstrate how far the development of women's industries, so marked in other countries, had kept pace with the times.\(^6^0\)

This was a clever woman-centred reconceptualisation of the dominant ideology of progress. A woman had presided over the great leaps and improvements of the nineteenth century, and her influence had actively contributed to this advancement. Women were not merely mediums of order and stability, the transmitters of tradition, but agents of change, actors and generators in the move towards development and reform.

The idea of this dual role for women was especially strong in the Australasian colonies. The women of America in presenting their work at their own centennial had chosen primarily associate to the feminine with pre-industrial stability, tradition and order.\(^6^1\) The women of Australia presented themselves as equally at ease with the new world and the old. This was a function of both their different relationship to the 'mother country', and the relatively smaller or more distant impact of industrialisation on the colonies. Theirs was a society in which liberality, reform, improvement and progress were valued alongside tradition, conservatism and convention. The former contributed to colonial self-confidence and identity, and added to notions of newness, possibility, and uniqueness. The latter gave Britons on the edge of Empire a sense of connection, of inheritance, of civilisation and cultural superiority in the face of

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\(^6^0\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1888, p. 6.

\(^6^1\) Cordaro, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, ch. 3.
indigenous and Asian cultures. The former suggested new and changing roles for women, the latter old and unchanging ones. The EWI, accordingly, represented both.

In measuring how far women's work had 'kept pace with the times', the EWI presented a mixed response to the 'vast changes' wrought by science and invention. On the one hand, the Exhibition's presentation of the dignity and skill of women's traditional arts was a reaction against industrialisation and mass production. On the other, the display actively promoted new occupations created by new technologies. The very contrast between the old and the new was proof of the special attributes of the colonial woman. As the introduction to the catalogue of the Exhibition noted:

If the spinning-wheel recalls an almost forgotten art, side by side with this solitary exhibit, the nimble fingers of the type-writers show how quickly the daughters of this new land have adopted recent discoveries, and mastered a new and profitable industry.62

Australian women, it seemed, were uniquely placed to draw the best from both tradition and innovation. Still, their negotiation of the old world and the new was not an easy one. The idealisation of the home as a sanctuary from industrialisation, machinery, and impersonality was premised on a connection between women and the past, a world of tradition. For genteel women on the edge of Empire, establishing this connection through a display of skill was fraught with anxiety. The inevitable comparisons with the old world were, they knew from experience at international exhibitions, potentially unflattering. The display of women's craft work at the EWI was a bold statement of pride, underpinned by nervousness and self-consciousness.

An interest in traditional female arts was also part of the EWI's promotion of middle-class ideology, evoking thrift, usefulness and housewifely competence. It was essential that the femininity of colonial women be maintained and proved by their skill in the womanly arts. While the Exhibition proudly noted the excellence of the Australian women's work, it also suggested they should apply themselves to improving the skills that made them 'real women', when compared with their sisters abroad. Exhibits were imported from Holland in an effort to prevent any deterioration of women's skills far from 'home'. Needlework, knitting and lace exhibits were

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62 EWI, Catalogue, p. 7.
brought in from Amsterdam to show the colonials 'how it was done'. Their message was doubly powerful because the superb sewing was the work of children. The most representative of these exhibits were donated to the Technological Museum as a permanent teaching tool [Figure 3.5].

This also had the benefit of encouraging plain, practical sewing over the more elaborate fancy kinds, boosting domestic 'productivity', reducing the consumption of manufactured clothing, and promoting skills that could provide a woman with a living should she fall on hard times. It is possible to read the Exhibition as a statement against consumerism. Although there were a few model boudoirs decorated by the large city department stores on show, on the whole the organisers resisted the commercialisation of the enterprise. But while the promotion of plain needlework was one of the organiser's central goals, more powerfully symbolic was work that had once been productive, but was now largely decorative.

Lace and spinning became the focus of a discussion about womanly skill. The Exhibition as a whole made the claim that women's work was skilful: the most repeated word in Exhibition literature, besides 'work', was 'skill'. The use of this word echoed contemporary male artisans who were claiming status by using skill as a discriminating tool. At the EWI, the women organisers were appropriating the word for their own purpose, to elevate women's work in the face of its being diminished by mass production.

One of the Exhibition's aims was to arrest a perceived decline in the practice and standard of traditional women's arts and crafts. A display of handmade work would, in the organisers' view, stimulate, encourage and teach women, staying the

63 See Rosemary Shepherd, The Powerhouse lace collection and the lace study centre: History and operation, unpublished paper in possession of the author. The 24 pieces of work from the Protestant Diakenie Orphanage, donated by Mrs Gurney, were amongst the Technological Museum's first textile acquisitions, see Specimens showing the most approved methods of sewing, darning and knitting as carried on in Holland, Technological, Industrial and Sanitary Museum, Stockbook, 1889, object numbers H10-34. The museum's lace collection began in 1890 when Mrs Thomas Mort donated a handkerchief trimmed with Hedebo work, along with a 'peasant's apron', made in Denmark and displayed at the EWI, see Technological Museum, 'H' Stockbook, 1890; Technological Museum, Annual Report 1890, Government Printer, Sydney, 1891, appendix S; Loan Register. 6 May 1891. See also Rosemary Shepherd, Handkerchief with Hedebo lace border, Australian Lace, Autumn 1993, pp. 23-4.
loss of skills caused by the introduction of new technologies and the mass consumption of manufactured goods. Describing the 'genuine excellence' of exhibits in the Needlework Department, Lady Darley noted that 'proof was given that despite the revolution which the introduction of machinery has wrought, there are still many who excel in the use of the needle'. Department II also showed 'machinery ha[d] not banished handwork, for knitting is largely displayed'.64

Similar fears, and similar solutions, were to be found internationally in the Arts and Crafts movement and amongst contemporary feminists. Inspired by William Morris, these movements asserted the preciousness of the handmade, revered the artisan and the craftsman, and idealised notions of ancient tradition, as part of a reaction to the diminution of these values brought about by industrialisation and mechanisation.65 Feminists like American Charlotte Perkins Gilman, South African Olive Schreiner, and Australian Catherine Helen Spence added a further gloss, arguing that the incursion of machinery into women's arts like spinning and weaving had stolen women's productive labour and thus her status, and reduced her to a miserable state of parasitism.66 In response to growing alarm that womanly skills were fading, exhibitions of women's crafts were held in Britain from the 1870s, often supporting specific activities like lacemaking or spinning.67

The significance given to lace and spinning at the EWI is representative of the complex intersection of gender and class in broader debates about the impact of technological and industrial change on traditional women's work. The two activities

65 Lears, No Place of Grace, ch. 2.
became central to the narrative of women's marginalisation made material by the Exhibition. Both were represented as symbols of the past, a past where women had played a productive and useful role in society, in contrast to the significantly reduced (or more intangible) contribution of women at the end of the nineteenth century. The *Echo* expressed this theme, describing the lone spinning wheel turning as 'many a young girl wonderingly looks on, while some matrons perchance may speculate on the labour gone through in olden times, when, before entering the dignity of married life, the spinster must have prepared her personal and household linen with her own hands.'

The unfamiliarity of women with tasks that had once formed an essential part of their education and employment was much commented upon by Exhibition organisers and journalists alike as a source of the air of unreality and underoccupation of many present-day women.

During the present century the time-honoured occupations of women in the dairy and the laundry, with their needle and with the spinning wheel, have undergone such vast changes that an exhibition of women's industries embraces a variety of work of which our grandmothers never dreamed. Machinery has taken spinning so entirely out of their hands that, to the Australian-born population the spinning-wheel is almost unknown and considered rather as a relic of bygone times, apart from the important place it once filled in every household; and the fact that a wheel and worker have been found for the forthcoming exhibition will be of great interest and curiosity to many visitors.

If mills and machines had taken over spinning to the extent that it was rarely practised, lace was now the art identified as most under threat.

Lace was continually described as the epitome of an ancient and highly esteemed women's craft. At the Exhibition's opening Lady Darley drew particular attention to 'the making of lace, which has long ranked high in the estimation of women.' Her assertion that such work was especially valued by women indicates the extent to which the Exhibition prioritised women's definitions of significance. In women's conception, lace came to symbolise a heritage of women's creativity, and a link to distant foremothers. A Lady's Letter in the *Goulburn Herald* noted that the 'nimble fingers of the workers of the "pillow lace" recall[ed] an almost forgotten art

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68 *Echo*, 9 October 1888, p. 4.
70 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1888, p. 6.
loved of our great-grandmothers. Concern that lace would be forgotten and lost lay behind the Exhibition's efforts to promote the preservation of lace as a living craft. The organisers penalised women and girls who submitted work trimmed with machine-made lace. Lace was put on an equal footing with needlework in the title of Department I, and this indicated a real effort on the part of the organisers to foreground and promote it.

Old lace, preserved and handed down through the generations, was also shown amongst the loan exhibits, and labelled prominently with its age. These lace exhibits were approached with real reverence and love. They were given special attention in the Englishwoman's Review:

We might feast our eyes on old lace for hours. Is there anything that more effectively fascinates a well-regulated female mind? Old lace and old China, with an aroma of pot pourri in the air—what more do you want to convert you into a day dreamer? But the old lace has the best of it, for there is a personality about its charms. The fair wearers seem to have breathed some of their soul into it[.]

Women's rediscovery of craft in this period represented a longing for the past, and a mark of aspiration for a gentility built on heritage and tradition. As Rosemary Shepherd has argued, lace carried strong class associations. Wearing lace collars and cuffs was a sign of affluence and rank. Old lace held tremendous status because it implied lineage and pedigree. In the late nineteenth century machines had largely taken over lace productions, and the wearing of contemporary handmade lace conveyed status and gentility as well as proof of disposable income. These associations must have been doubly strong in the colonies, where status was fluid, aspirants many, and lacemakers few. The presence of women making lace for a living, brought to light by the Exhibition, suggested a growing 'aristocracy' as well as the survival of an ancient womanly art.

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71 Goulburn Herald, 13 October 1888, p. 3.
72 Sydney Morning Herald, 27 October 1888, p. 10. This was not approved of by all judges. One, Adelaide Sutor, wrote to the Herald questioning this decision, see Sydney Morning Herald, 31 October 1888, p. 6.
73 See EWI, Catalogue, pp. 45-8, p. 4 of supplementary list.
74 Englishwoman's Review, 15 January 1889, p. 11.
Exhibits which revealed ladies themselves spinning or making lace suggested an almost folksy femininity, a gentility acquired through association with a rustic or pastoral past, and (in the colonial context) a connection with an imagined England. Through the Countess of Rosebery, Queen Victoria forwarded an exhibit of her own to the Exhibition. It was a napkin woven from yarn spun by the Queen herself. The napkin was shown in the Mechanical Work Department, beside the spinning wheel in motion. The Sydney Mail represented the display as a reminder of past times: in watching this time-honoured occupation many memories will be stirred, and bygone scenes recalled amongst them will suggest itself a mental picture of the Sovereign who rules the vast British Empire, seated at her wheel and spinning the yarn which in the exhibit referred to has travelled to the world which was scarcely known to the public when the Royal spinner so occupied her time.  

By sending this exhibit, claimed the Mail, the Queen had shown both her 'sympathy' for the Exhibition, and 'her own skill in the ancient art'. The Daily Telegraph however did not take kindly to the monarch's exhibit, criticising how much was made of it in EWI advertising. It saw its significance in terms of a pragmatic present rather than an idealised past. In its eyes all this 'passing of the napkin' was 'simply bringing down the Royal patronage to the Australian women by an easy grade.' Of what mortal interest is it to anyone to be shown that the Queen can make a table napkin? She is not in any way required to make table napkins, and to bring out her latent talents in that line was presumably not amongst the leading objects for which the exhibition was started.

That object, it argued, was to foreground the industry of ordinary women who were required to work for a living. The organisers saw a different meaning in the exhibit, that even the highest woman in the land still displayed her femininity through handwork.

Yet spinning also suggested women had used machines before the machine age, and that they were not antithetical to or alienated from machinery or technology. Repeated references to their delicate hands and dexterous touch implied they would be able to work any machine. The Exhibition's section on invention further proved that women could create or improve technology, usually in connection with a particular feminine insight or experience. A good example was Matron Guille's Bamberbed.

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76 Sydney Mail, 6 October 1888, p. 722.
77 Echo, 9 October 1888, p. 4. See also 'Emily Farran' in Ker, Heritage, pp. 246-7 and 348.
78 Daily Telegraph, 6 October 1888, p. 4.
Guille, in charge of the hospital at Goulburn, had devised an invalid bed with sliding or removable sections to elevate or lower parts of the patient's body, as well as make bathing, tending and treatment easier. Invention was a regular feature of exhibitions of women's work. It suggested technical competence as well as womanly ingenuity.\textsuperscript{79}

As well as aiming to protect and support women's crafts threatened by industrialisation, the EWI also championed new technology that increased the possibilities for women seeking to enter paid employment. Changes wrought on women's work by technology had been 'to a certain extent counterbalanced by the new occupations that arise' suggested the \textit{Herald}'s women's column.\textsuperscript{80} The best example of this was clerical work.

Typewriting was one of the Exhibition's great innovations. The first classes in clerical work, typing, and stenography in Sydney were held in connection with the EWI by Mrs Dora Armitage, formerly secretary of the Birmingham Typewriter Office, who had brought the idea out from England.\textsuperscript{81} With the permission of the Board of Technical Education, classes took place at St Leonards and at the Sydney School of Arts.\textsuperscript{82} Armitage and her 30 students, many from the Deaf, Dumb and Blind Institute in Newtown Road, exhibited their work at the Exhibition. They also engaged in typing and shorthand competitions, and appeared in person every day, typing menus and exhibition papers in front of enthralled visitors.

Descriptions of the typewriters hard at work in the Exhibition captured a typical Victorian excitement at beholding the machine. The smaller 'feminised' machines like sewing machines and typewriters had none of the thrusting male force of pistons or dynamos, but they carried an intricate machinery suitable for 'delicate' female fingers. Typewriting promised to become a 'very important industry...one in which girls and women can quickly become experts'. This was because 'the suppleness of finger

\textsuperscript{79} Cordato, \textit{Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere}, ch. 2.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 28 July 1888, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{81} See Mrs D. E. Armitage, \textit{Agriculture and Domestic Economy for Women}, Christian World Publishing House, Sydney, 1898.

\textsuperscript{82} 'Seven machines are in constant use, and the pupils have made such rapid progress that Mrs Armitage the Superintendent ... is now prepared to bring law and manuscript copying of all kinds.' \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 28 July 1888, p. 8.
which girls without any musical talent have acquired by years of steady practice, and
with little apparent benefit to music may here bring good fruits by enabling them to
work the "Remington" and "Caligraph" with great speed'.

It seemed fortuitous that
the skills of idleness might be turned into paid work.

The machines represented liberation from home work, and opportunities for
paid employment for middle-class women. In the Dawn a member of the Ladies’
Typewriting Association expressed the belief that through typewriting, the world of
business would open to women [Figure 3.6]84 As accounts of the feminisation of
clerical work have noted, this dream would not come to fruition.85 But the EWI was a
moment of possibility, where a clean new machine seemed a way to open a new area
of work to women.

The organisers of the EWI used the Exhibition to critique women’s past and
present, and suggest future opportunities. Their promotion of women’s crafts was an
effort to ensure their survival as an intrinsic part of feminine identity. It also conjured
images of a time past when the home was a site of meaningful production, not simply
the production of meaning. The eagerness with which colonial women embraced new
technologies was presented as testimony to their adaptability and connection to colonial
progress and advancement. Both of these conceptions placed women centre-stage, as
actors in the great movements of the age. The responses of the press to the Exhibition
picked up on these themes with rather different emphases.

The EWI provoked debate in the colonial press about the changing role of
women. Where the EWI organisers emphasised social, economic and industrial causes
for that change, the newspapers turned the discussion towards ‘nature’ and the free
market. Overall, the mainstream press, comfortable in its masculinism, calmly stated
that the threat apparent in women’s claim to work was merely an illusion. The classic

85 Garner, ‘Educated and white-collar women’, pp. 124-5; Meta Zimmock, ‘Jobs for the girls: The
expansion of clerical work for women 1850-1914', in John, Unequal Opportunities, pp. 153-178;
Carole E. Adams, Women Clerks in Wilhelmine Germany: Issues of Class and Gender, Cambridge
liberalism espoused by J. S. Mill was invoked to limit and contain the demands made through the Exhibition. The combined forces of marketplace competition and evolution would see women climb only as high as they were fit to.

The Age correctly identified the Exhibition as a 'retort' in the face of industrialisation. Its leader argued that an exhibition of women's industry was a measure that men had failed in their duty to protect women. Echoing some of the claims of the organisers, it suggested that it was men who were the cause of current discussions about women's work:

In admitting women to a larger share in the industries of life, men are in fact only restoring to women what they took from them. For women were once the principal workers of the world. Until the introduction of machinery they were the Bakers, Brewers, Drysalters, Butter and Cheese Makers, Confectioners, Spinners, Weavers, Dyers, Stocking and Lace Manufacturers for society; and instead of being regarded with jealousy and suspicion as intruders upon the province of man, they deserve to be credited with the attempt to retort on him as the real usurper.

It then continued critiquing what it perceived as ill-founded sexism from even the most liberal of men:

One of the obstacles that they [women] have to contend against is the ridiculous heresy that they are mentally and physically the inferior animal of the two. It is really surprising what a conspicuous part quite unfounded prejudice has played in the controversy against them, and how many advocates it finds even among the most liberal male thinkers of the day.

It mocked theories that women's smaller, lighter brains made them incurably inferior.

What, it asked, did it prove to ask where all the female poets, historians, philosophers and scientists were, 'except that the long disuse of women's faculties in the leading departments of mental and physical labour has left her unproficient'?

Woman, as we know the creature, is herself undevelopd. Her faculties have been dwarfed and stunted because they have never had any chance of evolution beyond a certain stage. ... let men do the work of women for a few generations, and women take on the employments of men—and we might then be in a position to pass judgement on their innate differences...

This invocation of Mill's 'stunted' 'hothouse' tree was intended for sceptical members of the sterner sex. Men should look to experience for better understanding:

If we go into the manufactories for proof of their mechanical dexterity and strength, do we not find them competing with men as workers in steel, iron and brass? A woman did not invent the spinning jenny, the stocking loom or the sewing machine; but that is no argument that they are physiologically incapable of being inventors.

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86 The opening of the EWI was 'one of those insignificant events that crop up every now and then to remind men that they have yet to face the problem of providing for women in some other way besides marrying them'. Age, 6 October 1888, p. 17.

'We have the hardihood to confess', the Age concluded, 'that as long as one man differs from another as much as Shakespeare differs from one of his clowns ... it seems simply childish and unwarrantable to say that a woman cannot do the work of the world because she is not a man.'

The Sydney Mail saw women's future being guided by the forces of evolution in a rather different way. 'The exhibition is interesting in itself as a display' it agreed, 'but it is far more interesting as an outward and visible sign of one of the great movements of the age.\(^88\)

What is woman's sphere is one of the questions which both men and women are perpetually discussing, and which on merely theoretical grounds it seems impossible to settle. Perhaps the only way to settle it will be to leave it to settle itself. In the struggle for existence all living things seem to find their limit, after a due attempt to develop their potentiality. If women try in all directions they will succeed in some and fail in others, and by so doing will determine for themselves their own sphere.

To do this women needed education and free access to all employments, 'but wherever women come into competition with men a great difficulty will be met with if they work for lower wages.' It concluded harshly that 'an incursion of women into men's work will be looked upon as being as bad as a plague of Chinese.'

The Daily Telegraph proposed the opening up of employment to women as a solution to an excess female population.\(^89\) In the 'Old World' the disproportion of the sexes was great than in Australia, it stated,

females preponderating to a degree which begins to demand a radical change in the present system of civilised society under which woman is relegated in the industrial sphere to a position of either absolute dependence, or, at best, begrudged toleration.

Citing figures that in Great Britain alone there were three quarters of a million women 'mathematically condemned to perpetual spinsterhood', the paper suggested that the plan of 'compelling all the men to work for all the women', while 'desirable' was 'impracticable'. Men needed to recognise this and be more generous:

Unfortunately a woman thus forced into the arena of industrial competition finds herself still handicapped by a most unjust, unchivalrous, and unreasoning prejudice. Because through the inexorable necessity of earning her own bread she is driven into the labor market, a cry goes up against her that she is wrongfully competing with the masculine breadwinner, upon whom the family has to depend. Being always relegated to a position of industrial inferiority she is obliged to accept lower wages, and she is at the same time able, as a rule to live on less than her male competitor. Her unfortunate position of lowliness is in itself a position of economy. These are the two circumstances which go to make woman an advantaged competitor in all

\(^{88}\) Sydney Mail, 6 October 1888, p. 703.
\(^{89}\) Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1888, p. 4.
walks of labor to which she is privileged to enter. But they are her misfortunes rather than her faults.

With the 'broadening of thought of the times' man was beginning to recognise this and relinquish his 'unmanly opposition to allowing women the same rights as himself.' Medicine and law had opened to women, the paper argued, and it was 'to be hoped that the male cleric will eventually have to follow ... suit ... and take his fair chance in the survival of the fittest.' The EWI was an example of 'how far Australia has got towards admitting women's right to the simple privilege of industrial fair play.' It may not be that from a purely showman's point of view the affair is of very great account. ... The lesson of the exhibition is more of a social rather than of a mechanical or scientific one. It helps to answer the question what at the close of our first century is the position of the Australian woman? And the answer is that in many walks of industrial life she is the equal of the Australian man.

This, it concluded, was 'one distinct step ahead in the social march, and as such the exhibition perfectly harmonises with the occasion that it helps celebrate', the colony's first century.

As a whole, the masculine press diminished any potential threat of women's increased involvement in work and public life using the very liberal evolutionary model that was invoked by women as justification for their ongoing emancipation. According to the newspapers, women would rise and fall on their own merits, and that would be the end of the matter. The EWI's claim for the expansion of women's paid work was not a controversial one, while its twin assertion of the dignity and value of domestic work went unacknowledged and undiscussed. The idea of women seeking equality and emancipation through paid work on male terms was absorbed with little protestation.

Sydney's alternative press took a rather different approach. In the radical and republican press the exhibition was identified as a capitalist plot to deprive women of their dignity and working class men of their jobs. The Australian Radical's leader of 20 October began by quoting the Age's argument that '[i]n admitting women to a larger share in the industries of life, men are in fact only restoring to women what they took from them. For women were once the principal workers of the world.' Such
sentiments, it declared, were 'the expressed opinion of the Tory mind the world
over.' It had an alternative reading of history:
When women were the principal laborers of the world, man was a savage and
regarded his women very much the same as he regarded his horse or his cattle—merely
as beasts of burden. The ancient savagery of that time survives in the Tory of today,
and he uses the above sentences in simply endeavouring to return to barbarism under
cover of the radical plea for women's suffrage.

It then explained what it believed lay behind such florishes:
The mills, mines and factories of the world are for the most part owned by the Tories
and in them we see what they mean by extending the sphere of woman and admitting
her to the larger share of the toil. Today women and children are filling the places of
their husbands and fathers in the sweating-dens of the Tories, while the husbands and
fathers attend the unemployed meetings. The women are already admitted to a larger
share of toil but only on wages that herald in starvation, vice and crime. We need not
point to Bryant and May in proof of what we say, for the same tendency is seen all
over the world. And this is what the Tories mean by admitting women to a larger
share of the toil, and this is what the most thoughtful Radicals will have to guard
against confounding the growing demand for more freedom for women as well as for
men. True freedom can never be reached through economic slavery.

The Australian Radical critiqued the Exhibition by drawing out the implications of its
arguments and forcing the display fully into the glare of economic reality and the
sexual division of labour. The Radical's picture of women toiling in the factory was a
stark contrast to the way in which women's factory work was on show at the
Exhibition in the Mechanical Work Department.

Living exhibits: The display of mechanical work
Anyone anywhere in the Exhibition of Women's Industries was aware of the
Mechanical Work Department. The click of the typewriters and clatter of the stocking
knitting machine could be heard throughout the hall. That the typewriter and the
stocking machine should form the soundtrack of the EWI was a powerful reminder of
larger social, economic, and industrial changes underlying the Exhibition: the
introduction of machinery into women's traditional activities, the growth of colonial
manufacturing, and the increasing employment of women in non-traditional areas like
factory work.

The organisers of the Mechanical Work Department sought to reveal women's
work in manufacturing, and show that it was a suitable and dignified occupation for

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90 Australian Radical, 20 October 1888, p. 1.
women. Their section of the Exhibition embraced work defined by manual dexterity with the intention of showing that women's delicate fingers could be turned to profit. A variety of activities were shown as potential paid employments for women. The mechanical work department was the focus of an overall Exhibition aim: to expose the real nature and importance of women's work in and to the colony. There were difficulties, however, associated both with fully representing women's involvement in manufacturing and with representing factory work in a positive light, when they were both the subject of considerable middle-class ambivalence. Keen to emphasise women's role in production, the organisers came up with special solutions in response to these problems. The department was marked by its use of living exhibits: real workers put on display to show how the work was done. This brought the lady organisers into a mutually beneficial relationship with the colony's manufacturers, who supplied the operatives.

In keeping with the EWI's overall theme, the organisers' intention was to dignify and ennoble women's factory work to the benefit of all workers. But in exposing the processes of work, they exposed the workers themselves. Instead of revealing the reality of factory work, the mechanical work exhibit revealed the extent to which genteel women were out of touch with the lives of other women, and their ultimate alliance with men of their own class.

Mechanical Work was unlike any other department, yet it embodied, embraced and unified them all. Physically as well as ideologically, the mechanical work display represented a great change from the rest of the Exhibition. As visitors walked into it from other sections, there was an immediate contrast. It was noisy, full of movement and real people, not static exhibits of objects in behind glass. Despite the fact that it revealed women publicly at work in the office and the factory, it received almost
unqualified praise throughout the Sydney press. The otherwise critical *Daily Telegraph* called it 'the most successful feature of the exhibition'.

The Mechanical Work department incorporated productive work done by dexterous hands, with the aid of machines, or in an industrial or factory setting. When it was first mooted, diversity was to be a central message. At the inaugural meeting in October 1887, Lady Martin submitted a long and extremely diverse list of occupations carried out by women in the colony. In many ways, this was the first of the acts of exposure which characterised the Mechanical Work Department. Suddenly it was revealed that there were women sailmakers and upholsteresses, that women made a living from hairdressing and broom-making. This was a strategy used to great effect by Louisa Lawson in the *Dawn*, a feminist women’s journal begun in the same year as the Exhibition. She published lists showing the diversity of women’s paid labour and titbits of information about unusual occupations. Lists like these challenged silences, prejudices and preconceptions about the nature and pervasiveness of women’s work. As Lady Darley said at the opening ceremony, the ‘18 sections of mechanical work show how varied are the occupations of the women of New South Wales’. The Exhibition as a whole was intended to do this too, yet much of its claim rested on the diversity of work in this single department.

The exhibits chosen were intended to show dexterous work suited especially to women’s bodies, especially their smaller hands and finer fingers, and commensurate with the refinements of genteel femininity. A large display of typed and shorthand documents, accompanied by working typists, opened the display. Inmates of the Deaf, Dumb and Blind Institute in Darlington submitted ‘writing with Braille’s frame’, and appeared in person covering chairs and reading. Section C, which incorporated baskets, straw plaiting, cane work, hat and bonnet making and cleaning, featured

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91 *Daily Telegraph*, 12 October 1888, p. 4. The women involved seem to have been equally pleased with the display. At the conclusion of the awards ceremony, 28 exhibitors presented the delegate with a card case and an address as a ‘small memento of their esteem, and in remembrance of the pleasure which they had experienced in the discharge of their duties in connection with the Exhibition.’ See *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 October 1888, p. 8.

92 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 October 1887, p. 3.

93 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1888, p. 6.
cabbage tree hats, table mats of native Sycamore bark sent from the Clarence River, as well as a collection of baskets and mats 'from the Islands' supplied by the delegate Mrs Fairfax. There was one exhibit of spinning, the working wheel described earlier. Paper bag making went on daily in the Exhibition, and several paper box makers, including a group from the company Fuerrth and Nall, displayed pill boxes and bonnet boxes and every size and shape in between. Only a handful of women showed feather dressing and dying, but there was a very large showing of artificial flowers, manufactured from muslin, fish scales, rice paper, moss, and wax. Workers from the Government Printing Office showed their skill in the book binding and wiring section, as did women supplied by the printing firm John Sands. Women from the city and Redfern submitted exhibits in bootmaking, including five Tildersleys -- obviously a family business. Toy making included the cow models of Martha Drabsch, one of the Gore sisters of Armidale, whose work survives today [Figure 3.7].

Mr Cameron of Sussex Street allowed six of his workers to show tobacco packing, while the appropriately named Mr C. Wigzell of Oxford Street supplied five hairdressers. Betsy Sutton ran her stocking knitting machine, capable of making hundreds of stockings a day, everyday. A mass of intricate, delicate and decorative exhibits made up the bulk of the final section, miscellaneous industries: Aboriginal women's shell work; sea weed, plush and pine cone frames; mats made from corn husks. Also included were baking and custard powders (probably shown here because they were commercial preparations), a cabinet water-filter designed and made by a woman, and two exhibits of mechanical dentistry.

Added to this there was a loan exhibits section, where women's work from other countries including Persia and India was collected. This added up to a good list of industries, but the final collection was not as wide ranging as had initially been hoped.

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95 EWI, *Catalogue*, Department IV. Also *Daily Telegraph*, 3 October 1888, p. 5; and *Echo*, 4 October 1888, p. 2.
What could not be included was work which was reliant on particular places of work, heavy or immovable machinery, or an extended production line. Also omitted were occupations where it was impractical to separate women's work from men's.

This defect was much lamented. The introduction to the catalogue noted:

In this their first attempt to bring the various Women's Industries before the public, the Committee have had to relinquish exhibits in many departments, owing to the impossibility, in the limited space available, of shewing the productions in which men and women jointly labour with the aid of machinery; and further to contend against the difficulty, which affects many professional workers, of separating their work from, or of displaying it away from the places where they are engaged.96

This problem was representative of a wider problem of definition (or loss of it) in men's and women's work. As the women's column of the Sydney Morning Herald put it:

In late years scientific study and the application of machinery have brought men into occupations which formerly pertained to women; and the making even of ladies' clothes employs so large a number of men as well as women that it is no longer a women's industry only. So in the dairy, machinery is fast driving out or replacing and aiding hand labour.97

As Raelene Frances and Sally Alexander have shown, changes in manufacturing were altering, though not obliterating, the sexual division of labour.98 In the colonies as elsewhere there was a continual blurring of men's and women's activities and struggle over the reinstatement of sexual divisions in battles over job demarcation, tenure, and wages. In one sense the EWI was profoundly traditionalist in its assertion of the difference between men's and women's work. In another it was a radical assertion that women's work embraced the widest possible range of activities, including work in factories alongside men, and further, might keep expanding under the processes of mechanisation as work became lighter and the difference between men's and women's potential contribution shrank. But the practical problem of displaying those new areas, compounded by the organisers' emphasis on showing the work in action, meant that the Exhibition did not incorporate that work, and thereby bring it into a dialogue about women's paid employment and the expansion of women's sphere.

96 EWI, Catalogue, introduction. For a strong echo of this language, see the catalogue of Bristol's Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries 1885: 'little effort has been made to shew such manufactures as are carried on by the joint labour of men and women, with the aid of machinery.' See Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries in Queen's Villa, Queens Road, Bristol, 1885, Catalogue, Second Edition, J. W. Arrowsmith, Bristol, [1885], p. 7.
98 Frances, The Politics of Work, introduction; Alexander, Becoming a Woman, ch. 1.
The organisers focused their attention on the women workers themselves as the means to represent their industries. While efforts were made to involve working women in all categories of display, the Mechanical Work Department more than any other was dominated by and devoted to 'industrial women'. How were they to be included? Mrs Fairfax and her committee sought women who were self employed or working from home by placing advertisements defining the categories of exhibits in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Unlike other departments, they also sought the direct support of employers. In one newspaper notice they expressed their grateful thanks to the various tradesmen who have by their co-operation enabled [the organisers] to present such interesting portions of Women's Work to the public.\(^99\)

What was in this bargain for factory owners and manufacturers? A presence at the Exhibition was an excellent advertising opportunity -- the event was novel, well-publicised and very popular. As an avenue to the well-recognised female consumer the EWI was unsurpassed.\(^100\) But the trade-off between lady organisers and employers was a vexed one. Did manufacturers want it to be widely known that their products were made by female hands? Did exhibition organisers, keen to show that mechanical work could be feminine and even genteel, a proper pursuit for any lady down on her luck, want to expose work that was dirty, heavy, tiring and unpleasant? This wider social debate surrounding factory work informed the exhibit that resulted.

The employment of women in factories was not popular or public. Factory work was viewed with suspicion by the bourgeoisie, who saw it as dangerous to women's bodies, antithetical to femininity, threatening to the private/public divide, as well as a drain on female labour that might otherwise be employed in domestic service. This was despite the fact that some bourgeois men were also factory owners. The *Echo* expressed some of these concerns a year before the Exhibition opened.\(^101\)

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responding positively in general to the proposal put forward by the organising committee, it 'could not help pointing out a defect in the programme, ... which can only be accounted for by the absence of gentlemen from the preliminary consultations.' While acknowledging that 'the range of exhibits' was 'remarkably wide', it did not see this as necessarily a good thing.

No fewer than forty different industries are covered. Yet, strange to say, most of them lie beyond woman's real sphere, and, in fact tend away from it. They constitute what might fairly be regarded as emergency recourses, to be turned to, perhaps, by women who are so unhappy as to fail to attain their rightful place in society.102

While the author 'could, of course, conceive of women in the capacity of tobacco-manufacturers, ropemakers, and even sailmakers' when it seemed 'inevitable' that 'many women' would 'fail', and when 'we must not be too nice about the occupations taken in default', this was not something which ought to be actively promoted. The Exhibition should, instead, be used to elevate the home, and thereby encourage women to reject their 'unhealthy preference' for 'the work of men in and out of factories in opposition to domestic training'. Instead, the Exhibition tried to formulate a new genteel image for factory work, not without some problems in negotiating middle-class mores, and not without some opposition from both from radical and bourgeois men.

In the 1880s the manufacturing sector in NSW was small but increasing in social significance. In 1886 there were 3,694 manufactories employing 45,783 people, compared to 2,770 employing 45,773 in Victoria. Coghlan noted that 'New South Wales cannot be considered an important manufacturing country'.103 But as Shirley Fitzgerald explains, this argument represented an attempt to promote an image of the colony in relationship to the Old World:

Urbanization, to nineteenth-century observers still a new and often fearful development, made 'sense' in Britain, where it went hand in hand with industrialization, but the emergence of a city the size and dominance of Sydney was more difficult to explain. It could not be justified by those theorists and practical merchants who argued that New South Wales 'correct' place in the world was within a trading empire. In this schema, Sydney was not supposed to manufacture things. It was meant to be an administrative centre and trading entrepot for channelling raw materials to Britain and receiving manufactured goods in exchange.104

102 Echo, 25 October 1887, p. 4.
104 Fitzgerald, Rising Damp, p. 143.
The bulk of genteel colonists' wealth rested on primary production or the sale of imported merchandise. A new breed of self-made men were forging their own empires on producing commodities in the colony itself. Concerns about class fluidity, urban life, and colonial advancement and self-sufficiency were all compressed into debates over manufacturing. Denial of the growing manufacturing sector manifested itself in an unwillingness to regulate factories. Fear of it, combined with cross-class alliances founded on the basis of male interest, was represented in attitudes to female factory work.

While the numbers of women working in factories in the 1880s was rising, they were still relatively small compared to their other occupations. In 1888 the NSW Government Statistician, T. A. Coghlan, reviewing the figures for the previous year, noted with palpable 'satisfaction' that 'the number of women employed in factories and works had not increased at the same rapid rate as male employés'. Between 1877 and 1887, there had been an increase in female hands of only 507, to 3,724. His delight was to be short lived. In 1888 Coghlan counted 3,106 manufactories or works, employing a total of a total of 45,564 people, of whom 4,265 were women. In the space of one year, another 500, the same number who had joined in the previous ten years, took up factory work. By 1891 the total figure was nearly 7,000. Such statistics threatened colonial identity not only in the manner outlined by Fitzgerald, but as growing evidence of women working beyond the domestic sphere. Proof of the colony's advancement and refinement rested on the idea that in a civilised society women were not compelled to work in the public sphere for pay, but remained at home, whether in domestic service or conspicuous leisure.

This relationship between factory work and domestic work has been the subject of feminist analysis in Australia for more than twenty-five years. Beverley Kingston set the agenda for the discussion of factory work in her 1975 book My Wife, My

105 Davison, The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne, ch. 2.
106 Coghlan, Wealth and Progress of New South Wales 1887-8, p. 396.
108 Kingston, My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann, p. 60.
Daughter and Poor Mary Ann. The title of the chapter devoted to manufacturing signalled her argument: it was called 'The freedom of the factory'. Kingston argued that factory work was an appealing alternative to domestic work for many women. Factory work 'seemed neither demeaning nor demoralising and offered some choice in such areas as the old vexed question of mistress-servant relations.' The assumptions made by men about the effect of bad conditions on women operatives were, argued Kingston, based on an illusory image of the domestic sphere. Factories were represented as noisy, dirty, dusty and poorly ventilated. So, she suggests, were many homes. Factory work required long hours of monotonous work, but housework too was hot, boring and exhausting. The 'great attractions' of the factory were the company it provided at work, the sense of being in adversity with one's fellow sufferers, the regulated and relatively short hours, and the relatively generous pay. All this, the companionship, the free evenings and weekends and the pay packet, added up to a kind of freedom quite unknown to any housewife or girl in service.

Kingston traces fears about the increasing numbers of factory girls to 'the problem of maintaining the standards of living of the middle classes, and therefore keeping up the levels of civilisation already established in the society.' In Kingston's view, despite the social concern about women's factory work, it prevailed because the capitalist economy benefited from the change. The servant girls' former mistresses were forced to work harder and install expensive machinery where once Mary Ann's had done the work, while Mary Ann herself became a vital part of the economy in the industrial process before departing to fulfil her natural function as a mother, housewife, consumer and general slavey in the name of the nuclear family.

Kingston identified a clear trend across manufacturing and pointed out the connection between middle-class and working class women's domestic labour, as well as the importance of both of these factors to colonial identity.

Raelene Frances' analysis of women's factory work in Victoria in the period 1880-1939 adds considerable nuance to our understanding of how change occurred in different industries, and suggests a more complex interaction between capital and labour as the cause of that change. Frances's research revealed that women were a

109 Kingston, My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann, ch. 4.
110 Kingston, My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann, p. 58.
112 Kingston, My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann, pp. 59-60.
113 Kingston, My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann, p. 60.
'pool of potential wage earners who can be provided to the labour market under certain circumstances', rather than just girls enjoying the freedom of working prior to marriage. Frances stressed that levels of female workforce participation need to be explained by 'shifting requirements for the labour of women (both married and unmarried, mothers or not) as unpaid labourers in the home.' As she put it:

patterns of fertility, shifts in household production and domestic technology, and fluctuating male incomes determine whether a woman's labour is of more value to the household unit in the home of in the workforce. And the decision for women to enter paid work outside the home is mediated by the strength of ideological prescriptions about 'woman's place'.

Frances's work points to the importance of seeing housework and paid work in a dynamic relationship with one another, and on identifying the gender demarcations of and within specific types of manufacturing. Both Frances' and Kingston's work contribute to an understanding of how the EWI displayed women's factory work.

The organisers of the EWI chose to show factory work that was already feminised, and that was compatible with their ideas about genteel femininity and emphasis on female productivity. There was no canning or onion peeling or other unpleasant factory work on show. This was partly because these were activities that couldn't be shown away from the big works, but also because the Exhibition was heavily promoting domestic industry, especially to working class women. Jam making and pickling were shown as the skills of good housewives, who made their own foods rather than buying them pre-prepared. As it was reported in the Englishwoman's Review, care was taken that the department should highlight 'domestic not manufacturing industries; for instance, the bread must be hand-made and the preference was given where home-made yeast was used, and the butter made from cream not separated by machinery.

The factory work that was displayed was confined to occupations already designated 'feminine'. Frances shows that the 'feminisation' of industry did not mean that women were moving into 'male' occupations. Rather the increased proportion of

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114 Frances, Politics of Work, p. 10.
115 For Catherine Helen Spence's similar views on this subject see Magarey, Unbridling the Tongues of Women, pp. 169-70.
women in printing, cardboard box-making and bootmaking (three types of work represented by living exhibits at the EWI) reflected ‘expansion in established women’s occupations.'\textsuperscript{117} Women had access to these employments exactly because they extended women’s domestic skills and duties into the public sphere, thus reinforcing the gender divide. As Lord Carrington stated at the opening ceremony, the Exhibition would ‘do much towards encouraging and making known the several modes of employment which are peculiarly within women’s province, and will tend to eradicate the prevailing impression that there is any desire to interfere with the work of men, or to compete with them in their occupations.'\textsuperscript{118}

Having identified the specific types of work to be displayed, the organisers then utilised a well-recognised paradigm of the exhibition form, the living exhibit, to show them. Unlike the Great Exhibition of Thomas Richards’ description, the EWI could have been mistaken, at least in part, for a factory. One newspaper described the Mechanical Work Department of the EWI as an 'exhibition in itself'.\textsuperscript{119} This was testament not only to its comprehensiveness but to its display style. What set it apart from the rest of the Exhibition was its combination of static displays with living exhibits. The cry of the critical press that it was unable to find ‘real working women’ at the Exhibition was belied by the actual presence, every day the Exhibition was open, of women rolling cigars, binding books and making paper bags. Factory girls were lifted from the factory floor to the floor of the Exhibition. Boots were sewn and hair dressed. Tobacco packing was 'practically explained' by the presence of several workers. The Government Printing Office allowed several of its women employees to be shown embossing and sewing books, while Dahms and Co., jewellers, supplied a girl to cut out silver flannel flowers for brooches and pins. Typists, eager to show off their new skill, pounded out the latest menus for the dining room. Aboriginal women from La Perouse made shellwork boxes.

\textsuperscript{117} Frances, Politics of Work. p. 182.
\textsuperscript{118} Echo, 3 October 1888, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{119} Echo, 4 October 1888, p. 2.
These activities differed from the other displays in several significant respects. Cases of needlework or vases of cut flowers represented the results of women’s labour, and symbolised the women who made them. The blind girls weaving baskets were themselves exhibits, and by conducting their work before an audience, they revealed the processes that lay behind the finished product. Such displays were unlike the cooking or ambulance work demonstrations, because the workers did not actively engage with the audience. They were expected to carry on as if the crowd was not there. Lady waitresses were under similar scrutiny, but, as the press so perceptively pointed out, everyone knew they were only acting the part, and the player-cooks in the EWI kitchen were only glimpsed as one ascended the stairs. The dubious honour of being a human exhibit, constantly and impersonally under the visitors’ gaze, was reserved only for some: for typists and stenographers, the blind, Aboriginal women, and factory girls.

We can only imagine what it must have felt like to be an exhibit. There are no surviving accounts from the women’s perspectives, nor any hints of what they might have experienced from the published sources. It is not hard to speculate that, added to the monotony and concentration required in the work itself, being on constant view must have been stressful and confronting, even while it was, possibly, novel relief from the routine of an ordinary work day. The Exhibition opened at 11.30 am and closed at 10 pm, but women employees worked only until their normal knock-off time. As the *Daily Telegraph* reported: ‘[t]he department of mechanical industries ... bids fair to be, next to the art collection, the most popular in the exhibition. All day long throngs of people congregate before the different industries in active operation, but with the evening the operators retire, and the public desert the subdivision.’

The real live women workers were obviously a great attraction. In the planning stage the organisers could have been confident this would be the case. Audiences were already familiar with ‘living exhibits’. The display of people stretched back into antiquity. The display of women workers had antecedents at international exhibitions

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120 *Daily Telegraph*, 5 October 1888, p. 6.
from the middle of the nineteenth century. There is a growing literature in exhibition history critical of the display of 'othered races', the parading of colonial peoples as oddities and possessions, and the popular amusement afforded by recreated Cairo streets and Javanese villages.\textsuperscript{121} Less attention has been paid to another type of living exhibit: the woman machinist. Firms like the Singer Sewing Machine Company employed women to work their machines at exhibitions and trade fairs. Their aim was not only to show off the machines, but to occupy husbands while wives were convinced of the efficiency, simplicity and economy of the machine [Figure 3.8].\textsuperscript{122} Such a strategy recognised both the authority of the woman consumer, and the benefits of using pretty women to attract and keep men's attention -- particularly bored men. It also reveals the extent to which women who appeared at exhibitions, like women who appeared at bazaars, were sexualised and commodified [Figure 3.9].

For the women organisers of the EWI, using living exhibits was a deal with the devil. While they exposed otherwise hidden and unknown aspects of women's work, they also exposed women themselves to a strong, interrogative, and at times sexual gaze. Living exhibits existed in a dangerous zone between the public and the private, between the personal and the symbolic. Was it possible to increase or prove the dignity of women's labour by putting women in a potentially undignified position as a public spectacle? Male exhibition organisers had always done it, to women and to other racial groups. What did it mean for women to do this to other women? These are extremely difficult questions to answer. There is little evidence to suggest whether the use of living exhibits was finally deemed a successful strategy by the organisers. One thing that can be said is that it was not used the next time many of the same women held an exhibition of women's work. The Woman's Work Exhibition of 1892 did not feature living exhibits of factory girls. Instead the members of the newly-established Factory Girls' Club sent examples of decorative mosaic work, letting the products of their labours speak for them, as was already the case for genteel women.

\textsuperscript{121} Mitchell, 'The world as exhibition', pp. 217-36; Rydell, All the World's a Fair, pp. 55-68, 167-82.
\textsuperscript{122} Webber, Romancing the Machine, pp. 243-4.
The telling exception to this was the experience of Aboriginal women. As has been noted, the paradigm of 'living exhibits' at international exhibitions had been set by displays of 'ethered' races. The superiority of Western civilisation was 'confirmed' when contrasted with the display of 'primitive' peoples in ethnographic buildings and mock villages. The organisers of the EWI gave this genre a slight twist. Aboriginal women's work from the mission at La Perouse was included to enhance the Exhibition's universalism. Their shellwork and weaving was displayed alongside the work of white women. The shellwork conveyed a complex set of meanings on behalf of its makers which were probably lost on the white audience [Figure 3.10]. As Ann Stephen has noted, shellwork represented Aboriginal women's negotiation of mission life and innovative efforts to both adapt and maintain their cultural life. It combined traditional creative skills and new crafts encouraged by missionaries as a way of 'civilising' the people and raising money through the sale of souvenirs. Thus it represented Aboriginal people's agency, albeit limited, in the face of the repression of their culture.\(^{123}\)

The display of more obviously 'traditional' indigenous crafts added to the organisers' argument that women's work had had status in pre-industrial times and in 'primitive' societies. The Aboriginal women who had contributed the exhibits also appeared at the Exhibition as visitors and living exhibits. As the *Sydney Mail* described it:

> considerable amusement was caused by the arrival of a number of native women from Botany who brought a collection of baskets for sale; they were delighted at contributing a portion of their work to the show and will make more baskets. Many people will be glad to buy the work to encourage the poor women, apart from the use they will find for the baskets.\(^{124}\)

While factory girls were absorbed into the overall femininity of the Exhibition, and while Aboriginal women's work was embraced as part of the display of women's work, Aboriginal women themselves remained significantly separated from the white men and women who visited the EWI. Whereas in 1893 the display of factory girls

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\(^{124}\) *Sydney Mail*, 6 October 1888, p. 722.
was not repeated, the use of Aboriginal women as 'living exhibits' was, showing the
shifting limits of 'dignity' and 'sisterhood' implicit in the two displays.

Overall, living exhibits helped set up a contrast between past and present, old
and new. They were direct evidence of skill and competence, they reduced the
invisibility of the work of women in factories, and proved that such work was not
necessarily grubby and hard. They also added colour and excitement and made the
Exhibition more attractive and interesting, especially to male visitors.

The use of living exhibits says much about the attitude of the organisers to their
audience, especially the male audience. The primary audience for the Exhibition was
women of all classes, who all, it was suggested, had something to learn from the
show. But men were also a sought-after audience. After all, they were the ones who
were most ignorant of women's work and who had the most influence if women's
position or access to employment was to be raised or improved. Living exhibits were
highly attractive to visitors, in more ways than one. To the already captured female
audience, they provided a fascinating study in the processes of bootmaking or cigarette
rolling, whether as a consumer, who saw how goods were made, or as a potential
worker, who could see what the work involved. To the male visitor they held the
attention in a way no showcase of gossamer lace or plain-sewn aprons ever could.
Here was action and production, pretty girls working busily. Living exhibits created
the potential both for genuine interest and simple leering, in accordance with the bazaar
trope which forever haunted the women's exhibition.

Male commentators on the Exhibition made much of the wonderment and
unfamiliarity of the male visitor to this exclusively feminine world, and mocked the
apparent irrelevance of man it seemed to imply. 'Viator' in the Sydney Morning Herald
commented that '[m]uch of the Exhibition consists of matters of which the masculine
mind is incapable of judging, and before which it stands to a great extent helpless; but
the effect of the whole is dazzling.'125 Cartoons mocked the perils for male pride and
independence of attending the Exhibition, indeed the threat to masculinity itself of such

125 Sydney Morning Herald, 3 October 1888, p. 5.
assertions of female strength [Figure 3.11]. The brow-beaten image of Mr Henry Peck was matched by the husband disappearing under a pile of feminine purchases, or the eligible bachelor withering under the matrimonial eye of his beau. Yet the same set of cartoons in the Tribune showed a young gentleman's flirtatious appreciation of a lady waitress. As it was at the bazaar, man's importance and superiority was reinforced and enhanced by the power of the male gaze. As the Bulletin put it 'the women hang round and gloat ... all day. For a man there is nothing whatever of attraction except the girls.'

The differences between the way that men and women saw the show is nicely summarised by the reception accorded an exhibit sent by Queen Victoria to the EWI. It was one of the attractions the women gloated over most: 'a pair of cream-coloured corsets' worn by the Queen on her wedding day. 'A properly-authenticated duplicate of these sacred articles', noted the Bulletin, 'together with plan and specification of the same, is now on view; admission, 1s.' The press could not help making fun, especially as a way of mocking the pretensions of Sydney 'society'. The Evening News, in an article headed 'More Royal Patronage', described the effect on two male reporters of being shown these particular items by a 'lady standing very high in Sydney fashionable circles'. Having at first missed the 'precious loan' amongst exhibits which seemed not 'in the least regal', the journalists returned to the lady and asked her to point out the object in particular.

A reporter is not, as a rule, very sensitive, but still he has feelings; and, to say the least of it, the sight which met the two in question was a novel one. Fancy, then, her most gracious Majesty has, in a burst of wild and extravagant good nature, allowed her Australian children the opportunity of gazing upon a pair of corsets, which have in their time actually supported her royal frame.

The reporters 'got out their implements to write a graphic description, but their hearts failed them'. As they left the building, 'one of them was overheard saying to his friend in distress,'

'I'll give that job best, old chappie; but I'll bet drinks they are more than 19in round the waist.'

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126 Tribune, 12 October 1888, p. 9.
Here, the *Evening News* played up the shocking effect on men of seeing the private garments of the most public woman in the Empire on display at an exhibition, in order to poke fun at the worship of such objects by 'society ladies'. The interplay between the apparent ordinariness of the corsets and their reflected importance, and between intimacy and display, provoked in the reporters an almost feminine resort to feeling and weakness, only salvaged by a quick exit and a reference to drinking and betting. But beyond the bazaar-like emasculation which might result from exposure to feminine matters, the joke also revealed the different gendered ways of viewing the exhibit. Beyond their aura of royalty, the corsets had been shown to impress on colonial ladies the quality of the processes that created them. They were meant to be inspected with a view to the stitching and shaping, the design and its execution. The women of Sydney understood Victoria's gift as it was intended. They were on a level of communication with the Queen, in ways that completely eluded her masculine subjects. In the name of showing the skill and quality of women's work, the organisers exposed even the undergarments of the most powerful woman in the world. All the men could see was the invisible body that had once filled them.

Conclusion

The definition of 'women's work' in any historical period has significant political ramifications. Could, as was claimed at the EWI in 1888, one term, 'women's work', embrace the woman in her kitchen making jam, and the woman peeling fruit at the factory? The Exhibition's diverse range of exhibits and attempts to redefine women's labour in a dignified and positive light represented an effort on the part of genteel women to reach across the gulf of class to all women's mutual benefit. But the resulting display revealed the enormous gap between industrious and industrial women, and their very different experiences of being hidden and being exposed.

Genteel women felt the invisibility of their hidden talents and their hidden work keenly. They used the Exhibition to reveal women's contributions, both paid and unpaid, tangible and intangible, to the young colony. But in its promotion of women's
productive role, the EWI women's palace became a stage, and typists, factory workers, blind girls, and Aboriginal women, were, like Vashti, made to dance upon it. Industrial women were thereby exposed to the gaze of visitors just as they were exposed, in a position of vulnerability and disadvantage, to the vicissitudes of the colonial economy and the demands of colonial capitalism. Press commentators were not convinced that women as a sex were actually in a position of industrial inequality, relying on the evolution of the market to resolve the 'problem' of women's labour.

The organisers' idealised goal to redefine women's work was realisable through the Exhibition, but did not prove readily applicable elsewhere. The EWI spoke powerfully to the class of women who had imagined and created it, but less so to men and to women more directly engaged in paid or professional employment. To women who had become 'one of the many myriads of human atoms struggling for life in the eddyingds of the great vortex of trade', it represented a world far removed from their everyday experience.

The EWI promoted the idea that women's work would be expanded and enhanced by the femininity of its agents. Another emerging strain of feminism suggested that if women were truly to succeed in the workforce they would need to give up a sense of being women in order to advance. Florence Walsh wrote later in the Sydney Quarterly Magazine that the 'imperative outcome of higher education' was 'the contest of the world...competition between the world's workers'.

What is it that women aim at in widening their career? Is it not freedom? The intellectual mastery and control that have made men free...? To realize this it will be necessary to resign all ideas of rights and privileges, and work as men work. They must expect no concessions, but await the award of merit.130

We should also ask what 'real emancipation' meant, and who was receiving its greatest benefits. We need to contrast the organisers' longing for a 'wider sphere of usefulness' with criticisms of the Exhibition like that made in the Australian Radical, which argued that the best evidence of what was meant by 'extending the sphere of woman and admitting her to the larger share of the toil' was 'the mills, mines and

130 Florence Walsh, 'The present position of women', Sydney Quarterly Magazine, September 1891, p. 188.
factories of the world' where women worked for 'starvation' wages.\textsuperscript{131} The extent to which even the most radical claims of the Exhibition reinforced the sexual and class divisions of labour exposes the fundamental interaction of class and gender at play in the development of colonial feminism.

\textsuperscript{131} Australian Radical, 20 October 1888, p. 1.
Figure 3.1

Jane Bailey, Sampler, 1830.
Third prize certificate, Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair, Sydney 1888, illustrating the Exhibition's seven departments. This certificate was won by Laura Begent, of the Deaf and Dumb Institute, for specimens of typewriting. Collection of Martha Sear.
A cooking demonstration by Mrs Ramsay-Whiteside.
From the *Illustrated Sydney News*, 20 March 1880, p. 4.
The Women's Exhibition: Distribution of Prizes

Cartoon by Hop, from the Bulletin, 3 November 1888, p. 10.
Doll dressed by the children of the Protestant Diakenie Orphanage. Amsterdam in miniature versions of the clothing worn by the inmates of the home. This doll was exhibited, along with other examples of the children's needlework, knitting and lace, at the Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair, Sydney 1888. Collection of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, accession number H12.
Doll dressed by Kate Brown, 7 years, of Waratah Public School. This doll won Kate Brown silver medals at the Newcastle Exhibition of Women's Industries and the Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair, Sydney 1888. Collection of the Newcastle Historical Society.
"The Caligraph"
TRIUMPHANT.

First awarded at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition, 1888.
The following testimonial has been written by Mrs. Arnitage, the manager of the
Ladies' Typewriting Association,
LIYNDHURST CHAMBERS, ELIZABETH ST.
A Caligraph operator who uses the 'model', for finished work and best work, before the Judges of the Women's
Industrial Exhibition.

Dear Sir,—It gives me great pleasure to testify to the
many merits of the Caligraph Typewriter with regard to
speed and reliability. I have had a No. 2 Machine
on which I write this letter, and which I bought from
you on my arrival in Australia, in constant use for the
last 18 months, and it has borne the strain of an eminently
productive quantity of work, without giving any trouble.
I have also had experience with a number of these instru-
ments, both here and in England, and have always found
them entirely satisfactory, both to myself and also to
those who became purchasers through me. I am not at
all surprised to hear that you have sold a great number
of Caligraphs since you started your Agency, knowing as
I do the great value and possibilities of these beautiful
machines, which only require a trial to be appreciated.
Wishing you all success in the large field I remain,
yours very truly,
DORA E. ARNITAGE.

Mr. Jas. Cunningham, Agent for the Caligraph,
LIYNDHURST CHAMBERS, ELIZABETH ST., SYDNEY.

LADIES' Type-writing Association.
Manager,—Mrs. ARNITAGE.
LIYNDHURST CHAMBERS, ELIZABETH ST., SYDNEY.
Reg'l, Medical, and Laboratory Copying—a specialty.
Copies sent out by day or leave. Type-writing
and Short-hand Teaching. Prior list and all
information given on application.

Both the Ladies' Typewriting Association and Mr Jas. Cunningham, Sydney agent
for the Caligraph typewriter, used the success of the typewriting display at the
Exhibition of Women's Industries to advertise their services in the years following
1888.

From the Dawn, July 1889, p. 30.
Wax cows and kangaroos made by Mary Gore, one of the Gore sisters of Armidale who exhibited their work at numerous shows and exhibitions, including the Sydney International Exhibition 1879, the Melbourne Centennial International Exhibition 1888, the Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair, Sydney 1888, the Woman's Work Exhibition, Sydney 1892 and the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893.

The Singer Sewing Machine Company's exhibit at the Sydney International Exhibition 1879, showing women demonstrating the machines.
From the Sydney Mail, 1 November 1879, p. 749.
'A watch on the Waltham Watch Company's operators' at the Centennial International Exhibition, Philadelphia 1876.
From Daisy Shortcut and Arry O'Pagus, One Hundred Years a Republic: Our Show, A Humorous Account of the International Exposition in Honor of the Centennial Anniversary of American Independence, From Inception to Completion, Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, Philadelphia, 1876, p. 25.
Shellwork made by Mrs Cruise, wife of the minister at the La Perouse Aboriginal community in the twentieth century. Work similar to this was made by Aboriginal people at the La Perouse Mission from the late nineteenth century, and exhibited at the Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair, Sydney 1888.

'At the Women's Exhibition'.
From the Tribune, 12 October 1888, p. 9.
Chapter 4
Competition and emulation: Femininity and class at the Exhibition of Women's Industries

In such common neutral ground as an exhibition supplies, are found the best materials for perfecting legitimate aspirations, and developing those womanly traits that are wont to rust from lack of sympathy or ignorance of their importance - sympathy and kindliness. ... While from the friendly rivalry and help given so freely, there must spring an esprit de corps which will weld together in common accord the diverse classes out of which our social communion grows.¹

M. L. Manning, from 'The industrial employment of women: thoughts suggested by the recent exhibitions of women's work in Melbourne and Sydney', 1888.

The public, which is never slow to discriminate between true and sham philanthropy, has evidently gauged the Women's Industrial Exhibition at its true value - a movement not so much for the benefit of deserving poor women as for the glorification of undeserving rich ones.²

Evening News, 4 October 1888.

Beyond the immediate noise of the conflicts that raged in connection with the EWI we can hear distant rumble of bigger questions, of the central place of competition in a liberal democratic free market economy: of men and women competing for jobs, of women competing with women for meagre wages and limited choices, of competing claims for a voice in an emerging nation. This is the rhetoric of competition fused with the language of gender, class and nation: of 'merit', 'fairness', 'freedom', 'progress', 'weakness' and 'strength'. How the EWI would negotiate the paradox of 'competition' is the subject of this chapter.

The Exhibition of Women's Industries not only displayed women's work, it encouraged competition in it. Exhibitors became competitors, work was measured and judged, and prizes were awarded. Combining genteel femininity and competition

¹ Manning, 'The industrial employment of women', pp. 405-11.
² Evening News, 4 October 1888, p. 4.
created a potential ideological contradiction. Where the Exhibition promoted sisterly sympathy, the battle to be the best encouraged competitiveness and rivalry. Where the Exhibition idealised solidarity, competition advocated individualism. Where the Exhibition made women's work symbolic, the competitions personalised it. Where the Exhibition suggested selflessness, competition implied self-interest and personal investment. Where the Exhibition glorified the everyday, the common, and the universal, competition introduced the elements of quality, 'specialness', superiority and discrimination.

At the EWI words like competition, distinction and discrimination carried dual meanings. On the one hand they represented the harnessing of apparently neutral concepts to the cause of promoting women's work. On the other they connected the Exhibition to deeper issues of social status and class hierarchy. Competition was an attempt to objectively measure and value women's skill, to prove its quality as well as its diversity. Using competition to establish the excellence of women's work required that all women compete from a position of equality. This meant that the organisers had to confront the material differences between women in the colony, and create rules and regulations that neutralised (temporarily) the practical inequalities of class, as well as differing standards of training and professionalism. But in recognising and seeking to diminish these inequalities the organisers drew attention to class, and unwittingly exposed their own aspirations to social authority. Tied to the idea of competition was the notion of emulation. It was earnestly hoped by the organisers that the Exhibition would generalise respectability and encourage working class women to embrace genteel habits. At the opening of the Exhibition Lady Darley stated that one of the organisers' aims was to 'promote the usefulness of women, by opening new sources of occupation for them, and by strengthening the bonds which should unite the people in one great family.' But while it was intended as a means to create social harmony, the Exhibition was itself a platform for the social climbing of Sydney's lesser gentry, and as such it became a site of struggle for social superiority.

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3 Sydney Morning Herald, 3 October 1888, p. 6.
The EWI's competitions put women on display as competitors as well as workers, managers as well as ladies. Tensions between organisers and the competitors were at times explosive. The introduction of competition into the exhibition opened up a potential for personal rivalries and jealousies which threatened to overwhelm the higher messages of the display. Private disagreements which spilled over into the columns of colonial newspapers jeopardised the public image of the EWI as a serene woman's world, as well as the organisers' claims to managerial competence and efficiency.

The EWI's emphasis on competition meant the rivalries that marked the public world entered even the sacred sphere of the home. The Domestic Industries Department opened up competition in areas considered central to women's identity and role. As the space at the core of the construction of femininity, domesticity needed to be both bolstered and extended by advocates of women's increased involvement in the public sphere. But the home, as the press took delight in pointing out, was also the site of the production of class identity, a field of battle in the social competition over status and authority. It proved difficult ground upon which to build claims about the universality of women's work.

In October 1888 the Sydney Tribune published a page of cartoons about the Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair [Figure 4.1]. The central image depicted 'Mrs Monte' of Balmain, first prize winner in the home-made jam section of the Exhibition, complaining to the 'Lady in charge' about being classed as a 'Cottager' when she lives in a terrace. The 'Lady in charge' responds that it was not so much the type of house which defined a 'Cottager', but her suburb of residence. "'[Y]ou live at Balmain['], she replies, ['"]to be admissible for the ladies class you must reside in an Eastern Suburb"".

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'Mrs Monte' of Balmain was no invention of the Tribune's cartoonist.\(5\) The 'Lady in charge' was a thinly-disguised caricature of Mrs Carl Fischer, music and drama critic for the Sydney Mail, and delegate for the Domestic Industries Department. As organiser of the Exhibition's jam-making competition she had separated the work of 'cottagers' from that of more affluent women. 'This course was adopted' claimed the Sydney Morning Herald, 'because it was thought that it would be scarcely fair to place them on an equality because of the advantage which the more wealthy class would have in securing the most modern appliances for preserving purposes'.\(6\) The rest of the NSW press did not agree. It believed the separation had been made on the basis of social distinction rather than access to technology or resources. Mrs Carl Fischer's decision became symbolic of a larger critique of the Exhibition organisers' attitudes to working women.

Criticism of the EWI in the NSW press was strong and sustained. At the Exhibition's closing dinner Lord Carrington acknowledged the 'severe criticism' the organisers had received for their efforts.\(7\) Papers of all political persuasions and social opinions lent their voices to a cacophony of faultfinding and opprobrium, most of which focused on the Exhibition's supposed class bias.\(8\) The 'bazaar' in Prince Alfred

\(5\) See EWI, Catalogue, p. 63; Echo, 9 October 1888, p. 4; Sydney Morning Herald, 8 September 1888, p. 3.

\(6\) Sydney Morning Herald, 3 October 1888, p. 6.

\(7\) Sydney Morning Herald, 25 October 1888, p. 7.

\(8\) Only one paper was consistently supportive. From the very beginning of the enterprise, the Sydney Morning Herald presented the EWI in a positive light. It published reports of nearly every meeting held in connection with the exhibition, as well as advertisements, longer articles, and leaders which initially expressed approval and encouragement, and later defended the display against the charges of other papers. This, no doubt, was primarily the result of the influence of the owner of the paper, Mr J. R. Fairfax, who was a member of the Executive Committee of the Queen's Fund, and whose wife was a member of the Executive Committee of the Exhibition, as well as being delegate for the Fine Arts Department. As well, Mrs Curnow, the wife of Herald editor William Curnow, was a member of the General Committee, and Mrs Carl Fischer, one of the honorary secretaries of the EWI and delegate for the domestic industries department, had been appointed as Australia's first women music and drama critic by the Herald in 1879, a position she held until her death in 1896. See Clarke, Pen Portraits, pp. 116-8. But there were also other more general reasons why the Sydney Morning Herald might have offered support. The Herald had a history of publishing the work of women writers, including Anna Blackwell and Louisa Atkinson, see Clarke, Pen Portraits, pp. 4, 108-112. Emily Manning, 'Australie', contributed regularly to the Herald on a wide range of subjects for twenty years from 1870. It is to her that Patricia Clarke attributes the role of principal journalist on the paper's 'Women's Column', which began in 1888. The column first appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on 4 January 1888, and continued weekly until 1890, when it became less regular. Clarke, Pen Portraits, pp. 113-6. A connection to the Exhibition committee did not, however, necessarily make a paper fully supportive. Lucinda Gullett, also a member of the General Committee of the EWI, was the wife of Henry Gullett, joint editor of the Daily Telegraph, which published some of the most scathing
Park could in no way be regarded as an exhibition of women's industries, argued the

*Evening News*, 'except in the successful show of insufferable snobbery'.

A woman's industrial exhibition, to succeed, should be ... to a large extent, carried
out by those who have some claim to be recognised as belonging to the industrial
classes.

Instead, '[a]ll connected with such classes have been carefully excluded, and the
whole undertaking has been selfishly monopolised by society butterflies of the most
pronounced jingo breed'.9 The *News* lamented that 'a splendid opportunity of a truly
useful purpose', to represent the lives of 'industrial women', had been 'frittered
away'.10 The paper accused the genteel lady organisers of having a superficial and
superior attitude to the women they claimed to be helping. It was apparent, said the
author, 'that the whole affair is got up for the amusement and self-glorification of a
few, a clique ... of colonial uppertendum.'

These people would be shocked, not to say deeply insulted, at being suspected of
having anything in common with the women of Australia, especially the industrial
women. They are made, if not of sterner stuff, at least of superfine material, and not
of the common clay.

The *Daily Telegraph* described how the display was being 'robbed of its genuine
character by the interference of an officious snobbery which utterly spoils the true
significance and effect of the undertaking.'

*We hear of two classes of exhibits, one composed of the work of "ladies" and the
other of the handicraft of "artisans' wives" and "sich like". It must not be understood
that Mrs Smythe, the wife of the rich shopkeeper, condescends to exhibit on equal
terms with Mrs Smith, whose husband drives the dray.*11

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attacks on the Exhibition outside the pages of the *Bulletin*, see Clarke, *Pen Portraits*, pp. 207-10.
This may have deeper implications. Lucinda Gullett was the driving force behind the Women's
Literary Society and her home was a popular meeting place for intellectuals. She encouraged women
to take up journalism as a career, and worked at the *Daily Telegraph* beside Mrs Julian Ashton, later
ejected from the Womanhood Suffrage League. Gullett appears, like Ashton, to have held quite radical
opinions on some issues. It may well be the case that the Gulletts were expressing the views of a
section of the EWI committee which felt the elitist nature of the Exhibition did detract from its
message.

9 *Evening News*, 4 October 1888, p. 4.
10 In a leader entitled 'The Failure in the Park', the *Evening News* made its editorial position clear.
'To call the nondescript show in Prince Alfred Park an Exhibition of Women's Industries is to give it
a name and character it is not entitled to bear. It is, in fact, a misnomer.' At the 'so-called Exhibition
of Women's Industries', the leader argued, there were 'number of articles, more or less pretty, and not
wholly useless' displayed in such a way 'so that no sacrilegious eye belonging to the common people
may look upon their alleged beauties'. As well, the show included 'a few things useful in their places',
such as mangles and tables, which were 'chiefly the product of the handicraft of the male sex'. *Evening
News*, 11 October 1888, p. 4.
11 *Daily Telegraph*, 6 October 1888, p. 4.
The spirit of paltry snobbish patronage', it concluded, 'pervades the affair to a degree hovering between the offensive and the ridiculous'.

A week later, the editor of the Australian Star responded to these 'harsh criticisms' in a leader on the Exhibition. 'What', it asked, 'has the Committee of Management of the Women's Industries Exhibition done to the Daily Telegraph?'

If our friends up the street are unable to speak a good word for the exhibition, they might refrain from saying anything evil. Everybody knows that there are one or two female snobs on the committee, but then these objectionable persons manage to force themselves into every movement that is patronised by vice-royalty, and a good cause should not be condemned because these social pests are connected therewith.

The Star sought to dissociate the 'snobs' clamouring for a position in Society, from the 'cause' of the Exhibition, which, it inferred, was classless and intrinsically worthy. Ironically, it was the Australian Star which had pointed to the class inconsistency in the first place. On the day after the EWI opened, its leader was titled 'CASTE IN THE EXHIBITION'.

In responding to the display the critical press were less concerned with the idea of women working, than with what they believed was the arrogance and ignorance of upper-class women in identifying themselves with work and with workers. What emerged from the pages of the newspapers was a contest over who could rightly claim the ideological power of 'work'. The 'lady' came under intense criticism for being a 'sham', while the 'woman worker' emerged as the embodiment of 'true womanhood'.

The Evening News complained that the Exhibition seemed 'to be less an exhibition of women's industry than of women's vanity and snobbery':

from the moment the project---in itself a laudable one---was mooted, it was fastened on to by society hangers-on as a medium for the exercise of cheap benevolence; and accordingly we have a whole troop of Darling Point and other fashionable dames and damsels masquerading as philanthropists in the character of amateur shopkeepers.

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12 These attacks are especially marked when one considers, as Susan Sheridan has pointed out, that the Telegraph was castigated by the Bulletin for being a 'champion of the weaker sex'. See Susan Sheridan, 'Louisa Lawson, Miles Franklin and feminist writing, 1888-1901', Australian Feminist Studies, nos. 7 & 8, Summer 1988, p. 33.

13 Australian Star, 13 October 1888, p.4.

14 While the Queen's Fund should 'command the support of all sects, parties, and classes without distinction', it was impossible that the 'so-called Women's Industrial Exhibition' could command the 'sympathy of the general public', when it had been 'handicapped ... with the incubus of such exclusiveness and snobbery.' Evening News, 4 October 1888, p. 4.

15 Evening News, 4 October 1888, p. 4.
The metaphor of masquerade was a common one. As one correspondent put it in the *Evening News*, 'when "ladies" condescend to do the work of women they should for the nonce drop the "lady".'

No doubt it is very kind of these people to come down to the level of a hard working girl in an afternoon tea shop, but it is only acting, and very bad acting. Next time I hope more women will have to do with an Exhibition of Women's Industry.\(^\text{16}\)

'There is a great deal of make-believe about the whole affair' the *News* commented in an editorial:

There is a pretence of interest in the "common women," who, by the way, can and do work, and who wonderfully seek for the display of women's industries, of which they have heard so much, and are able to see so little.

Championing 'women workers' as 'real women', the leader criticised the women organisers for displaying a patronising attitude towards them.\(^\text{17}\) The greater amount of evidence for this 'condescension' came from publicity about the way the exhibits of poorer women had been separated from those of a higher social rank. 'There is a war in the women's camp at Prince Alfred Park', reported the Goulburn *Herald*, '[p]lries and puddings made by "swelldom" have been allotted the place of honour, whilst Mrs Jones' jams and Mrs Muggins' sauces and preserves have been socially tabooed, marked as coming from working hands.'\(^\text{18}\) 'This', claimed the *Australian Star*, was 'carrying out the caste law with a vengeance'.\(^\text{19}\)

The ultimate 'proof' of the 'ridiculousness' and 'offensiveness' of upper-class femininity came in the Department of Domestic Industries.\(^\text{20}\) Genteel women were attacked on exactly the grounds they were using to claim status through the Exhibition: female solidarity, equality, competition, domestic work, and professional management. The cartoons which appeared in the *Bulletin*, and surrounded the jam debate in the *Tribune*, mocked the inept attempts of 'ladies' to bake bread, boil eggs, or peel potatoes [Figures 3.4 and 3.11]. The *Australian Star* implied that the separation

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\(^\text{16}\) *Evening News*, 16 October 1888, p. 3.
\(^\text{17}\) *Evening News*, 11 October 1888, p. 4.
\(^\text{18}\) *Goulburn Herald*, 13 October 1888, p. 2.
\(^\text{19}\) *Australian Star*, 3 October 1888, p.4.
\(^\text{20}\) When the author of 'A Lady's Letter From Sydney', published in the *Goulburn Herald*, sought a resonant phrase to describe the goings-on at the Exhibition, she chose a suitably domestic one. 'There is an air of fashionable gathering about the whole affair...because every society belle and matron has "her finger in the pie," and some of them have immersed both hands, aye, and even elbow deep, showing a horrible want of decorum as regards the feelings of visitors.' *Goulburn Herald*, 13 October 1888, p. 3.
of exhibits in the Jams and Jellies Section showed the ignorance of elite women about domestic practicalities.21 The Daily Telegraph and the Evening News published accounts of the dismal dinners and terrible teas to be had at the Exhibition, and printed the critical letters of Mrs Fawcett-Story, a professional cook who resigned her position at the head of the Exhibition kitchen because of the 'amateurism' of the management.22

But while the Telegraph and the Evening News contrasted the brittle and fake femininity of 'colonial upportundum' with the 'true' womanliness of the woman worker, papers like the Tribune and the Bulletin ultimately implied that the negative qualities associated with elite women were only the qualities of all women given their freest reign. 'Hamlet was an ass', claimed 'A Man of No Account' in the Tribune, 'the name of woman is not frailty it is snobbery'. The 'proffered object' of the Exhibition, he wrote, was to 'show off the strong points of the female', but what it proved 'beyond all doubt' was that 'her forte is grovelling to her "betters" and snubbing her "inferiors."

"Little fleas have lesser fleas to bite 'em and these again have lesser fleas and so ad infinitum." In the same way every snob and every snobess has another snob or snobess to snub and another to be snubbed by. The exhibition leaves it a moot point whether the snobess finds the intenser gratification in snubbing a snobess under her or in submitting herself to the snubs of the one above her. In all other respects, however, as a demonstrator of feminine qualities the show has been fairly successful.23

The Tribune's cartoon about the jam-making competition in was accompanied by a poem entitled 'The Whim'un's Exhibition':

There is a theme that many deem
The height of their ambition;
They long to start and take a part
In Women's Exhibition.
Yet it appears as if the dears
 Have all of them decided
That they will do their best all through
To get themselves derided.
The Darling Point she cooks a joint
And swears it is perfection;
But with Balmain for reasons plain,
She can have no connection.
The lady fair from over there
Is in the same condition.
We'll say no more, you'll see I'm sure

21 Australian Star, 3 October 1888, p. 4.
22 Daily Telegraph, 10 October 1888, p. 6; 13 October 1888, p. 6; Evening News, 10 October 1888, p. 5; 16 October 1888, p. 3; 6 November 1888, p. 8; 12 November 1888, p. 3.
23 Tribune, 19 October 1888, p. 12.
'Tis Woman's Exhibition.24

The cartoon and poem made clear that 'Mrs Monte' was just as vain and obsessed with status as the 'Lady in Charge'. In the masculinist press, the controversy surrounding the Exhibition was traced not to femininity rather than class, but to a universal feminine affectation and conceit which constructed and perpetuated class hierarchy itself. A 'woman's exhibition' was not so much a display of women's work, but a show of class distinction and its feminine origins. Shifting the responsibility for exclusiveness and snobbery onto women enabled powerful men to turn a blind eye to their own more significant participation in the processes of class formation and its consequences. It also allowed them to marginalise women from constructions of colonial or budding national identity. 'Rings of any kind' were unpopular in Australia, argued the Evening News, because the soil was 'uncongenial to them'. 'Society rings' of the kind exposed by the EWI would 'only spring up to be laughed at'.25 Debates over the birth and rebirth of social competition in the colonies were focused on the competition over women's work.

Quality vs equality: The paradox of competition

_The condescension of the "superior persons" who run the show is thinly veiled under a pretended temporary equality._

_Overberg News, 11 October 1888._

Competition was central to the EWI's elevated aims and highest claims. What separated the Exhibition from the Fair that surrounded it was that it was competitive: women's work was not merely on show or on sale as it might be at a bazaar. It had been quantified and classified, its value set in an objective manner by rules and regulations, and its merit measured by qualified judges. Competition revealed the skill

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24 _Tribune_, 19 October 1888, p. 16.
25 _Evening News_, 4 October 1888, p. 4.
26 _Evening News_, 11 October 1888, p. 4. For a contemporaneous use of the poem by crafts leaders in the USA see _Lears, No Place of Grace_, p. 77.
of women workers, but it was also intended to expose the Exhibition audience to new ideals and higher aspirations. Working women in particular, it was hoped, would be encouraged to do better, and to better themselves. The introduction to the Exhibition catalogue concluded with the wish that

this opportunity for competition offered alike to all classes, will encourage a spirit of honourable emulation, and induce all to act in the spirit of Mrs. ... Osgood's poem, whose closing lines may well serve as a talisman for every exhibitor:-- ...

"Labour, all labour is noble and holy,
Let thy great deeds be thy pray'r to thy God!"^{27}

The Exhibition's highest aim was to reconceptualise and redefine 'Women's Work' in accordance with the sentiment of the poem: as inclusive, unifying, and ennobling. Competition, paradoxically, was invoked to further this aim. Competition was offered to all classes, but to offer it 'alike' involved both a recognition of and an attempt to negate class distinction. The potential for exposing rather than neutralising difference was great, and keenly felt by both the organisers and the exhibitors.

Competition is a concept so fundamental to our culture we take it for granted. It lies at the bottom of our system of capitalist economics and at the core of evolutionary biology. Through these discourses it is intimately tied to women's oppression, yet it is little studied by historians, and rarely touched on by feminists. Competition is a paradox, evoking ideals of fairness, honour and merit, as well as a harsh world of winners and losers, success and failure, rivalry and survival. The combination of women and competition conjures a powerful mythology of jealousy, vanity, pettiness and spite, usually connected with social climbing and husband-hunting. The cultural background to the Exhibition's promotion of competition lay in these associations, as well as the wider world of industrial competition discussed in the last chapter.

Competition in women's work had been the norm at colonial agricultural shows since the 1830s.^{28} What differentiated the women's exhibition from the competition in women's industries to be found at every country show was that here

^{27} EWI, Catalogue, p. 9.
^{28} Very little research has been undertaken into the display of women's work at country shows. The exceptions are Issacs, The Gentle Arts, pp. 196-211; and Judith McKay and Kerry Kleinschmidt, The Champions: Two Queensland Embroiderers, Queensland Museum, Brisbane, 1995; although both focus on twentieth century shows.
competition was intended to contribute to the higher cause of 'Women'. The display was held
with a view of showing the various branches of work in which the women of the Colony are now engaged, and the standard of excellence they have attained in the several useful and ornamental arts to which they devote their attention; and, by the stimulus which such an exhibition is calculated to give, to still further develop, encourage, and increase their sources of employment and their usefulness.  

Competition was a strategy which gave motive power to each of these goals. In its categorisations it revealed the diversity of women's work. In its invitation to compete it expressed confidence in the numbers of women workers. It was both a recognition, definition, and exposition of excellence; and through its system of grading and rewards it created the possibility for improvement. Both the Exhibition's high aims and the value of competition in realising them rested on the ideals of inclusiveness and equality.

It was intended that the inclusiveness of the EWI would add much to its rhetorical power. The ladies in charge of the affair, however, knew that inclusiveness, and unity had to be constructed through the Exhibition's organisation. The EWI brought together paid and unpaid labour, the professional and the amateur, rich and poor women. 'Women's work' was defined as 'what women are capable of in every rank of life' [my italics]. The 'universal' message and ultimate success of the Exhibition rested on the overall involvement of 'women of the industrial classes', beyond their inclusion simply as living exhibits. In order that the display be 'thoroughly representative', inclusiveness had to extend to age and class, and 'girls and women of all ranks' were invited to exhibit and compete.

The ideological message of inclusiveness was largely to be achieved though equality of display: Aboriginal women's basket work sat beside that of white weavers, the needlework of a cottager might be shown beside that of the Governor's wife. There were, however, clear status implications in the ways in which exhibits might be physically shown. 'Vox Populi', a correspondent to the Evening News, made these

29 EWI, [Prospectus].
30 Sydney Morning Herald, 7 March 1888, p. 9.
31 EWI, [Prospectus], p. 3.
implications clear when writing to complain that the Exhibition had been 'monopolised' by 'the "butterflies" of society'. The resulting 'utter want of justice to the poorer classes' was manifested in the display of exhibits:

When the ladies of the committee called on me, they distinctly said that there would be no difference between the work of rich and poor. Now, imagine the feelings of some of the poorer exhibitors, who have been working for several months prior to the opening, upon finding their work doubled up and placed in some obscure corner with about the sixteenth part of an inch exhibited. It was not to be expected that all exhibitors could excel in their work; but I maintain that all exhibitors should have been fully shown. The general public would then have felt satisfied that all exhibitors' work had been treated alike.32

The democratic nature of an Exhibition in this analysis lay in the fair apportionment of space to every exhibitor. While competition was cast as an objective discriminating tool, which sorted exhibits for quality, exhibition, in contrast, should have been a force for equality.

Nevertheless, credible competition relied on a recognised equality between entrants, so the organisers were forced to actively confront aspects of difference between women. In November 1887, Lady Carrington wrote to Sir Henry Parkes in relation to the EWI:

The industrial classes could have no confidences in me, as although the desire is there to benefit & help them, the necessary experience and power to do so is wanting. ... [It would be far better that I should not sign any papers for circulation amongst the working classes as they might think it was an attempt to patronise them, and, as you say, they have a right feeling of pride & independence which would brook as interference on my part.33

In general, the attitudes of the women organisers of the Exhibition to exhibitors from the 'industrial classes' remained within the paradigm set by their President in her initial letter. Although elite women were eager to see the Exhibition as 'thoroughly representative', their efforts to engage working class women in the project, to both recognise and neutralise class in the competitions, actually showed up the depth of differences between the two groups, and made the organisers feel uncomfortably self-conscious.34

The women organisers sought to encourage the participation of 'women of the industrial classes' by recognising the economic realities of their lives, and alleviating

32 Evening News, 12 October 1888, p. 3.
33 Lady Carrington to Sir Henry Parkes, Sir Henry Parkes Correspondence, vol. 6, pp. 217-20, ML MSS A876.
34 Sydney Morning Herald, 15 September 1888, p. 9.
immediate practical barriers which prevented them from exhibiting. The Exhibition's rules were reshaped in an attempt to accommodate different groups of women. The greatest change made to the standard exhibition structure has been discussed earlier: women workers were encouraged to look upon the display as a place where they could sell their goods, and receive some free advertising at the same time. As well, unlike at many exhibitions,

no entrance fee or charge for space had been made to any competitor, the object of the committee being to induce workers of all ranks and ages to place their work before the public, to show what standard of excellence had been attained.\(^{35}\)

As a further incentive to exhibitors 'from the humbler walks of life' as well as from the country, the deputation to the Premier sought free rail freight for exhibits, and the education department sponsored the train fares of nurses planning to compete in the nursing examinations.\(^{36}\) Poor but skilled workers in the needlework department were supplied with materials, on the proviso that resulting exhibits would be sold for the benefit of the Queen's Fund.\(^{37}\)

The organisers placed a special emphasis on the competitive aspect of the Exhibition when discussing working-class exhibitors. One of the main aims of the Exhibition, according to the deputation made to the Premier in the month before the EWI opened, was 'to encourage the workers of the humbler classes by putting their efforts in competition with those of persons in better financial circumstances'.\(^{38}\) It was hoped that this might show them the excellence they had already attained and stimulate them to higher goals. Special prizes were offered to encourage entries from the less well-off, such as those for best all-round cottage cook or cottage gardener.

Still, there was some recognition of handicaps working women might face in bringing their work beside that of their richer sisters. The rules of competition were then altered to accommodate the particular situation of the 'industrial classes'. The entries of working-class women ('cottagers') were separated from those of upper-class

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\(^{35}\) Sydney Morning Herald, 15 September 1888, p. 9.

\(^{36}\) Letters of the Colonial Secretary 1888, 88/19, Archives Office of NSW; Two letters from Susie Evelyn Beitsch, 7 September 1888 and 3 October 1888, in Margaret Windeyer Correspondence, Windeyer Papers, ML MSS 186/17.

\(^{37}\) EWI, Regulations for Needlework Department, no. 5, in Mitchell Library pamphlet file.

\(^{38}\) Sydney Morning Herald, 15 September 1888, p. 9.
women where it was perceived that the rich might have an advantage or time or equipment. In several classes, most notably in the Jams and Jellies section, competition was divided between lady amateurs who had ample time and access to labour-saving kitchen technology, and 'artisan's wives', who laboured under different domestic conditions. The division of exhibits in the Domestic Industries Department into 'amateur' and 'artisan' classes, 'in order that one may not be unduly pitted against the other', was 'a very fair course to take', commented the Daily Telegraph, for it would hardly be right where awards are offered that the lady amateur, with her abundant spare time, expensive conveniences and labor-saving appliances, should enter into competition with an artisan's wife, whose means are limited, and whose skill is the outcome of sheer necessity.39

These efforts were well-meaning but not always effective. Furthermore they led to strong criticism in the press for revealing the organisers' class bias and ignorance of the practicalities of domesticity and the lives of working women. The Australian Star refuted the Telegraph's arguments on the basis that 'every housewife knows' that the appliances for making preserves were the same in high and low households, and that the fact that 'some of the best exhibits of jams and jellies came from the wives of mechanics' proved that no such distinction 'between aristocratic and non-aristocratic' exhibitors needed to exist.40

Parallel to attempts to put working class women and leisured ladies on an equal footing in competition lay a belief in the relationship between competition and emulation. The catalogue stated plainly that 'it was hoped that this opportunity for competition offered alike to all classes, will encourage a spirit of honourable emulation', and the model it put forward was that of the

spirit which pervades the home-life of the middle-classes in European countries where each member of the family feels it a privilege to contribute to the general income, where young people are happy in working with the needle, brush, or in some branch of mechanical industry during a portion of each day or evening, proud if the result increases the decoration of the home, or adds a trifle to the family store.41

While this message was undoubtedly aimed at working people, it was also meant for the new colonial middle class. Rising in isolation, thousands of miles from 'home',

39 Daily Telegraph, 3 October 1888, p. 5.
40 It also noted that such a distinction existed only in the Department of Domestic Industries, and expressed the belief that this 'mistake' was not evidence of the opinions of the women organisers generally. Australian Star, 3 October 1888, p. 4.
41 EWL, Catalogue, pp. 5 and 9.
the Australasian bourgeoisie, confident in their ascendancy but insecure and uncertain about their relation to social position, needed to learn *themselves* how to recreate the old world in the new.

It was also hoped that working women would learn about refined home life from visiting the Exhibition. Working class women were also encouraged to attend the Exhibition by a reasonable entry fee (1 shilling), opening hours that extended after shop and factory closing (the Exhibition was open 11.30 am to 10 pm every day), and the provision of special trams. Nevertheless, mid-way through the Exhibition concern was expressed in the letters columns about the 'total absence' of working class visitors:

> every woman and girl in Sydney should have a chance of seeing what their sisters can do; it may have the effect of inducing a spirit of emulation, and promote habits of thrift and industry among them.\(^42\)

'Every inducement' should be offered to make them come: correspondents suggested cheaper admission, cheaper meals and cheaper trams.\(^43\) Possibly with poorer visitors in mind, but also with a view to encouraging repeat visits, entry charges were dropped to half price (sixpence) in the last week, while the inmates of charitable institutions were admitted for free.\(^44\) This move seems to have been successful. On the last Saturday more than 9,000 people attended, about three times as many as on an average day.\(^45\)

The Exhibition aimed to be inclusive but ultimately it was about asserting the universality of respectable gentility and the social authority of the middle class, manifested in home life and the work ethic, through ideas of competition, emulation, education and improvement. 'Proof' of the 'elevating' and 'ennobling' effect the organisers believed competition would have on the women of the working classes was to be found in their attitudes to medals and prizes. The organisers had incorporated both cash and medal prizes into some parts of the competition [Figure 4.2]. This was seen as further proof of their insensitivity and elitism by the press. The *Echo* took it

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\(^{42}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 October 1888, p. 6.  
\(^{43}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 October 1888, p. 4.  
\(^{44}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 October 1888, p. 4.  
\(^{45}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 October 1888, p. 2.
upon itself to defend the organisers against public criticism that in offering exhibitors in certain sections a money prize in addition to medals or certificates ... an insult is offered to exhibitors in those classes and a snobbish distinction made.' Such claims, it argued, were the 'outcome of false pride to be found in the minds of the critics' rather than in those of the exhibitors. There is no disguising the fact that exhibits come from two sorts of exhibitors: those to whom money is no consideration, and those to whom a pound or two as a recognition of the excellence of the work is both welcome and useful.' While it would be 'a mistake to attempt to draw a hard-and-fast class line, and say that those on one side of it had higher sensibilities than those on the other', it continued, [w]e believe that the "working classes," to use a term with a well understood meaning, have a very keen feeling of self-respect which it would be the height of cruelty to wound.' There need be 'no such wound inflicted' when a prize 'for excellence in some branch of domestic work' was given in a form 'most useful to the recipient'.

The *Echo*’s defence was persuasive, but the organisers did, however, draw inferences from the working women who won prizes that suggested critics may not have been too far off the mark. The number of exhibitors, claimed the secretary Mrs Carl Fischer at the meeting with the Premier, was evidence of the 'enthusiasm' of such women for the enterprise, while Vice-President Mrs Admiral Fairfax said 'she thought that the interest taken in the Exhibition by the humbler classes was certainly very real and very genuine'. 'Their ambition', she explained, seemed to be not so much to secure money prizes as to get medals. That she thought was one of the most gratifying evidences of the nature of the interest taken in the exhibition. A desire for a medal rather than a cash prize suggested to the organisers that working women were engaging with the higher aims of the Exhibition above the level of pure self-interest. Involvement in the Exhibition, particularly its competitions, in their view elevated the working class woman to a level where she could appreciate the

46 *Echo*, 10 October 1888, p. 4.
48 *Echo*, 10 October 1888, p. 4.
abstract reward of recognition in a form beyond the inferior attraction of money. This patronising attitude reveals the limits of the organisers' 'sympathy' for women of the 'humbler classes'. They might make poorer women equal to themselves in competition, but they were unable to see them as equals in righteousness or refinement.

The voices of working class women are notably absent from the records that document the EWI. The strong reaction of the newspapers to the 'snobbish distinction of exhibits' may be further proof of working women's resistance to the Exhibition's ultimate message. But while the press that took up the claims of working women with gusto, it spoke for them, rather than providing a forum for them to express their own views. The only evidence is in the entries to compete and exhibit themselves, and their import is ambiguous.

On the whole, initiatives on the part of the Exhibition organisers which recognised the differences of class could easily become patronising, and the evidence of the exhibits suggests that the working women of Sydney were acutely aware of this possibility. Their overall response to the Exhibition call was mixed.49 Sensitive perhaps to the especially patronising message of the Domestic Industries Department, few appear to have entered the cooking competitions in that section, despite the incentive of special prizes, such as that awarded for 'best All-round Cottage Cook'.50 As much as the organisers tried to construct and control the message of the Exhibition, exhibitors and competitors turned the display to their own advantage. In needlework and knitting, as has been noted in chapter 2, where the Exhibition organisers deviated from standard exhibition practice and allowed competitors to exhibit for free and sell their work as well as compete, seamstresses outnumbered 'amateurs' by around two to one.51 In the Laundry Work section there was a good turn-out and most competitors seem to have been professional laundresses, some even exhibiting under the name of

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49 While hard to gauge in any nuanced way (as the catalogue's only distinction between exhibitors was that between amateurs and those who worked 'for some payment') some general trends can still be identified.
50 Sydney Morning Herald, 8 September 1888, p. 3.
51 EWI, Catalogue, Departments I and II.
the firms for which they were employed. The self-employed, be they laundresses or
photographers, used the Exhibition as free advertising. The display brought their work
to a wider audience and if in addition they won prizes, their skills received a valuable
stamp of approval.

The relationship between the elite women of the Exhibition’s organising
committee and the working women whose involvement they sought to encourage was
a complex one. The organisers were not blind to class difference. Inclusiveness and
competition demanded recognition of working women’s inequality and action to
temporarily neutralise it. Nor were they unaware of the way their actions might be
perceived by poorer women as patronising. Where this was the case working class
women responded in kind. In practice the ‘friendly rivalry’ of competition did not
necessarily encourage unity or unanimity amongst women divided by status,
experience and an emerging professionalism. Working women’s interests were taken
up on their behalf by the press. The women who were able to raise their own voices in
criticism of the EWI management were professional genteel women.

Playing at work: Amateurs and professionals
On 9 October 1888 Mrs A. Fawcett Story wrote to the newspapers of Sydney
explaining why she had resigned from her position as superintendent of the cookery
section of the EWI.

Under the system in force I saw no chance of giving satisfaction to customers,
justice to competitors, advantage to the fund, or of furthering and elevating the art of
cookery. The probable reverse of these pleasant results of very anxious labor was,
however, plainly visible, and still more patent was the fact that I could not retain my
position together with a shred of dignity or self-respect. To an amateur playing at
work these things matter nothing once the exhibition is over, but to a worker of my
professional status they become of serious importance and their effect remains....
Having foolishly allowed myself to be placed in a false position under amateur
managers, I abandoned it when it became untenable and intolerable.53

Story was a cookery instructor, at the vanguard of a new movement to rationalise and
professionalise traditional women’s work, and make it a central part of women’s
education. A graduate of the National Training School for Cookery in London, Story

52 EWI, Catalogue, Department III: prize list is in the Sydney Morning Herald, 12 October 1888, p. 8.
53 Daily Telegraph, 10 October 1888, p. 6.
had been appointed in 1883 by the NSW Board of Technical Education to teach cookery to women of all ages. In 1886 she joined the Department of Public Instruction as a lecturer in domestic economy at Hurlstone Training College.\textsuperscript{54} Her selection as head of the EWI's cookery department, with such impeccable credentials, confirms that the Exhibition organisers viewed the domestic industries section as a training school as well as an exposition of housewifely skill and a working kitchen which turned out high class meals for hungry diners.

It was probably the impossible conflation of all these goals that led to Story's resignation. Under her charge in the Exhibition kitchens was a group of enthusiastic but decidedly amateur cooks. \textit{Bulletin} columnist Sappho Smith told of seeing three or four of the very best people in Sydney ... languidly stalking strawberries and feebly stirring pudding-bowls while the real business of the show was being run by a stout lady with square elbows, who, I take it, was the professional cook of the concern for she handled the 10-pound lump of beef as though it were a feather, and smacked it with her hands and dumped it into the oven in the most familiar and business-like manner.\textsuperscript{55}

It soon became clear that the meals being produced verged on the inedible. As the \textit{Evening News} reported, under a screaming headline

\textbf{AMATEUR COOKS AND COOKERY}

\textbf{FAILURE OF A DINNER}

\textbf{MISMANAGEMENT AND RESIGNATIONS}

There is a dreadful report abroad concerning a "society" dinner in connection with the Women's Industrial Exhibition. The cook and her assistants were distinguished members of society. So were the guests. The dinner, it is said, was so badly cooked that the guests could not eat it, and went to their homes hungry.\textsuperscript{56}

A correspondent to the paper declared the cooking a 'farce', and reported having seen the 'young lady cooks' double-dip their spoons while tasting dishes.\textsuperscript{57}


\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Bulletin}, 27 October 1888, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Evening News}, 10 October 1888, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Evening News}, 6 November 1888, p. 8. See also 'A Little Tiff' reported in the \textit{Evening News}, 25 October 1888, p. 5: 'Two days since one of the many little differences which have been periodical amongst the managers of the "Snobberies" occurred in the refreshment department. Enter Masculine Lady (glaring through her specs): "Where's the lemonade?" Amateur waitress: "There isn't any." M.L.: "Why didn't you order it?" A.W.: "I sent a written order." M.L.: "You're a 1--r." Assistant waitress breathed hard for a moment, and then proceeded to get rid of her waiting garments. She didn't
The difference between the amateur and the professional, between 'feeble' inadequacy and 'business-like' competence, exposed the fragility of an all encompassing ideology of 'women's work', and opened a significant cracks in the EWI's smooth veneer. Story very publicly and very forcibly attacked the managers of the Exhibition on every level: she damned the way the display had been organised, accused them of injustice and incompetence, and declared that as a result, none of the higher goals of the Exhibition would be realised. Story also pointed to the detrimental effect that the Exhibition might have on her own professional career, a heavy irony when one considered the Exhibition's stated aims. The meeting of new professional women and lady organisers keen to justify their own entry into the public sphere on the grounds of businesslike management sent the deepest tremors through the Exhibition's women's world.

For the EWI's organisers the professionalism of their management of the Exhibition, like the management of the Queen's Jubilee Fund, was proof that women could handle responsibility and be businesslike in the public sphere. Strong public criticism of their handling of the event cast a long shadow over women's efforts to organise more generally. As the Daily Telegraph smirked, alluding to Mrs Story's letter:

We do not think we are going beyond the mark in inferring from statements which have been made public ... that the lady promoters of the Women's Industries Exhibition do not at the present moment form a perfectly happy family. We shall be delighted to receive the assurance that these conclusions are inaccurate and that a state of agreement, concord, and mutual esteem of the most Arcadian nature prevails amongst those public spirited ladies.

Without those assurances, the paper 'feared', it was to be inferred that the Exhibition had revealed a 'good deal of needless friction' rather than the 'gentler graces and amenities which many sanguine people believe will be introduced into the affairs of life when their control is more largely undertaken by female hands.'

Perhaps no other result was to be expected. We must remember that women come to such work as this quite untrained—amateurs in the strictest sense of that derogatory term. They are quite wanting in the material discipline which all ordinary men of business and of the world have to go through daily. ... Clearly it is hard for a sex which has been assured that its engaging wilfulness and peremptory unreason constitute its greatest charm to have to come down to the common, dusty, turnpike

"go for" the masculine lady, but she did the next best thing, which was to put on her bonnet and proceed to go home; but an apology from the masculine lady brought her back again.'
road of business and the methods of compromise which business involves, just the same as the coarser and less interesting half of humanity. And probably it is merely a pretty revolt against this grim necessity which has caused the condition of things in the management of the Women’s Exhibition of which rumour is giving such vivacious accounts.  

A misogynist press gleefully seized the opportunity to cast slurs on women’s competence as managers.

Specific criticisms of the snobbish nature of the Exhibition were supported in the press by general criticisms of the poor organisation such ‘amateur managers’ had manifested in the display. In pointing out defects in the arrangements, the patriarchal scorn of the press critique of the Exhibition came to the fore. The implication of complaints that the Art Department was confused and badly hung, that the entertainments were pure extortion, and that the catalogue was a hopeless mess, was that women were unfit for business, and that organisation was a masculine quality. When these defects were explained or justified, in supportive and critical papers, recourse was always made to the absence of men on the organising committee, or to lack of training and experience on the part of the women. While in even the most vituperative leaders the President Lady Carrington emerged unscathed and untainted, her escape came more as a result of being perceived as the exception rather than the rule, a woman possessed of business sense as well as feminine sensitivity. At the same time, criticisms of the upper-class woman as vain, emotional, bad tempered and not impartial, had implications in a wider masculinist critique of women in positions of social power.

There is little doubt that the Exhibition was not completely ready when it was opened to the public on the 2nd of October. The already small and barn-like exhibition space had been radically altered to accommodate a floral annexe, a tea room, a dining room and an auditorium [Figure 4.3]. The Committee had had possession of the space for less than a week, and the number of exhibits to be shown exceeded five thousand.

58 Daily Telegraph, 10 October 1888, p. 4. Compare ‘A man’s talk to women’ in the Sydney Morning Herald, 27 October 1888, p. 9
59 Sydney Mail, 6 October 1888, p. 714.
In order to show all of the exhibits, the stalls of the Centenary Fair had to be rotated over the month, rather than being given a permanent position.

The Fine Art Department, ironically, suffered the most due to its elevated status as high culture. Totalling more than two thousand artworks, it was squeezed into the galleries, and some of the exhibits were hung almost into the great curve of the roof. Here the resolve of the organising committee to show as many of the exhibits received as possible created a significant display problem. The arrangement decided on was soundly criticised. A reporter from the *Evening News* commented that the fine arts department 'should be one of the great attractions of the exhibition' as it contained 'many valuable works of art', but it had lost 'a great deal of its beauty and attractiveness from the fact that they have been hung up in a sort of higgledy-piggledy manner. ... There is no attempt at classification, the rough crayon sketch of the amateur being hung side-by-side with a first class work, by a master.' The rhetoric of order and classification which elevated exhibitions to cultural status was here used to critique the women's organisation of the show as misinformed and amateurish. The following day the *News* commented that '[i]f any evidence be required of the incapacity of those who have fastened themselves onto the management of this particular project, it will be found in the haphazard, higgledy-piggledy manner in which the various exhibits are arranged, especially in the art section.'

The incompleteness of the catalogue and of labelling only added to this impression. The single catalogue which has survived in a public collection is the second revised edition, so we have only the evidence of detractors on which to gauge the initial publication. Much of the *Bulletin*’s criticism of the management centred on

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60 EWI, *Catalogue*, passim.
61 The exhibits were 'arranged (?) without any attempt at order or method.' *Evening News*, 3 October 1888, p. 5. This position was expanded by a correspondent who wrote in support of the *News*’s negative leader of the 4th of October. 'Outlooker' had 'perused' the article 'with great satisfaction' because it 'speaks out plainly to the management', showing how the 'laudable object' of the exhibition had 'fallen into disfavour, seemingly through some clique or other.' 'The Fine Arts Department, to me, was the most striking. The hanging of the pictures is, to say the least of it, most indiscriminate. They seem to be in utter confusion, as to classification. I take it (in the interest of art) such bungling as this should be remedied.' *Evening News*, 6 October 1888, p. 5.
63 The catalogue is preserved in the Rare Book Library of the Fisher Library at the University of Sydney.
the catalogue, which it referred to as a 'hollow fraud', as well as on the apparatus of display. The various exhibits in the show have tickets on them, giving the following particulars:--- "Exhibition of Women's Industries. Section, blank; class, blank; delegate's name, blank; exhibitor's name, blank; number of exhibit, blank. For sale for the benefit of blank; price, blank; other particulars, blank; everything, blank." In the Bulletin's view the way in which the objects were displayed reflected not the lack of time and space made available to the organisers, but their inexperience, ignorance, and incapacity to present women's work in an ordered and structured way.

The educational function of the display, tainted by the chaos of the bazaar, was shown to be severely compromised by these arrangements. Criticisms of the entertainments, or 'side shows' as the Evening News called them, focussed attention on the management's hard-headed attempts to make money. The News claimed that patrons were being charged twice for the 'privilege' of seeing some of the music and drama. A correspondent to the Daily Telegraph confirmed that on the first Monday evening of the Exhibition the Tyrolean Singers had performed, and the audience had then remained in their seats for the next scheduled performance, 'My Uncle's Will'.

[But to our surprise and astonishment someone stepped forward before the curtain ...
and informed the audience that the drama would not commence until the room had been vacated.

While some left, the 'majority' remained, whereupon 'some of the persons in charge', 'finding the public were not to be deceived and wronged', 'actually came amongst the audience to try to demand a second payment'. This, claimed 'Justice', was an attempt to 'extort money from the public'. Both papers emphasised popular resistance to the machinations of the management. The patrons held onto their seats and that made the efforts of committee members to remove them appear ridiculous as well as grasping.

Discussion of the merits of prize winners was another thinly veiled way of criticising management. The newspapers became a forum for disgruntled competitors,

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65 Evening News, 11 October 1888, p. 4.
66 Evening News, 10 October 1888, p. 6.
67 Evening News, October 12 1888, p. 3.
the *Evening News* in particular bolstered its own critical leaders with letters detailing favouritism or other abuses of power. The paper became the competitors' champion:

> There is a tendency to think that all the hard work fell on the delegates and secretaries, and to pass over unnoticed the months of patient toil of the exhibitors. But we are sure that much of the success of the Exhibition, either pecuniary or otherwise, is due to their industry and perseverance. Nevertheless, from first to last they have been treated in a very supercilious manner by some of the delegates, which made one feel that after all that to benefit women was not the purpose of the exhibition—but simply to make a show of doing so.\(^{68}\)

Correspondent 'Vox Populi', who had complained that the exhibits were not given equal space, also cited another 'incident ... which showed the greatest mismanagement (to use the mildest term) occurred':

> A lady, Miss A., upon seeing Miss B.‘s name upon the former’s work as prizetaker expostulated, and was informed by one of the committee that, anyway, the prize was meant for Miss B, which was equivalent to saying that the name and not the merit of the work gained the prize.\(^{69}\)

The claim that prizes were awarded on the basis of favouritism rather than merit also appeared in a debate over prizes awarded to schoolchildren which ranged over several papers. The *Evening News* described the disappointment that had resulted when prizes awarded to schoolgirls in the first week of the Exhibition were removed in ensuing weeks, following the arrival of better entries. 'Nothing so cruel, shabby and unjust has taken place in connection with any other exhibition yet held in this country' it claimed. The paper also published the pitiful letters of the unhappy children, most of whom came from the working-class Crown Street Public School.\(^{70}\) The *Herald*, accused of suppressing correspondence from one of the girl's parents, did publish two letters from a school teacher criticising the retraction of prizes in the Needlework Department.\(^{71}\) The *Australian Star* went even further than the *News*, accusing the organisers of favouritism. Anyone who had 'paid attention to the prize lists', it argued in a leader, would have 'noticed that a relation of a member of the committee received a large number of medals and certificates'. If the teacher had had 'a thorough-faced toady relative on the committee, his school might have received enough medals and certificates to cover and average-sized black-board.'\(^{72}\) A correspondent to the

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\(^{68}\) *Evening News*, 12 November 1888, p. 3.

\(^{69}\) *Evening News*, 12 October 1888, p. 3.

\(^{70}\) *Evening News*, 1 November 1888, p. 5.

\(^{71}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 November 1888, p. 5, and 29 November 1888, p. 11.

\(^{72}\) *Australian Star*, 10 November 1888, p. 4.
*Echo* came to the organisers' defence, lamenting the 'decay of chivalry' which should have protected them from public criticism. Chiding instead the disappointed exhibitors, 'Charity' turned to chivalry of competition to argue, rather feebly, against their claims: Surely, if it is the honour, and not the mere medal, that is sought, there is little honour in a prize received for an exhibit which is not the best of its class.\(^73\)

He contrasted these tarnished ex-medallists with the shining, selfless goodness of the management. Mistakes were 'only to be expected', he said, when women had 'no previous experience in exhibitions on a similarly large scale', and even professional men in the same position were equally subject to loud criticisms from exhibitors.\(^74\) It was a great pity, he concluded, that 'detractors should try to minimise the credit due to the management.'

The Exhibition's white knights had to defend the organisers from a range of criticisms, as well as the 'base and cruel' charge that they were 'parading their vanities under the guise of philanthropy'.\(^75\) They also had to argue women's aptitude for public work. A letter published in the supportive *Herald* noted Some of these correspondents have gone so far as to say that because the Exhibition is being managed and conducted by ladies, it must of necessity prove a failure.

This, the author argued, was an 'absurd idea', refuted by the Exhibition's obvious success. The Exhibition's gross takings were over £8,000, and the final profit came to nearly £6,000.\(^76\) The 'inevitable' mistakes were presented as 'good lessons' for the ladies. The Exhibition would provide valuable experience for the feminist and philanthropic bodies that emerged from its management in the 1890s. The EWI suggested an increased role for women in the public sphere, but in their own conduct the organisers had to balance masculine norms with feminine innovations. While they sought to assert feminine modes of acting and working, the public sphere demanded professionalism, and this meant women had to behave something like men, or at least to match up to masculine notions of business and organisation.

\(^73\) *Echo*, November 2 1888, p. 4.
\(^74\) See also *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 October 1888, p. 8.
\(^75\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 October 1888, p. 7.
\(^76\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 October 1888, p. 7.
All of the competing demands of competition, ideology, professionalism and management came together in a one particular conflict that took place around the Education Department's ambulance work exam. The incident is worthy of concentrated study for several reasons. It is exceptionally well documented, and better still, documented in a way that reveals both the private and the public sides of the debate. Most of the conflicts associated with the Exhibition are known only through murky undercurrents in speeches or acerbic but untraceable jabs in newspaper articles. A few were more public, class warfare carried out in the correspondence columns of newspapers. But this dispute concerned the essence of gentility, and was kept from the prying of the press. Instead it is fleshed out by the private letters of all involved, carefully preserved by the delegate at the centre of the allegations, presumably in an effort at vindication. It throws new light on the processes of professionalisation that surrounded nursing in late nineteenth century Australia, and exposes the dilemmas, potential and expectations of competition both for organisers and competitors.

In November 1888 junior nurse Miss Amy Oxley wrote to Mrs Windeyer, the delegate in charge of the Education Department, complaining that she had not received a certificate she deserved in the ambulance section of the Exhibition's nursing examinations. Windeyer had taken a special interest in the nurses when developing her department. The examinations, held as part of the Exhibition under the judicial eye of eminent Sydney doctors, were the first external measure of the skills of nurses in the colony, and an important step towards the registration of nurses. Circulars were sent to all the hospitals in NSW. Women who responded were then broken into groups according to their training and experience. Twenty-eight nurses turned up to the Macleay Museum at the University of Sydney on the 11th of October 1888 to take the

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77 The examining doctors were Samuel Knaggs, William Chisholm and Edward Jenkins. For further detail on the history of nursing in this period see Alison Bashford, *Purity and Pollution: Gender, Embodiment and Victorian Medicine*, Macmillan, London, 1998, ch. 2. The professionalisation of nursing was one of Windeyer's main interests. She would later help found the Women's Hospital in Crown St, Sydney, with the dual aims of helping poor women and training nurses, see 'Windeyer, Mary Elizabeth (18372-1912) and Windeyer, Margaret (1866-1939), in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 12, 1891-1939, pp. 537-9.
practical and written examinations, answering such questions as 'describe the circulation of the blood' and 'how would you prepare beef tea'?\textsuperscript{78}

Overall, the nursing examinations went very well: the Exhibition's highest award, a single gold medal, was won by nurse Nellie Gould [Figure 4.4]. The examiners' report was widely circulated and published as proof of the skill and professionalism of colonial nurses. The doctors professed themselves exceptionally well pleased with the 'high standard of excellence' displayed by the Australian-trained nurses, who had been deliberately examined separately from the rest. Garnering such comments had obviously been Windeyer's intention from the first. The competition provided powerful public proof that well trained professional women could succeed and advance in the world of paid employment, pushing down barriers of prejudice along the way. At the opening of the Exhibition Lady Darley expressed the hope that the competition would 'stimulate the nurses to add knowledge and an ever-increasing power to the energy and enthusiasm which animate their efforts.'\textsuperscript{79} In her own report to the Exhibition's President, Lady Carrington, Windeyer noted with pride that 'the chief point of congratulation' was the recognition of the status of nurses by the medical men of the present day who now regarded them as valued cooperators rather than as subordinates from whom twenty years ago, was expected nothing more than submissive deference, and nothing less than blind obedience.\textsuperscript{80}

The sick nursing exams, then, had been a triumph both for the organisers and for the nurses.

But something had gone wrong in the following section: ambulance work. Twenty five women had presented themselves to be tested on their first aid skills.\textsuperscript{81} The published rules stipulated that trained nurses should not compete against amateurs. But on the day of the examination, the doctors forgot to separate the two groups, and the results forwarded to Mrs Windeyer mixed amateurs and professionals. Miss

\textsuperscript{78} EWI, department V - educational, section B [sic], examination paper (trained nurses), Mitchell Library pamphlet file.
\textsuperscript{79} Sydney Morning Herald, 3 October 1888, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{80} EWI, Report of Department V - Educational, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
\textsuperscript{81} EWI, Department V - Educational, section B, examination paper (ambulance work), Mitchell Library pamphlet file. Many would make later appearances on the Exhibition's stage demonstrating how to 'bind cracked skulls'.
Oxley, a junior trained nurse, had come fourth, behind several amateurs. However, not long after the results of the ambulance exam were made public, Oxley's name and place (along with those of other trained nurses who had competed in this section) were removed from the list of prize winners.

A group of amateurs had written to Windeyer to complain about the way the competition had been run. They objected that amateurs had had to compete against trained nurses, and Windeyer agreed they had a point. She sent them the regulations to show that this 'difficulty had been considered' before the examination had taken place, but to spare the examiners from criticism, she decided to cut the names of the trained nurses, including Oxley, from the list of prize winners in ambulance work.\(^{82}\) This seems to suggest that Windeyer thought criticism about the mix up would come from the amateurs, not the professionals who were trained and consequently more dispassionate.

This was obviously deeply unfair to Miss Oxley, who wrote to both Mrs Windeyer and the Exhibition's president, Lady Carrington, to complain. Windeyer in turn wrote to Lady Carrington explaining that although she was inclined to give Oxley a certificate, she maintained that technically, according to the rules, the nurse 'wasn't absolutely entitled to it'. Nevertheless she enclosed a certificate for Carrington's signature.\(^{83}\) In an effort to make the process entirely transparent, Lady Carrington forwarded Windeyer's letter along with her own in reply to Oxley's complaint. Not unsurprisingly, this did not much soothe the aggrieved nurse, who turned to her father for support. He wrote immediately saying he had advised his daughter not to accept a certificate offered in this way. He accused Windeyer of 'endeavour[ing] to throw all the blame on the medical examiners' who had placed Oxley fourth on the list, and questioned her 'power or authority' to 'disturb' the doctors' results. He had 'no sympathy with unknown and unnamed interference, especially in a matter which

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\(^{82}\) For 'disagreeable criticism' see for example the *Evening News*, 12 November 1888, p. 3.

\(^{83}\) Mary Windeyer to Lady Carrington 4 December 1888, in Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/13.
materially alter[ed] [Oxley’s] professional opinion amongst professional women. He threatened a ‘public inquiry’ if the diploma was not forthcoming.\textsuperscript{84}

Windeyer’s response was uncharacteristically exasperated, haughty, and contemptuous. She wrote:

\textit{It is a matter of utter indifference to me that “you cannot advise your daughter to accept” my statement of facts which you call my “explanation”. I only regret that my expressed intention of handing her the diploma should result in me receiving so ungentlemanly a letter as yours...}\textsuperscript{85}

The strong language of Mrs Windeyer’s reply was a measure of the frustration, weariness and exasperation of the organisers generally. Mr Oxley's 'public inquiry' would only have added to a barrage of criticism the Exhibition had received in the press.\textsuperscript{86} Mrs Windeyer's letter expressed her 'regret' at Mr Oxley's 'inability to understand the plain purport' of her letter to Lady Carrington, and informed Miss Oxley she could pick up her certificate from the Exhibition offices in Moore St whenever convenient.\textsuperscript{87} We do not know whether she did. How the matter of Amy Oxley's ambulance certificate was resolved after this remains unclear. But the dead end doesn't really matter. The exchange as it exists raises many interesting questions. The incident represents in microcosm all the benefits and complications inherent in competition at the Exhibition, while also giving a unique insight into how they were negotiated by particular individuals.

In nursing, competition presented enormous possibilities. An external examination of nurses, carried out by eminent doctors, both proved and enhanced their claims to professionalism and status (as Windeyer’s pride in the results attests). Windeyer had deliberately constructed the rules and regulations to make the competition not only fair and representative but meaningful. Separating the overseas trained nurses from the locally trained ones allowed comparisons to be made to the advantage of colonial nurses. Creating a category for junior nurses provided

\textsuperscript{84} Mr J. N. Oxley to Mary Windeyer 11 December 1888, in Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/13. It does not seem that this threat ever eventuated. The only public mention of this incident is in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 30 October 1888, p. 3, where it is referred to as a 'misunderstanding'.

\textsuperscript{85} Mary Windeyer to Mr J. N. Oxley [n.d.], in Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/13.

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Evening News}, 12 October 1888, p. 3; 1 November 1888, p. 5; 6 November 1888, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{87} Mary Windeyer to Mr J. N. Oxley [n.d.], in Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/13.
encouragement for young trainees. The presentation of the Goodlet Prize for untrained nurses, despite the fact that the doctors involved did not approve, recognised that women played a skilled and significant role in nursing the sick at home. The competition in ambulance work was intended to develop a movement still in its infancy in the colony: the St John Ambulance. Investment in the ambulance work competition at the Exhibition was heightened by the fact that the St John Ambulance did not yet formally exist in NSW. Branches were independently affiliated with the central Association in London, and were probably competing with each other as much as members were competing on an individual level.

Because of its emphasis on training and examining everyday people, ambulance work existed in a liminal space between trained and untrained nursing, amateurism and professionalism, home and work. Windeyer obviously had this complication in mind when she wrote the rule that trained nurses were to be examined separately from amateurs in the ambulance class. That the doctors combined the two groups detracted from the clear messages the examination was intended to send about ambulance work and nursing - that there was a distinction in the grounds of professionalism and training. This distinction was confounded when the amateurs beat the nurses in competition. The resulting dispute reveals a complex set of interacting struggles for recognition at a significant moment of transition in the relationship of femininity to care, professionalism, and paid work; between lady amateur ambulance members seeking validation of their skills gained in organised classes, and nurses.

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88 Evening News, 12 November 1888, p. 3.
89 The association would not form until 1891. The various branches which had sprung up following the visit of ambulance evangelist Lady Brasseys were independently affiliated with the central Association in London. This situation undoubtedly explains the resentment amongst amateurs from brigades that trained nurses were allowed to compete against them at the EW: their chances for examination (a central part of the St John idea) were already substantially limited. St John had a significant presence at the exhibition because its most powerful advocates were intimately connected with its organisation. First aid missionary and Newcastle surgeon Dr Samuel Knaggs was one of the examiners in nursing, and the Carringtons had convened a meeting about ambulance work with Annie, Lady Brasseys, one of its most passionate exponents, during her visit to Sydney on the ‘Sunbeam’ in 1887. Brasseys charismatic evangelism of the St John idea accounts for feminine bias of groups in the colony, another powerful argument for their inclusion in and exhibition of women’s industry. See ‘St John: The formative years’, in St John: The Magazine of the St John Ambulance Australia NSW, vol. 4, no. 1, June 1991, pp. 7-8. This article suggests the first examination in first aid did not take place until the following year at Randwick. See also the Englishwoman’s Review, 15 January 1889, pp. 14-15.
pursuing a formalised recognition of their profession and an external measure of their skills gained through paid labour.\footnote{Amy Oxley was a member of the St Johns Ambulance brigade of Woollahra, see letter from the St John Ambulance brigade of Woollahra [n.d.], in Margaret Windeyer Correspondence, ML 186/17.}

The correspondence in the Windeyer papers also reveals that the EWI could exert a powerful, real effect on the status of some women workers in the colony [Figure 4.5]. Oxley's father complained that the retraction of her certificate and implied slur on her skills had 'materially alter[ed] her professional opinion amongst professional women'. Where boundaries between nurses and amateurs were accidentally blurred and a mix-up ensued, Oxley suffered the humiliation of going unrecognised in an examination that had no official weight, but great symbolic power in her workplace. Oxley's resentment of the 'unnatural' way that the Exhibition's competitions intruded into her life suggests the delicate knife edge that the Exhibition walked between the universal and the personal, and between pure symbolism and actual practical effects.

The incident also reveals something of the relationship between gender and 'proper' ways to compete. Windeyer's response to the amateur entrants who benefited from Oxley's fall was an admonition that if women were to compete, they must learn what competition was, and how to compete properly. When the amateurs wrote to Windeyer about the trained nurses, they also complained that only 'highly commended' certificates, and no 'commended' certificates, had been awarded for ambulance work. Windeyer answered that if this level of distinction had been awarded, then everybody who competed in the ambulance section would have received a prize. This, she wrote, 'was not generally the result of examination. The word distinction would be misapplied.' In an extraordinary and virtuoso juggling of gender identities, she advised the amateurs:

\textit{Someone must come last as well as first. As you have all tried your best you should let that assurance be your satisfaction and do honour to the cause of Women by each taking your beating \textit{like a man}.} \footnote{Mary Windeyer to an unknown complainant [n.d.], in Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/13.}
Windeyer asked the amateurs to look both inside and beyond themselves to a higher goal, and ignore what lay between - their competition with each other. In contrast, Windeyer preserved a letter in her papers from A. B. Ellard of Redfern, a competitor but not a prize winner in the poetry section of the Education Department. Ellard wrote: 'It is the first time I entered into competition of the kind but I now feel encouraged to try again.'\textsuperscript{92} This was the 'right' way to view competition, as self-development, and the 'right' way to accept defeat, with quiet dignity. Windeyer's letter to the amateurs clearly implied that this was the way men approached competition, and it was something women could aspire to. Yet Windeyer also expected the women involved to behave in a properly feminine way: to be selflessly and quietly accepting. It is ironic that Windeyer was proud that colonial nurses were no longer submissive and blindly obedient to doctors, yet she was aggravated and irritated when other women behaved this way to her.

The somewhat exasperated attitude of the organisers towards aggrieved exhibitors stemmed from the organisers' position of privilege and power. They could afford to be gracious because personally they didn't have much to lose. From the organisers' perspective what was at stake was the broader claims of women as a sex, to work and power in the public realm. In both Oxley's and the amateurs' case Windeyer pleaded that disunity, disappointment, and conflict be kept hidden. When Windeyer asked the amateurs to keep quiet so as to 'do honour to the cause of Women', she meant to do honour to the other competitors, to the competition itself, and not to tarnish the honour of the judges and organisers of the competition. While competition was public and transparent, complaints about the competition were to be dealt with as private matters, between exhibitor and delegate, not brought into the light. Windeyer's disgust at Mr Oxley's threat to go public arose from personal distress and frustration, against a background of mounting newspaper attacks on the

\textsuperscript{92} A. B. Ellard to Mary Windeyer 27 December 1888, in Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/13. Also preserved was a letter from five teachers, thanking Mrs Windeyer for her 'extreme kindness and courtesy in connection with the department', in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159; and twelve letters from various judges in her department, collected as ML Aw 62.
Exhibition which focused on the organisers' gender, but it was expressed in the language of class. She accused him of 'ungentlemanly' behaviour for suggesting that her decisions be exposed to public scrutiny. Windeyer's 'indifference' to his opinion was the ultimate put-down, but the supposed 'indifference' clearly masked a set of far stronger emotions, and revealed instead both her power as a member of the ruling class and her weakness as a woman. This was not a case of indifference at all, but a need to appear indifferent, a struggle that was common to all the Exhibition's organisers at this time: the need to remain unified, unperturbed and ladylike while they were publicly criticised in the press. As a group they maintained a unified silence on the subject. As 'ladies' the organising committee never engaged with their critics in the public realm, leaving chivalrous male 'supporters' to put their point of view.93

Windeyer and the other Exhibition organisers saw competition as a way to legitimise women's work, and they asked the women competitors of all kinds and classes to show their commitment to this higher aim by proving themselves to be good sports. The debate which surrounds the ambulance work exam shows that women exhibitors took the organisers up on their promise to grant status and value to women's work, and that, of course, raised the stakes considerably if things didn't work out the way they wanted or expected. All involved had a great deal invested in the exhibition, it was not merely a show of ideas or things. But in practice the EWI expressed a difficult balance between expectation, investment and actuality.

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93 *Echo*, 25 October 1888, p. 4; 2 November 1888, p. 4. These men never denied that there were problems, but argued that there had been great public sympathy in and for the ladies' efforts, see Lord Carrington's speech at the conclusion of the work, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 December 1888, p. 3.
Conclusion

I believe your motives have been noble and honest ones. They have been removed far from the purely selfish consideration in exhibition-making which has had its beginning in commercial intrigue, and at the instigation of some ring of interested people. You have been criticised and I think unjustly often. Some of you have been accused of drawing class-lines, and of sacrificing to some extent the spirit of philanthropy and industrial development which was supposed to have been working in the inception of this great fair. You have had energy and devotion and will enough to carry this fair to where it is, will have courage enough to face all criticism and yet not see it, to do as you are often so well able to do--be oblivious to unpleasant things.\textsuperscript{94}

'A man's talk to women', Sydney Morning Herald, 27 October 1888.

In 'A man's talk to women', published in the Sydney Morning Herald near to the EWI's close, a male supporter defended the Exhibition's organisers against charges of self-interest, dishonesty and snobishness. Addressing the lady workers, who themselves remained silent, he praised them for avoiding the machination and artifice that usually attended exhibition creation. He expressed confidence in their ability to cope with the criticisms, because they would be able to draw on a well-established characteristic of genteel femininity: the ability to 'be oblivious to unpleasant things'.\textsuperscript{95}

The organisers of the EWI used the Exhibition to promote an ideal of classless feminine camaraderie as well as reinforce their own social superiority. The Exhibition's competitions functioned as a symbol of the interconnections of class and femininity. In creating and managing them the delegates were not entirely oblivious to the unpleasant inequalities between women, and sought temporarily to neutralise them. But their efforts exposed their own class identities and alliances to the scrutiny of the press, who used them to position women as the bearers of class distinction. At the same moment, the Exhibition's organisers hoped to claim some of the masculine attributes of work in the public sphere for women: good management, dispassionate judgement, measured and dignified interactions.

What emerges from the story of the EWI chronicled in the Windeyer papers is a deep awareness on the part of the women involved of the need to maintain a proper

\textsuperscript{94} 'A man's talk to women', Sydney Morning Herald, 27 October 1888. p. 9.
\textsuperscript{95} Russell, A Wish of Distinction, ch. 2.
feminine and a proper public exterior in the name of women's cause. These two things were not always entirely congruent, indeed at times it seemed as if they were quite incompatible. Women in public were required, and required of themselves and other women, to embody proper genteel feminine values of selflessness, nobility, solidarity and silence. They sought to downplay division, difference and disputes, and maintain an air of disinterested unflappability. Hard lessons learnt at the EWI about bringing womanliness into the world would leave a lasting mark on the feminist movement that followed in its wake.
'Our artist at the "Industries"'.
From the Tribune, 19 October 1888, p. 14.
EWI silver medal, featuring Lady Carrington in profile, awarded to E. M. Rumsey for wood painting. Rumsey had her name and exhibiting section engraved on the medal’s rim.
Collection of Martha Sear.
Figure 4.3

The interior of the Old Exhibition Building Prince Alfred Park, as seen at the Sydney Metropolitan Exhibition, 1877.
From the Illustrated Sydney News, 28 April 1877, p. 5.
(a) Nellie Gould, first matron of Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney, 1888. Photograph from the collection of the Royal Prince Alfred Graduate Nurses' Association.

(b) Nellie Gould won the Exhibition of Women’s Industries’ only gold medal. As a measure of its importance to her, she had it made into a belt buckle and wore it throughout her working life, which included service in Boer and Great Wars. It was sold at auction ten years ago to a private collector for $7,200. Reproduced from the Australian Antique Collector, January-June 1991, p. 113.
Exhibition of Women's Industries

**=-Centenary Fair,=-**

**SYDNEY, OCTOBER, 1888.—**

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President: **Lily Carrington.**

Delegate: **Mary L. Windyer.**

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**HIS is to Certify that Miss Alice Ryrie, of Prince Alfred Hospital, was examined by us in the Theory and Practice of Sick Nursing, and obtained the following award:—**

**Section A, Senior Trained Nurses' "Silver Medal."

**SAMUEL T. KNAGGS, M.D.**

**WM. CHISHOLM, M.D. (Lond.).**

**EDW. J. JENKINS, M.D. (Oxford).**

**Examiners.**

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*Nurses who competed in the Exhibition of Women's Industries' nursing examinations received a certificate stating their level of award. Nurse Alice Ryrie, of Prince Alfred Hospital, added it to a collection of testimonials she had printed, proof of her proficiency and professionalism.*

From the collection of the Royal Prince Alfred Graduate Nurses' Association Museum.
Chapter 5
'Together': Feminism and women's work exhibitions in New South Wales 1888-1892

The woman's cause is man's; they rise and sink
Together, dwarfed or god-like, bond or free...1

Alfred Lord Tennyson, The Princess, 1847.

Lady Windeyer ... recommended "Together" as a good motto for the present times when men and women should make common cause in work.2

Sydney Mail, 30 July 1892.

The era of the women's exhibition in Sydney also witnessed the genesis of an organised women's movement in NSW. The exhibitions made a complex and subtle contribution to colonial feminism. The EWI indirectly assisted in the movement's creation and articulation. It promoted the identification of women as a group, opened the 'woman question' for increased public discussion, and helped accelerate processes already begun: women's network building and organisational control over their expanding public role. Some of the women who were involved in the EWI became central to new organisations, such as the Dawn Club and the Women's Literary Society, which debated women's issues and the suffrage. All of these threads were woven together when in 1891 the NSW Chicago Exposition Commission sought a committee of women to gather exhibits of colonial women's work for the Fair, and appointed Lady Windeyer, former EWI delegate and President of the newly-formed Womanhood Suffrage League (WSL), as its head.

2 Sydney Mail, 30 July 1892, cutting in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML. *D159.
But while the Women's Work Exhibition (WWE) held in Sydney in 1892, preliminary to the Chicago fair, took place in a context marked by a clear feminist presence in public affairs, the feminism of the Exhibition itself was muted. The committee's choices of subject matter, objects and messages were informed by a feminist consciousness, but this was not openly articulated while the exhibits remained in Australia. Conscious instead that women's involvement in the NSW representation was a momentous responsibility, and a significant test of women's abilities, the committee put forward the exhibit and their work in organising it as visible but unspoken proof of women's fitness for public life. In 1891 the women of Committee XII on Woman's Work (Committee XII) felt that they were 'on show' as much as the exhibits. Maintaining the committee's public face became the all-encompassing goal, while behind the scenes they struggled mightily, amongst themselves and against the ignorance, apathy and obstructiveness of the male commissioners. These rifts made the most politically-conscious members all the more aware of the prejudices which hindered women's emancipation, at exactly the moment when they felt least able to voice their objections. For the President Mary Windeyer, especially, the vexations raised in 1888 by the ambulance work incident reemerged, magnified a hundredfold by the 'national' importance of the undertaking.

The 'national' aspect of the representation would prove central to the feminist dilemma of the Exhibition. In 1888 women had been excluded from the centennial celebrations and the EWI was a visible protest against that. In 1891 they were invited to take part, offered the 'distinct recognition' they had sought three years earlier, and allowed a deal of autonomy in carrying out the work. But these new opportunities coincided with a moment of national crisis: labour strife, economic depression, commercial failure and political instability. Expenditure on the overall NSW representation to Chicago had to be justified in the face of severe financial problems. The women's exhibit had to be justified further, because it was intended as a show of abstractions such as 'civilisation' and 'womanliness', not tangible solutions to real economic difficulties, such as trade goods and reserves of mineral wealth. Committee
XII on Woman's Work tried to claim that women's work too was essential to the survival of the colony. However the women's agenda had to be presented in such a way as to seem deferential to more pressing needs.

The most striking thing about the Woman's Work Exhibition of 1892 is that it was created by some of the leaders of the colonial suffrage movement, and yet mention of women's rights was assiduously excluded. In 1888 Lady Carrington had been praised as president of the EWI for 'by her example and precept elevating woman's cause, whilst carefully avoiding all participation in any proposals which could savour of agreement with agitators for the so-called "Women's Rights."  

The absence of a feminist voice at the EWI was paralleled by a more general silence, broken only by Louisa Lawson's *Dawn*, or the faint cry of reformers from afar. But the lack of overt feminist rhetoric in connection with the WWE was more puzzling because it took place in a climate of intense gender debate and increasing suffragist action. The president of the women's exhibition was now herself an 'agitator for women's rights'. She felt compelled however, at least in so far as the Exhibition was concerned, to elevate the cause of woman by 'example and precept' rather than by raising her voice in public in connection with the display.

The symbolism of the Vashti story to women's efforts to present their sex at international exhibitions like the Chicago World's Fair has already been described. Here the silent defiance of the queen comes to the fore, as well as her transformation into an example to other women. The feminism of some members of Committee XII was implicit in their actions and their resistance to the NSW Commission, but it remained unspoken until the exhibits and their guardian Margaret Windeyer had left the colony. Ironically, an overwhelming awareness that the committee's work was being judged as a measure of all women's fitness for public life and national responsibility stifled their feminist expression.

At the same time they knew they were being judged on their womanliness as feminists. The suffrage debate that surrounded the exhibit was marked by an emphasis

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3 *Sydney Mail*, 6 October 1888, p. 714.
on the public image and civic responsibility of the suffragists. The WWE therefore became a tableaux vivant on the subject 'colonial feminism' as well as 'colonial woman'. The real women involved tried to be still, to hold their poses of noble femininity while the audience scrutinised and considered their applause. But before the curtain rose, the struggle for control and balance was strenuous, and the marks of that struggle were difficult to conceal. The EWI that had appeared before it had more in common with a mime. Its living exhibits moved, though silently, and out of the empty air the women of NSW began to draw the newly-imagined forms of feminism.

The first crack in the eggshell: The feminist legacy of the EWI

_The Exhibition of Women's Industries in Sydney was nothing but a manifesto of the position of the women of New South Wales. It was a history written in objects. Its unworded proclamation was "See what we can do with our hands tied. For centuries men have compressed us into the mould they thought befitted us, this is the best we can do."_4

_The Illustrated Sydney News, 29 November 1888._

The EWI was, like all exhibitions, an ephemeral event. Only a small set of needlework from Holland gained the promise of permanence offered by a museum. Instead, the lasting impact of the display lay in more intangible things: connections, camaraderie, optimism, learning and experience. For competitors and exhibitors the Exhibition brought recognition and encouragement, and perhaps also work. For female visitors it offered real and imaginative opportunities: to be typists or inventors or nurses or factory workers. All the women involved were changed by the display, and they in turn went on to change their society: whether by taking up a new job, or seeking the suffrage. Some of those same women would go on to create another exhibition of women's work, the Woman's Work Exhibition of 1892. So proud were they of the EWI that the second exhibition would include a framed memorial to the 'women's

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4 _Illustrated Sydney News, 29 November 1888, p. 23._
industries' of 1888, a tribute to that 'first crack in the eggshell from which the emancipated woman was to emerge.\textsuperscript{5}

The EWI's contributions to the emergence of a women's rights movement in NSW were imaginative and ideological as well as practical. Newspaper responses to the EWI meant women's role and women's work were the subject of intense public discussion.\textsuperscript{6} From the female columnists came pleas for liberty and enlightenment, critiques of women's current place and suggestions for their enlarged sphere, and imaginative constructions of an emancipated future. Both the Exhibition itself, and the response of female commentators to it, represented a clear assertion that women's role was historically constructed rather than biologically given. Furthermore, as a result of the harsh criticism faced by the organisers, genteel women could plainly see that they were constrained and constricted by an 'unreasoned prejudice' based on sex rather than merit. At the same time they sensed and saw great possibilities and opportunities for the women and for society as a whole.

The Exhibition's effects were not simply visionary, but tangible. The EWI taught its organisers about management, meetings and paperwork, approaches to government, business and the press. It gave them a taste of life in the glare of the public gaze and the robust world of public debate. It was a huge statement of possibility as well as a practical result. It could be pointed to with the exclamation 'women did this!' to justify other, newer, activities. Yet ironically, the most directly feminist discussion which surrounded the Exhibition came from women who looked at the display and declared that the exhibits were not of a creditable standard.

Two articles by women which assessed the EWI's impact articulated the unwitting feminist message of the Exhibition - that the work displayed was not good, and that was because women's lives were constricted and their experience limited. The author of the women's page of the \textit{Illustrated Sydney News} took this view:

\textsuperscript{5} Women's Column, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 26 May 1888, p. 7.
The recent Exhibition of Women's Industries in Sydney has naturally had the effect of directing public attention to the manner in which women are handicapped in the work of industrial competition. Although every encouragement was afforded the women of New South Wales to furnish proofs of their industrial skill and capabilities, the results were somewhat disappointing. There was more of promise than of performance. Everywhere might be detected indications of the latent capabilities of women, but very little, in anything showing the manner in which they were being developed.7

Following the classic line of liberal feminism articulated by J. S. Mill, and restated by the colonial press, she traced the underdevelopment of women's talents to restrictions imposed by men on the expansion of women's labour, particularly the labour of women who did not have a male provider or protector:

[W]omen themselves are beginning to discover that, with all man's boasted love of liberty, his heartfelt sentiment has been that he alone was competent to use and to distribute it. It has at last become palpable that inasmuch as thousands of women--spinsters, wives and widows--are compelled to earn their own livelihood, and yet cannot all be governesses, companions, needlewomen, servants or boarding-house keepers, the fullest liberty must, in the name of common justice, be afforded them to labour in such avocations as they can and will.

The author recommended increased employment and improved educational opportunities for women as a solution to social problems more generally, suggesting that female independence would strengthen rather than threaten the marriage bond.

Woman's nature is not a thing of unalterable shape, fixed in the mould we see today; it is as susceptible of change by the compression of surroundings as is the nature of every child, every man, every living thing in nature. Give women means to learn, the opportunity to grow to independence, and men will bear no longer the shame of eating bread which weaker creatures need. Give them but the ability to be free, to stand and live alone, and their love will be a better gift to fight for, and a thing which even after marriage men will desire to retain.

Women's capabilities, she argued, were not fixed or predetermined, but malleable. This was the 'real teaching of the Exhibition'. It had exposed the current limitations on women's development and the pressing need for the expansion of women's capacities.

M. L. Manning in her essay in the Centennial Magazine made a similar argument.8 She discussed the Exhibition as the latest step in the history of a 'progressive desire' which was 'the distinguishing mark between man and the dumb creation'.9 Manning presented women's efforts in the eighteenth century to 'brave

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7 Illustrated Sydney News, 29 November 1888, p. 23.
9 'With every infringement upon the coercive laws that had made woman little more than a mischievous puppet in the hands of man, and the emancipation than resulted from some petty thraldom, there came the desire for wider usefulness, greater intellectual freedom; although with each fresh departure from the worn-out track there was associated only gall and wormwood for the high
public opinion' as a 'natural revolt against false conditions'.

She cast the rising women's movement as an inevitable result of progressivism, and the greatest revolution in an age of change:

There is no more fallacious belief in this world of social scares than that soul freezing aphorism 'What is, is best.' It is opposed to all progressive aims towards a higher ideal, and to accept such a dogma in sincerity is to tolerate the crudest, most vitiating abuses. ... In this great 'revolt of women' going on so quietly and persistently, we recognize a force that will revolutionize the civilised world, and will be stronger to turn swords into ploughshares than that doctrinal teaching of the past which has looked askance at all liberality of views where women were concerned.

Yet Manning also identified that women themselves might be the least likely to want to throw off their 'friendly chains'. Only relief from purely domestic concerns would give women the opportunity to see the extent of their oppression. She therefore viewed machinery as a positive force for increasing women's awareness of wider public questions and their place in society:

[When steam, gas, and electricity came as motive forces to expedite and save, there came a time to pause, a time of leisure to all classes of women. And in that leisure they saw that the conditions of life were rapidly changing; what had formerly been luxuries were now necessities, and what had once been accomplishments of a very high order were now very mediocre attainments; and if they would keep abreast of the tide, they must swim with it. As they felt more assured of their footing the old mauvaise honte of their inferior capacities lessened and lessened before the conviction that it was no primal inferiority, but one of prejudice and physical unendurance—the latter the heritage of false education.]

These thoughts applied to the exhibition of women's work, argued Manning, '[m]uch in the same way as we deduce a moral from a story'. Such an exhibition, she suggested, would not have been tolerated even twenty years before. It was proof that there had been 'time for many changes, ... time for the subjection of unreasoning prejudice to universal toleration. Thoughtful reflection will see in these initial attempts at womanly independence great possibilities in the future.'

Mrs. Manning, 'The industrial employment of women', p. 408.

10 'Previous to that initial struggle woman was hardly more than an appendage of animal worth. Invaluable in many ways, it is true, but not the less merely a useful piece of furniture, and hardly of greater value...and therefore incapable of sharing in man's high aspirations.' Manning, p. 408.

11 In this she was in agreement with the correspondent of the Englishwoman's Review, who commented: 'A sampler; a wedding veil; and then the last dress of all. These were fair emblems of an average woman's life in the bygone years. They remain emblems still, but with a great deal superadded. And we women of 1888 have to thank God, the true and brave of our own sex, ay, and the true and brave of the other sex too, for the increased scope for good, the increased capabilities of happiness which "industries," mental and manual, have brought to our lot.' Englishwoman's Review, 15 January 1889, pp. 12-3.
Like the columnist in the *Illustrated Sydney News*, Manning pointed to the defects of the Exhibition as proof of women's constricted experience, although with a more optimistic and sympathetic tone. There was much to be deduced from the weakness of some of the exhibits about the differences and inequalities between the sexes:

In the nature of things a woman's life is mainly torn into shreds and patches, while it is the object of a man to give his whole energies to the perfecting of one or two things. He has a defined time for work, he has a defined time for recreation; and in this rest he perfects the thoughts of his brain. The scrappy nature of women's work was seen (except where a profession had been embraced) in the character of the exhibits in the Sydney exhibition, few of which pointed to any settled plan of action, any well-thought-out problem, or to years of steady application to one subject; though there were indications of a more methodological disposition of the precious time which is the inheritance of all alike.

She offered several other reasons for the poor showing. Because of the nature of women's lives, their commitments to child-rearing and domestic work, the exhibits were naturally more likely to be the work of young women whose skills were yet to reach their zenith:

In the initial effort there must be many weak spots, and hardly at any time can a Women's Exhibition bear comparison (even on its own grounds) with a masculine effort, from the obvious fact that the majority of exhibitors must be drawn from the ranks of girls and very young women. Older women, whose powers are matured, are usually absorbed in household duties, and having relinquished the favourite pursuits of maidenhood on the threshold of marriage, have as little inclination to rub up knowledge long laid aside, as they have leisure from their manifold duties to show their housewifely skill.

As well, she hinted, femininity itself may have prevented women from showing their work:

It is not too much to say that they have by no means probed to the bottom of women's capacities. Better and finer work has in all probability been withheld from a sense of too great humility on the part of the worker; unused to competition, she has thought her work would bear feeble comparison with others and has waited to see.

Manning hoped that the EWI would become a triennial event, and confidently predicted a better display in 1891, when the lessons of 1888 had been fully absorbed by colonial women.

Both authors positioned education as central to the improvement of women's work and the liberation of their sex from centuries of oppression. The EWI's Education Department was perhaps the most progressive of all, and it represented the core of the Exhibition's latent feminism. Undoubtedly this was the result of the advanced opinions of its delegate, Mary Windeyer. She was already active in public life as a charity worker, a promoter of the boarding-out scheme for State wards and,
with her husband, judge William Charles Windeyer, a supporter of law reform in areas affecting women such as divorce and factory regulation. Leonora Ritter has shown the extent to which education was 'central to the Windeyers' model of an improving society' as well as a key element in their efforts to create equality between the sexes.\(^\text{12}\) She identified their two main interrelated educational goals: giving exceptionally gifted women full access to higher education, and giving all girls thorough training in the 'feminine arts', in order 'to improve the domestic and maternal performance of ordinary women'.\(^\text{13}\) Both of these aims were manifested in the EWI.

Windeyer was able to take charge of a section whose work extended into other departments. Hence the value of education to women's general advancement percolated through the whole display. There was a formal as well as an informal educational aspect to the entire exhibition, which was most clearly seen in the large number of school girl's exhibits sent from all over the state.\(^\text{14}\) At the same time the decision to grant education an entire department gave it even greater significance.

Windeyer used the opportunity to encourage study in areas that might lead to higher education and training, and focus on educational opportunities that might lead to 'honourable and lucrative employment'.\(^\text{15}\) As we have seen, the department assisted in the recognition of nurses in the colony. It also suggested an expanded role for women in scientific pursuits, opening competition in 'the culture of silkworms, the preparation and classification of specimens of natural history, the modelling of objects used in scientific and botanical demonstration, experimental work in electricity, telegraphy and stenography'.\(^\text{16}\) Map-drawing attracted the most exhibitors, but in keeping with the observations of Manning and the *Illustrated Sydney News*, entries in Windeyer's department were 'not numerous' and 'did not comprise a very wide range'.\(^\text{17}\)

\(^{12}\) Ritter, William and Mary Windeyer, ch 2, and p. 307.

\(^{13}\) Ritter, William and Mary Windeyer, p. 308.

\(^{14}\) Teachers who competed in the exhibition wrote to Windeyer to express their 'gratitude' for her efforts in the 'cause of education', Group of exhibitors in the education department to Mary Windeyer, 27 October 1888, Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.

\(^{15}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1888, p. 6.

\(^{16}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1888, p. 6.

\(^{17}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1888, p. 6.
Competitors in French composition, considered a 'refining influence' for girls at the best schools, were many; in German and Latin, considered 'male-oriented' academic subjects, they were few. Efforts to encourage women's creative expression met with better results. Competition in 'stories of Australian life' and poetry attracted more than twenty entrants each, including prominent or soon to be prominent authors such as Emily 'Australie' Heron, Florence Walsh, Frances Gillam Holden, Louisa Mack and Ethel and Lillian Turner. Ethel Turner, a schoolgirl in 1888, would later attribute her decision to take up writing as a career to her success in winning a silver medal at the EWI. Essay writing and a lecture series gave women's opinions a public voice. Papers given by women on coal, kindergartens, 'food and its relation to life and intelligence', 'temperance from a woman's standpoint', the 'lower forms of plant and animal life', and infant management drew large audiences.

In the Educational Department under Mary Windeyer arguments about the emancipating and ennobling attributes of women's work took on an explicitly nationalistic and political bent. Holden's prize-winning essay on the nobility and patriotic purpose of women's work, discussed earlier, was published the following year by Louisa Lawson's openly feminist journal the Dawn. On the second day of the exhibition, Miss L. Ellis, principal of Newnham High School, delivered a lecture on 'the education of women morally and intellectually considered'. Ellis argued for women's better access to education as the basis for improved home and family life, as well as national greatness, by forming in the 'New South Welshmen of the future those qualities which would help to make our country one of the leading nations of the earth.' But she also suggested that education would enable a woman to become an 'independent member of society':

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19 EWI, *Catalogue*, pp. 82-83; Professor M. W. MacCallum, judge of the creative writing competitions, expressed his surprised that 'industrious women had so robust an appetite for horrors. They talk as familiarly of murder, starvation, and burning alive 'as maids of thinkin' do of puppy dogs'’. M. W. MacCallum to Mrs Windeyer, 18 October 1888, in Women's Industrial Exhibition Sydney 1888, Letters, ML Aw 62.
20 This was for her essay on Woman's Work, see *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October 1888, p. 4.
21 *Sydney Morning Herald*, advertising columns during October 1888, passim.
Formerly girls were educated to be ornaments of society, but the women of to-day were awakening to a knowledge of the power which lay dormant within them -- the power of ruling the world. Women were no longer satisfied to be mere ornaments; they aimed at being what God intended them to be -- a means by which mankind might be rendered truer, purer, holier, and more like the image in which they were created.\textsuperscript{22}

Ellis wove together women's individual aspirations with their maternal power and national responsibility in a manner which would become characteristic of colonial feminist claims in the ensuing decade. Hard on the heels of the Exhibition genteel women's frustrations, and their growing recognition of the 'unreasoning prejudice' that greeted efforts to resolve those feelings, were translated into organised collective action.

The EWI opened up a discussion about women at a profoundly symbolic moment, the centenary, offering a vision of the future while providing a distraction from a fraught past.\textsuperscript{23} The Exhibition forged connections between women, colonial identity and Australian destiny which would be exploited by feminists in the following decade. The centenary of Australian settlement prompted many visions of the future, including feminist ones. In the \textit{Centennial Magazine} Catherine Helen Spence imagined a week in the future where society was co-operative and women were emancipated.\textsuperscript{24} The women's column of the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} painted several images of a future where women were enfranchised and free to enter parliament.\textsuperscript{25} The same column which noted that 1888 seemed 'specially a woman's year' in the light of the impending women's exhibition, pictured the

dim future, when our granddaughters have gained celebrity at the bar, in medicine, or in commerce, or -- following the lead of Miss Cornwell, have burst like meteors on the financial world -- when seated in their comfortable club library, they leisurely turn over the leaves of some old chronicle and chat of the quaint manners and customs of the nineteenth century, they will acknowledge this fact, and speak of this dear old year 1888 as having been witness to the first crack in the egg-shell of social opinion from which the emancipated woman, slightly stiffened at first by the

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Echo}, 4 October 1888, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{23} See Davison et al., \textit{Australia 1888}, ch. 22.
\textsuperscript{24} Catherine Helen Spence, 'A week in the future', published in the \textit{Centennial Magazine}, 1888-9; see also Magarey, \textit{Unbridling the Tongues of Women}, pp. 105, 136-7.
cramped position she had been forced for some time to assume, but gradually to find
the use of first her feet, and then her wings, was to emerge.26

Its author then noted that among the 'many advantages we women in New South
Wales enjoy this year is a promise of the franchise.' In 1887 Sir Henry Parkes had
given his support to woman's suffrage in the NSW parliament.27 The women's
column was cautious about predicting how soon his promise would be made good, but
'lived in hopes, for we should much like a vote in the election of our members, we
have a sort of vague idea it means power.' While the pledge to grant women the
franchise in 1888 was not fulfilled, the EW'I's status as the concluding event of the
centennial year gave women a more tangible sensation of the social and cultural power
the vote might bring. By the time of the next women's exhibition the vote would still
not be won, but women had emerged from the social eggshell and started to find their
feet in the public arena.

A show of solidarity: Feminism in Sydney 1888-1891

I was especially glad you should find and feel yourself one with a large body of
women. The lack of solidarity -- it is a long word but no other will serve -- amongst
women was one of the things that struck me most painfully when I first came to
Sydney and only on such occasion as this World Fair could you have experienced it
sufficiently to know what a charm it gives to life28

Louisa Macdonald, Principal of the Women's College at the University of Sydney, to
Margaret Windeyer in the USA, 1893.

Between 1888 and 1891 women in NSW began to organise themselves into groups
devoted to promoting women's interests as a sex. Some encouraged women to discuss
issues pertaining to them. Some sought legislation which would protect women and
girls from exploitation and abuse. Some tried to open up new opportunities for women

26 Sydney Morning Herald, 26 May 1888, p. 7.
27 'I say myself that I would admit them to the right of the suffrage tomorrow...I think we need not
hesitate much if, indeed, we are the democratic country which gentlemen sometimes represent us to
be. One thing I am quite sure of, and that is that on many questions -- on questions of a social
character -- the vote of women would be safer than that of the men.' Sir Henry Parkes, quoted in
Audrey Oldfield, Woman Suffrage in Australia: A Gift or a Struggle?, Cambridge University Press,
28 Louisa Macdonald to Margaret Windeyer, 10 September 1893, in Margaret Windeyer
Correspondence, ML MSS 186/17.
workers, or to ameliorate the effects of economic depression on poor women. Others sought the vote as a way to speed these reforms, to purify the public sphere, to grant women full citizenship, or advance their claims to equality with men.29 The diversity of these goals was matched by a diversity of opinion amongst women as to how women's advancement was to be achieved and to what purpose. The colonial women's movement was small. Personality and individual interests took on enormous significance, and internal differences of opinion had to be confronted at every turn.

The suffrage alliance in New South Wales included women who held ideas that in England, for example, were represented by whole groups rather than one person. Divergent views sometimes erupted, fracturing delicate unity and opening cracks in the mask of a 'women's movement' built on feminine ideals of self-effacement, refinement, harmony and devotion to the common good.

What almost all the women involved held in common, a belief in the transcendent, dignified and ennobling femininity described in previous chapters, formed the basis both of robust alliances and fragile associations. Women's groups challenged and reinvented conventional femininity even while it formed a central part

of their public image and their arguments, strategies, and vision for change. In femininity they found justifications for diverse claims, but also grounds for sisterhood and solidarity. Women leaders sought to accommodate and contain divergent voices and maintain the public face of their movements, while individually they expressed strong arguments in the name of 'Woman', and pressed for a greater 'women's voice' in the running of the colony. The nature of the new women's groups, and the debates that surrounded them, would shape the approaches of the organisers of the NSW representation to the Chicago World's Fair of 1893.

Perhaps the EWI's most important feminist legacy was that it brought together women from a diverse range of backgrounds and beliefs, many of whom would form fast friendships, and some of whom would later become active in the women's movement. In 1891, for example, Mrs Matilda Curnow, wife of the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald and founder of the Women's Literary Society, wrote to Margaret Windeyer: 'Having made your acquaintance at Women's Industries, I felt you were one after my own heart'.

The Women's Literary Society, along with Louisa Lawson's Dawn Club, embraced alliances formed in the execution of exhibition work. They in turn would form the foundation of genteel women's organised political campaigns during the 1890s.

Louisa Lawson started the Dawn Club in May 1889, a year after beginning her women's journal of the same name. Lawson's experiences as a mother working to support a large family in both the city and the country had made her a 'radical ... protagonist for women's emancipation' [Figure 5.1]. Described as a 'Social Reform Club for Women', the Dawn Club took as its object 'the social advancement and

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30 Mrs Curnow to Margaret Windeyer, 8 June 1891, in Margaret Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/17.
industrial independence of women'.\textsuperscript{32} It existed 'to amalgamate for mutual development, mutual aid and for the consideration and forwarding of various questions of importance to the sex'.\textsuperscript{33}

The group drew together Sydney women with the most advanced views in the city, united by their outlook rather than their background. It was intended that the club would 'gather together a nucleus of those women who, having themselves faced the realities of life, in its work, its poverty, its trials, have or hope they have, gained through these things, useful experience which might help others in the same battlefield'.\textsuperscript{34} The Dawn Club was founded with working women in mind and had connections with the Women's Trade Union and Provident League.\textsuperscript{35} Full membership details are unclear but the club included journalists, typists and schoolteachers. Some of the women involved had connections with the EWI. By September 1889 the club had 50 members including working women like Lawson, professional women like nurse Frances Gillam Holden, and elite women such as Margaret Windeyer. Lawson had met Susannah Gale, a strong advocate for women's suffrage and member of the Windeyer family, at a meeting of spiritualists soon after her arrival in Sydney in the early 1880s, and become friends with Mary Windeyer and her more radical daughter.\textsuperscript{36} It is unlikely that Mary ever attended the Dawn Club but Margaret was one of the original invitees and gave a paper on 'Women's Mission' to one of the earliest fortnightly meetings.\textsuperscript{37}

In November 1889 the \textit{Dawn} described a typical gathering of the society: The meeting usually begins in an atmosphere of slight formality and restraint, but as the reading of essays proceeds, and discussion follows, interrogations, replies, comments and laughter become general and the meetings are so lively and so amusing that the disappearance of gas-light at ten o'clock is generally the first intimation of the flight of time.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Dawn}, July 1889, p. 8; Also quoted in Oldfield, \textit{Woman Suffrage in Australia}, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Dawn}, July 1889, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Dawn}, July 1889, p. 8; Allen, \textit{Rose Scott}, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{36} Oldfield, \textit{Woman Suffrage in Australia}, p. 76; Roberts, \textit{Maybanke Anderson}, pp. 51-2.
The subjects discussed at the last four meetings were, -- Sir Alf. Stephen's Divorce Act, Tennyson's Idylls of the King, ambition, and temperance. One member usually prepares the main essay on the topic, and three or four others get up the subject with less elaboration, and it is amusing to find how diametrically opposed the written opinions often are.38

The Dawn Club tolerated different views without consternation. At the first meeting its vice-president stated 'we do not hope or expect to think alike, but know that there must be "diversity in unity", and wish for the freest interchange of thought and expression and the closest criticism of both.'39 The other Sydney women's discussion group founded in the same year would not be so accepting of radical views.

The Women's Literary Society (WLS), like the Dawn Club, was intended as a forum for women to discuss literature, as well as more practical or topical matters.40 Subjects debated included the life and work of Mary Wollstonecraft, George Eliot's women, Buddhism, Socialism, crime, 'the art and practice of housekeeping', 'suggestions for the improvement of affairs as regards wage earning women', and 'what is a vulgar person?'. The WLS membership included numerous women who had worked at the EWI, but it was more uniformly genteel than that of the Dawn Club. Margaret Windeyer was the only member the Dawn Club and the WLS had in common. She was Honorary Secretary of the society from its foundation until she left for Chicago in 1893.41

Most of the prominent feminists of the 1890s, such as Dora Montefiore, Maybanke Wolstenholme (later Anderson), Lizzie Ashton and Rose Scott were also in regular attendance, but their views were often in contrast to the rest of the group. In 1925 Anderson recalled an early meeting where she and Scott had raised the subject of woman suffrage:

one or two members began to give guarded assent, when an energetic and much esteemed member rose and said with much heat that she hoped that we would never discuss such a disgraceful matter.42

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40 Allen, Rose Scott, pp. 82-3.
41 Collection of Women's Literary Society material 1890-1896, ML.
42 Quoted in Oldfield, Woman Suffrage in Australia, p. 78.
Ethel Turner, a junior member, commented in her diary, 'it is horrid to see the way some of them go on about their rights and wrongs, its old fashioned of me I suppose but I do think it would take from the womanliness of a woman to be in Parliament [sic].’ Anderson’s memory gives us an insight into the extent to which women felt uneasiness about publicly admitting to sympathy with the suffrage cause, as well as the suffragists’ own sense of originality and distinctness. A growing awareness that they were in 'advance' of the rest of the society may have contributed to their cohesion as the WLS splinter group which would go on to found the Womanhood Suffrage League of NSW (WSL) in 1891.

Judith Allen, in her discussion of the genesis of Rose Scott’s feminism, gives the WLS a special place in the development of a colonial feminist consciousness. She argues that the women of the WLS would ‘normally have confined their public activity to various forms of philanthropy.’ But by the late 1880s, as could be seen in the activities of the Queen’s Jubilee Fund, these women were beginning to approach the underlying causes of women’s distress rather than seeking simply to ameliorate it. This 'entailed the recognition of women's disenfranchisement, economically, legally and culturally, in the major spheres and activities of their lives.' It made them realise that 'the basis of women's disenfranchisement was their sex.' The philanthropic gaze 'disclosed ... sexual asymmetry, exploitation and discontent' and 'permitted the kinds of cross-class, cross-ethnic identification of women as a sexed group: in [Nancy] Cott's words, the 'we' requisite for the emergence of feminism.' The WLS, in Allen’s view, represented a form of sexual politics centred on the ‘analysis of cultural production’. Women positively evaluated women’s contribution to cultural life and in the process became ‘familiar enough with contemporary discourses effective in women's subordination to subvert them with confidence.’ Allen notes that is was fitting that women’s first venture into public life should be with the 'minimal skill bequeathed to them by the ... parlour -- literacy.' One might add that other parlour

44 Allen, *Rose Scott* pp. 82-94.
skills, such as those on show at the EWI, could also form a conduit into sexual politics.

The WSL began at a meeting held in a lady's drawing room. In March 1891 Dora Montefiore called a meeting at her home in Darlinghurst Road to 'consider the need for active work for the women's vote'.45 She invited Maybanke Wolstenholme, Rose Scott, May Manning (who had written at such length on the EWI in the *Centennial Magazine*), Margaret Windeyer and Dr and Mrs Ellis. A second meeting included Mary Windeyer and Mr J. L. Brient, editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, and heard from Mrs Wolstenholme about Jessie Ackermann, an American temperance leader and suffragist in Australia to advise the local Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).46 The WCTU of NSW, founded in 1882, had been an early advocate of the women's franchise.47 It sent Mrs Eliza Pottle, a Quaker and EWI committee member and guest speaker, to address an invitation-only meeting of fifty sympathetic men and women held on 6 May 1891 to assist in the constitution of a Womanhood Suffrage League.48 Louisa Lawson also spoke, having been advised by Scott to merge the Dawn Club with the new group. At the founding meeting a month later both women spoke again, as did Mary Windeyer, the new president of the league.49 The league adopted the motto 'Equality is equity', accompanied by the lines from Tennyson which began this chapter.50 The new group included many influential men, including Sir Henry Parkes, as well as prominent genteel women. As Oldfield puts it, 'it was

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46 See Jessie Ackermann, *Australia From a Woman's Point of View*, (first published 1913), reprinted with a new introduction by Elizabeth Riddell, Cassell Australia, North Ryde, 1981.
48 Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia*, pp. 74 and 79.
impossible to dismiss the new organisation as a "shrieking sisterhood", because it carried with it such an 'aura of respectability'.

Maintaining that aura was essential to the League's success. It would continually face public crises over its image that stemmed not just from external hostility but from internal differences of opinion fanned by public criticism. This difficulty began early in the League's life. Late in 1891 Lizzie Ashton, wife of the painter Julian Ashton, expressed the view that marriage was a 'failure, a lamentable one' at a WSL meeting. She thought that the first work of enfranchised women should be to amend the marriage laws, proposing the end to lifelong contracts and suggesting annual reviews instead. Ashton spoke out passionately to what she called the 'small section of thinking females in a world of marionettes'. But she soon found herself alienated from even the small group of women who shared her enthusiasm for the suffrage, after her comments provoked an intense debate in the press. Fearing a loss of support, members of the League hurried to reassure the 'outside public' and 'remove the erroneous impression' that women sought to gain the suffrage in order to 'do away with marriage altogether.' 'Agna', a correspondent to the Daily Telegraph, lamented that 'our cause has ... been wounded in the house of its friends', and anxiously asserted that the majority of the League disapproved of the sentiments set forth by one 'very advanced member'. The leadership sought to distance the League from the views of individual members. Vice-president Maybanke Wolstenholme wrote to say that the single aim of the organisation was to obtain the franchise for women:

On this broad basis there is room for many individual opinions, and creed, race and sex are alike matters of indifference among its members. This being so, it is surely most unjust and illogical that an assemblage of men and women so leagued together for a common good should be credited or discredited with all the opinions of one of their number.

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51 Oldfield, Woman Suffrage in Australia, p. 79.
53 Allen, Rose Scott, p. 127.
54 Daily Telegraph, 14 November 1891, p. 3.
55 Daily Telegraph, 14 November 1891, p. 3.
56 Daily Telegraph, 16 November 1891, p. 3.
The governor's wife, Lady Jersey, wrote to Lady Windyer urging her 'to publicly dissociate the WSL from Ashton's "atrocious" sentiments, which she argued had raised the spectre of "free love" and concubinage in the minds of the conservative and stood to tar suffragists as a whole. Writing officially to the press on behalf of the league, secretary Rose Scott stated that the only object of the group was to gain the suffrage for women, distancing it from the 'irresponsible opinions' of some of its members. Julian Ashton wrote in vain defending his wife, conceding only that her comments had been 'inopportune', although for the good of the cause he too made clear that they were not the views of the league as a whole. The Ashton incident exposed to the public world that there was a range of conflicting views amongst local campaigners, who were anxious to present a united front. Reinstating public confidence in the movement involved its leadership admitting to differences of opinion, but upholding the ability of the organisation to deal with them by asserting the singular aim of the group, and maintaining the moderate views of the 'silent majority' of members.

The furore brought into question women's capabilities to take part in public and political life. Following the debate a leader in the generally supportive Sydney Morning Herald demanded women show some evidence of their 'mentalsobriety, their sanity, their common sense.' More of the world's work, it claimed, would be opened to them if they could 'prove their competency for discharging it'. The leader accused suffragists of being self-interested rather than committed to co-operation:

they should make it clear that it is really the work of the world, ... that [which] is conducive to the general welfare, and not merely their own work and the ceaseless advocacy of their own claims to which they desire to devote themselves. Much would be done towards the recognition of their demands to share in this work were it once made apparent that the interest which animated them was that of society at large, of men and women alike, instead of merely the class interest of womankind.

The Herald questioned what it described at women's 'morbid consciousness of sex', asking them not to 'forget that they are women, but that they are female.' It suggested

57 Allen, Rose Scott, p. 127.
58 Daily Telegraph, 16 November 1891, p. 3; Sydney Morning Herald, 15 November 1891, p. 3.
59 Sydney Morning Herald, 17 November 1891, p. 6.
60 Sydney Morning Herald, 16 November 1891, p. 4.
they claim the vote as 'unenfranchised members of the state', not on the basis of 'sex considerations' with the aim of using newfound political power to promote 'ulterior sex purposes'. It urged the leaders of the movement to silence the 'Wild Women' in its ranks who spoke with 'a dominant note of violence, lawless extravagance, or desperate revolt'. Women must learn to acquire the male qualities of 'reserve and self-control', to recognise that there was more to gain from 'silent work than from reckless, or defiant, or destructive, and we may say immodest, talk.'

Sydney suffragists found themselves the subject of intense criticism for making sex a public issue, for being unfeminine and intemperate, and yet not possessing the necessary masculine qualities essential to civic responsibility. In response, they acknowledged the need for moderation, but persisted in asserting the need for women to bring their special qualities to bear on public life. Rose Scott sought immediately to contradict the Herald's opinions.61 'T]he tone adopted by the N.S.W. League has ever been that of moderation,' she wrote, 'and that the spirit which is at the very foundation of our work is and has been based on the love of humanity in its widest sense.' Quoting a speech from Sir J. Hall on woman's suffrage in New Zealand which 'so exactly express[ed] the League's thoughts, Scott argued that women would ask for the vote on the basis of sex and humanity, religious and national duty:

If [the vote] is refused to her now, on the grounds that she is a woman, let her ask for it for that very reason, because she is a woman with a woman's sympathies for the weak and defenceless; let her ask for it because she is a Christian, with a moral duty to perform towards the ignorant and perverted; let her ask for it because she is a citizen of a great nation, whose power is as wide as the whole earth, and whose duties and responsibilities are commensurate with that power; and because she is bound to help not only the material prosperity, but the moral growth of her fellow citizens.

As they had in 1888, women engaging with the public world in an effort to expand women's sphere and influence found themselves in the difficult ideological position of attempting to further their claims by emphasising sex difference, female solidarity and feminine qualities, while also having to prove themselves committed to collaboration with men in the name of 'humanity' and 'nation', and capable of masculine standards of organisation, debate and negotiation.

At the same time, the colonial 'women's movement' was characterised both by supporters and opponents as lacking in essential solidarity. This disunity was traced to the unique qualities of colonial femininity as well as the interjection of class interests where sex interests should prevail. In connection with the EWI the Herald published an opinion column by a woman author signed 'Silverpen', gently chiding the organisers for 'jars and squabbles owing to want of discipline, rules and concord in aim.' Australian women, unlike their sisters overseas, she argued, could not 'easily bend their wills', did not have as much 'pliability in trifles', 'patience' or 'power of self effacement', and were therefore less able to work together in groups. 'In future the system pursued should spring from voluntary co-operation by persons who bring to the work freshness and independence of mind, unbiased by personal considerations' she wrote.62 Louisa Macdonald, an acute but not always sympathetic observer of colonial life, lamented the painful 'lack of solidarity' amongst women in Sydney, compared to the British milieus she was familiar with.63 It appeared to these writers that the very qualities that made the Australian girl high-spirited and unconventional handicapped Australian women in their struggles for recognition and rights.64 In their view the colonial woman's individuality brought with it a detrimental individualism, while social competitiveness triumphed over social cohesion.

As it had been in 1888, class was also a potential fault line in the 1890s women's movement. Following the controversy over Ashton's speech, a 'woman of the people' composed a column for the Daily Telegraph entitled 'a plea for unity among women'.65 Describing the need for 'unionism' amongst women fighting for the suffrage, the author urged that success would be swift only if women 'would combine together and forget class in the great struggle, for it is the women who help to keep women down.' It was a 'miserable conceit' for privileged women to 'pose as an illustration of the feminine ideal.' Such women 'condemn[ed] unreservedly any

62 Sydney Morning Herald, 10 November 1888, p. 7.
63 See also Beaumont and Hole, Letters from Louisa, ch. 8.
64 See Beverley Kingston, 'The Lady and the Australian Girl', pp. 27-41.
divergence (however excusable or pathetic the case) from the conventional standard',
but

at the same time these women prattle inanely in their drawing rooms about the
suffrage and the broader and freer life emancipated women will lead. They advocate in
theory the same laws for both sexes, yet hold up their hands in horror at a practical
illustration of the same.

She likened the genteel suffragists to 'blind puppies' in the 'basket of conventionality'.'
'Union' was the 'great force' needed for success, but women seemed unable to
recognise it:

Let them sink the Ego and amalgamate for the advancement of their sex. ... Let them
cling together as the other sex do, practicing at the same time the beautiful morality
so strong in good thoughtful women.

This plea for cross-class solidarity again exposed the complex negotiation of interests
implicit in all of women's efforts at organised action in the name of 'woman'. The
WSL's interaction with the labour movement and with working women was cautious
and at times fraught. The group had active branches in working class suburbs and held
regular discussions with sympathetic trade unionists and socialists. The image of
respectability so assiduously maintained by the league united women across class, but
its genteel overtones and the elite nature of the league's leadership would increasingly
lead to the dissatisfaction and alienation of working women.66

Nevertheless, early in the League's life Mary Windeyer issued a rallying call to
genteel women to unite in the battle for suffrage not to help themselves, but to aid their
working sisters.67 At a drawing room meeting held in July 1892 she expressed the
view that while the importance of women's suffrage was probably not apparent to
women of wealth and authority, but the 'disabilities of political non-enfranchisement,
with all the hardships, limitations of privilege and curtailment of opportunities that
followed ... weighed very heavily on the working women of the world.' If the
'women who had all that they wanted would place themselves in an attitude of
solicitous consideration' for those who did not, their action would be 'all the more
just, because it would be unselfish.' Windeyer rebuffed the criticisms of newspapers

66 See Lake, 'Politics of respectability', pp. 1-15; Chris McConville, 'Rough women, respectable
men and social reform: A response to Lake's "masculinism".', Historical Studies, vol. 22, no. 88,
1987, pp. 432-40; Bruce Scates, 'Socialism and feminism: The case of William Lane', Labour
History, November 1990, pp. 54-9; Oldfield, Woman Suffrage in Australia, ch. 5.
67 Daily Telegraph, 30 July 1892, p. 9.
like the Herald by arguing that suffragists were acting from altruistic motives, in the name of women less fortunate than themselves.

Women has equally with men an interest in politics and good government. Women who had influence wanted the vote in order that other women might be raised to the position of influence and power their more fortunate sisterhood already held. The housewife spinning among her maidens might be a very pretty picture of long-ago domestic life, but the whole social and domestic conditions of life had changed in modern times, the scope of women’s work had concurrently changed.

By ‘broadening the scope of women’s work and enlarging their opportunities, the sympathies of women would become higher and nobler.’ Womanhood suffrage would, in her view, give women the chance of ‘broader, better and more useful lives’, and the benefits of that would extend to the entire community. Windeyer’s speech shows how the focus on an expanded definition of ‘women’s work’, a rhetorical emphasis on women’s virtuous qualities, and re-reading of the historical change, which were all combined at the EWI, could be turned into a plea for women’s political rights four years later. However her efforts to use genteel women’s concern for working women into agitation for the extension of the franchise were not shared by all publicly-active women in NSW.

Beyond efforts to gain womanhood suffrage, women also organised themselves into groups concerned with the improvement and expansion of women’s work. These groups have received little attention from historians, overshadowed by the clearer feminist mobilisation around the vote. Organisations like the Working and Factory Girls’ Club, the Working Gentlewomen’s Home and the Women’s Industrial Guild carried on the rhetoric and work of the EWI. 68 The Women’s Industrial promised women ‘the great blessing of human life - WORK - for all women who need it.’ 69 It advocated paid employment as the solution to women’s financial difficulties, sought to soothe the ‘special’ suffering of distressed gentlewomen, and protect the morals of vulnerable young working women, by promoting the value of respectability

68 See for example Sydney Morning Herald, 2 August 1892, p. 3; Working Gentlewomen’s Home and Women’s Industrial Guild papers ML. The Factory Girls’ Club was an initiative of Lady Carrington and founded on a British model in 1889. It might be seen as a natural follow-on from the factory girls’ picnics of the centennial and the interest in factory work at the EWI. The organisation continued well into the 1890s, counting Louise Macdonald and Margaret Windeyer as supporters, see Beaumont and Hole, Letters From Louisa, pp. 109-10.
69 Woman, 25 May 1892, pp. 2-3.
and the dignity of labour. Many involved had held positions at the EWI such as Lady Darley, who was the president of the Women's Cooperative Silk Growing and Industrial Association; and Miss Woolley and Mrs Carl Fischer, who superintended the 'educational' and 'house' departments of the Women's Industrial Guild. Many suffragists too were involved in the industrial societies. Lady Windeyer and Maybanke Anderson for example supported the Women's Co-operative Silk Growing and Industrial Association of New South Wales. Managed by another suffragist, Mrs Sanger Evans, it aimed to 'open up ... new fields of productive industry for workless women of all classes ... industries suited to their strengths and capacities, industries healthful and elevating'. But industrial societies predominantly absorbed the energies of women who appeared to show no interest in the suffrage, or who were more interested in advancing women industrially than politically. The Women's Industrial Guild in particular, under the leadership of Lady Jersey, made strenuous efforts to distance itself from the WSL, reconstituting itself and removing the word 'league' from its title in 1892 in order to eliminate any potential confusion between the two groups. Organisations like the Working Gentlewomen's Home and the Women's Industrial Guild merged the philanthropic ideology of the Queen's Fund with the new impetus for women's organisation and mutual, practical help. They extended the shop aspect of the bazaar and the EWI into depots where women could combine to sell their work, their produce (such as eggs and flowers), or their labour as seamstresses, governesses or maids. Such work was criticised by the satirical feminist magazine Woman as a 'fashionable fad'. 'A number of women representing the leisured class have decided to manufacture another and more cumbersome philanthropy' Woman reported, arguing that the Women's Industrial Guild was evidence of the extent to

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70 See Women's Co-operative Silk Growing and Industrial Association of New South Wales, [Objects and plans]. William Brooks, Sydney, 1894. Rose Scott, the Vandeleur Kellys and other members of the WSL were also involved with the Women's Industrial Guild, see Sydney Morning Herald, 12 May 1892, p. 8.

71 Sydney Morning Herald, 10 March 1892, p. 7; 12 May 1892, p. 8.

72 Women's Industrial Guild, Aims and Objects, Hector Ross Printer, Sydney, 1892; see also Beaumont and Hole, Letters From Louisa, pp. 107-8.
which 'frivolous' elite women were 'out of touch' with the reality of working women's lives in the midst of an economic depression [Figure 5.2].

But despite their preoccupation with the 'refined gentlewoman, thrown perhaps suddenly to depend on her own exertions', industrial societies represented the responses of genteel women to other women's financial distress, as well as to generalised labour unrest. Through new modes of organisation, increased acceptance of women's work, and greater confidence about activity in all aspects of the public sphere, these groups formed another aspect of the women's movement in colonial NSW, a strand concerned with women's economic independence and industrial emancipation.

The EWI had helped kick-start the development of organised feminism in NSW by bringing women together and encouraging them to organise in women's interests. Its focus on women's work and independence, as well as their national and collective responsibilities, helped shape the three interconnected strands of the 1890s women's movement: public cultural activity, formalised by the Dawn Club and the Women's Literary Society; political activism undertaken by the WCTU and the Womanhood Suffrage League; and employment-related organisation such as that undertaken by the Co-operative Silk-Growing Association and the Women's Industrial Guild. The work of all of these women's groups would be combined in the formulation of a NSW women's exhibit for the World's Columbian Exposition to be held in Chicago in 1893.

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73 Woman, 25 May 1892, pp. 2-3.
74 Women's Co-operative Silk Growing and Industrial Association of New South Wales, [Objects and plans].
Government discovers woman: Fair women and official recognition

No organisation comparable to this has ever before existed among women. It is official, acting under government authority and sustained by government funds. ... Even more important than the discovery of Columbus, which we are gathered together to celebrate is the fact that the General Government has just discovered woman.75

Bertha Palmer, President of the Board of Lady Managers, World's Columbian Exposition, 1892.

Lady Windyer spoke at length upon the importance of women marking their appreciation of the first national undertaking in which the promoters had recognised women officially.76

Sydney Mail, 30 July 1892.

The unkindest thing men can do, it seems to me (I've just heard about the doings of the NSW Ladies' Chicago Committee), is to give the dear souls the reins, and then sit back and watch the fun.77

Sappho Smith, Bulletin, 4 March 1893.

The appointment of a committee of women to superintend the exhibits of NSW women in the Women's Building at the Chicago Fair took place late in 1891, less than six months after the foundation of the WSL and in the midst of growing organisation and public action by women and men in the areas of politics and industry. Politically active women invited to take part in the Fair were extremely conscious of the need to maintain a public image, for the good of the women's cause. This image had to conform to accepted notions of femininity and social debate. It had to present public women as moderate, unified, and reasonable, committed to social harmony and the 'national interest'. The overwhelming necessity of maintaining this image would profoundly affect the work of the committee responsible for the NSW women's exhibit at the Fair, provoking a crippling level of self-consciousness and a frustrating experience of internal and external conflict.

A small group of women was selected by the NSW government to present the activities and interests of colonial women at the World's Columbian Exposition. The NSW Executive Commission to the Fair charged Committee XII on Women's Work to

75 Quoted in Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, p. 209.
76 Sydney Mail, 30 July 1892, cutting in Windyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
gather a display of NSW women's work for the women's building at Chicago. Never before had a women's committee been appointed to a foreign exhibition. The creation of the committee came as a result of overseas influence, as the structure of the US fair included a distinct women's exhibit and the officially-constituted Board of Lady Managers had requested exhibits for their international display. In addition, the exhibition-making experience many local suffragists had gained at the EWI meant that the emergent feminist movement in Sydney saw an opportunity to capitalise on its own claims for women's inclusion in public life. But the women chosen to be a part of Committee XII represented a range of views about women's emancipation. Some were active suffragists, others had no interest in substantially changing women's role. Internal tensions between these women as the committee performed its work indicated major differences of opinion about the significance of official recognition, and the uses to which it should be put.

Late in 1891, the NSW Government under Sir Henry Parkes appointed the NSW Commission for the representation of the colony at the Chicago World's Fair. The exhibition, held to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus's discovery of the Americas, took progress as its theme, and the visible inclusion of women in the display was seen as a measure of that progress.

How women were incorporated into the NSW display would in many ways mirror the US experience that immediately preceded it.78 Interest in the Fair, and feminist interest in particular, had been gathering since it was first mooted in 1889. Susan B. Anthony, who had so opposed the women's display at the Philadelphia Exhibition, now sought to promote the official recognition of women from the earliest stages. Anthony feared however that 'her own well-known radical views' might

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"hinder the progress of affairs", so she worked behind the scenes, pragmatically supporting more socially acceptable women who lobbied Congress to appoint a group of female organisers.79 As Cordato put it, female promoters of the enterprise now 'worked within the power structure of society, rather than on the periphery of it'. Anthony believed that only an 'orderly, well-disciplined, non-controversial campaign for the involvement of women in official leadership roles at the Exposition ... would lead to long range success for the cause of woman'.80

For this strategy to succeed the voices of two separate groups vying for control of the women's department had to be first suppressed, and then reconciled once the official recognition was gained. The Queen Isabella Association, a coalition of suffragist professionals, demanded that women be allowed to exhibit on a position of complete equality with men. They advocated a permanent Woman's Building which would become a clubhouse and meeting place for women, not an exhibition hall. The Chicago Women's Auxiliary, a less radical collection of philanthropists and clubwomen, argued for a special separate display of women's work. The officially-appointed Board of Lady Managers initially sought to combine the two groups under its Congress-sanctioned umbrella, but this led to significant factionalism and discord. Conflict peaked in 1891 when the Board of Lady Managers sacked Isabella agitator and lawyer Phoebe Couzins from her position as secretary of the board, and the Isabellas ceased to have a significant voice in the Chicago Fair.81

In December of that year, Margaret Windeyer became Vice-President of the Queen Isabella Association in Australia.82 It seems Windeyer was receiving information about the group from Catherine Wallace, wife of the US consul in

79 Cited in Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, p. 212.
80 Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, p. 212.
81 See [Isabella Association], *Extracts From Papers*, [n.p.d.], in Miscellaneous File of Woman's Building Material, Chicago Historical Society; Weimann, *The Fair Women*, chs 1-5; Darney, *Women and World's Fairs*, ch. 3; Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, ch. 5. Black women were also excluded, see Ann Massa, 'Black women in the White City', *American Studies*, no. 8, 1974, pp. 319-37, and Erlene Stetson, 'A Note on the Women's Building and black exclusion', *Heresies*, 1979, vol. 2, no. 4, 1979, pp. 45-47.
82 Certificate in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X.
Melbourne. This certainly suggests interest in the women's role in the Fair well before the NSW government had officially decided to exhibit. In the same month, Margaret's mother was appointed President of Committee XII on Woman's Work, with responsibility to gather exhibits for the NSW display in the Board-planned Woman's Building. Certainly the different approaches taken by the two groups were mirrored in the different feminisms of mother and daughter, as will be discussed later. But the special nature of Australian feminism was also what made these positions largely compatible in a colonial context. Cordato argues that the conflict between the Isabellas and the Board of Lady Managers mirrored the tensions that had existed at the Philadelphia Centennial. The moderates 'sought woman's advancement through the expansion of her sphere', while others had 'sought the more radical goals of the time, including equal rights and individualism'. NSW women's committee president Mary Windeyer combined all of these elements: she was a suffragist who promoted the purifying influence of the domestic sphere, a believer in woman's equality with man as well as her difference, and a champion of women's right to individual fulfilment as well as the value of sisterhood and solidarity.

The same might, ultimately, be said of the American organisation. While the Board of Lady Managers excised the most radical women from its ranks, it nevertheless incorporated many of their ideas into the final plans for the women's exhibit which would guide the local committees. 'Woman's' representation to the Fair, it argued, would present 'to the world a justification of her claim to be placed on complete equality with man'. Whether women's work should be shown separately or in conjunction with the work of men was a 'burning question' for the Board of Lady Managers.

The most advanced and radical thinkers felt that the exhibit should not be one of sex, but of merit, and that women had reached the point where they could afford to

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83 Catherine P. Wallace to Margaret Windeyer, 3 March 1892, 3 May 1892 and 3 June 1893, in Margaret Windeyer correspondence, ML MSS 186/17.
84 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 December 1891, p. 5.
85 Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, p. 207.
compete side by side with men, with a fair chance of success, and that they would not value prizes given upon the sentimental basis of sex.87

As a result, many of the women's exhibits were shown and judged alongside those of men, within the same classification. 'In an international competitive exhibition, the object is to honor the highest grade of work only, and thereby give it an international reputation, and added commercial value', the Board told its prospective foreign exhibitors. 'This intention might ... be entirely defeated, in the case of competition restricted to women only.'88 Other exhibits shown in the Women's Building would be used to 'emphasize the great and hitherto unacknowledged services rendered by women to the arts, sciences, and industries of the world during past centuries as well as the present'.89 The Women's Building also represented the 'new opportunities awaiting' women.90 'We have eaten of the fruit tree of knowledge and the Eden of idleness is hateful to us. We claim our inheritance and become workers', proclaimed its organisers, echoing the voices of Sydney women in 1888.91

The NSW women's committee predominantly gathered exhibits for the Women's Building, although a few Australian women did show in the rest of the Fair. This made its 'national' significance and interweaving of femininity and identity all the more potent, as is discussed in the next chapter. But the strong focus on the Women's Building also resulted from a decision by the NSW Commission to go even further than the US Fair authorities had required them to do in the matter of women's work.

On 2 November 1891 the NSW Commission newly appointed to oversee the colony's display at the Chicago World's Fair met to discuss the organisation of exhibits. The classification sub-committee had 'regrouped certain departments' but had not significantly 'interfered' with the cataloguing requirements of the Chicago Exhibition authorities. The exception was their treatment of women's exhibits. The sub-committee expressed a

87 Elliot, Art and Handicraft, p. 11.
88 [Board of Lady Managers, World's Columbian Exposition], 'Exhibits by women. How they will be installed, Etc.', undated pamphlet in the archives of Girton College, Cambridge.
89 'Exhibits by women', pp. 4-5.
90 Elliot, Art and Handicraft, pp. 15 and 17.
91 Elliot, Art and Handicraft, p. 23.
desire to affirm the necessity of making woman's work, now simply one of the 172
groups in the classification, a special department of itself in which the commission
may seek the assistance of a ladies' committee.92

One month later, the Commission endorsed the following resolution, which brought
Committee XII on Woman's Work into existence:

That a committee of ladies be appointed to enquire into the question of exhibits of
women's industry, and to report to the commission the result of their deliberations,
and further to state, so far as in their power, what is likely to be the cost to ensure a
suitable representation in this special section.93

As we have seen, classifying women's work as a separate section of an international
exhibition had both international and local precedents. But never before had a colonial
government appointed a committee of women to gather exhibits for a women's court at
an international exhibition outside of Australasia. It was recognition that women's
work required woman's judgement, a fact that Committee XII would use as a strategic
lever to control the display, and its own decisions and appointments.

Requests for the recognition of women in the NSW representation came both
from above and from below. The Board of Lady Managers had written to the
governments of the world requesting them to appoint women's commissions to the
fair.94 Letters preserved at the Chicago Historical Society suggest that, in the case of
Australasia, the Board approached the governors of each colony. The governor then
handed on the request to the premier's department.95 Once a committee of women had
been appointed, the Board of Lady Managers then continued to supply the 'Lady
Commissioners' with information about its aims and intentions, the allocation of space
in the Woman's Building, and requests for statistics about women's work in each

92 Sydney Morning Herald, 3 November 1891, p. 4.
93 Sydney Morning Herald, 5 December 1891, p. 5.
94 At the first meeting of Committee XII, the NSW Executive Commissioner spoke of the 'great
efforts that were being put forth in the United States and Europe, to have the fullest possible
representation of the work of Woman' at the Fair. Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from
Committee XII on Woman's Work, received by the Commissioners, 18 December 1891'.
95 World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893, Board of Lady Managers' Papers, Chicago
Historical Society, vol. 13 Index - President's Letters, April 4 - July 25 1892, Foreign, no. 814, To
Mr Thomas, secretary to the Premier's Department, Melbourne, Australia; and another to E. M.
Wallington, Government House, Melbourne, Australia. Both of these letters discuss Victoria's
decision not to attend the fair. There is no correspondence preserved in the Board of Lady Managers
archives relating to the initial stages of the NSW representation.
country. Although under the auspices of the NSW Commission, Committee XII was therefore also in a position to directly negotiate with the Board of Lady Managers in Chicago. This added to their own sense of freedom and to the Commission's fears about the possible results of their autonomy. Would the women put 'sex considerations' before the 'national' good?

The women of NSW were given official recognition at exactly the moment when an international sisterhood, independent of male authority, was constituted through the Fair. The Board of Lady Managers saw itself as the centre of a united woman's world:

> The appointment of these official commissions, created and supported by government, caused the Board to assume the head of the most powerful organisation of women that has ever been effected and marks an epoch in the course of civilisation, the importance of which it would be hard to equal.

The official recognition of women as a group brought with it powerful political potential. As board member Rebecca Latimer Felton put it:

> It is the first time in the history of the Republic that the female sex has been recognised as competent to attend to any sort of business for the National government. It is the very first recognition of woman's service as a citizen and a taxpayer by Congress.

The significance of this step towards full citizenship, with all its implications for womanhood suffrage, was equally deeply felt in the colonies. Calling for exhibits at a meeting in the Sydney Town Hall, Lady Windeyer impressed upon the women of NSW the 'importance of marking their appreciation of the first national undertaking in which the promoters had recognised women officially'. Recognition carried with it an immense feeling of confidence and optimism, but there can be little doubt that Windeyer and her committee also shared Felton's sense of awesome responsibility to their sex and the woman's cause:

> Let us set an example. ... Let us take no step forward, that we shall regret afterward. Let us remember we are on trial before this great nation. There is a large class in this

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96 Board of Lady Managers' Papers, Chicago Historical Society, vol. 28, folder 2, Copy of letters sent to all foreign countries, having commissions of women, in the interest of the World's Columbian Exposition.
97 Board of Lady Manager's Papers, Chicago Historical Society, Inward correspondence, undated, foreign, [n.p.n.].
98 Cited in Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, p. 209. See also Darney, Women and World's Fairs, p. 66.
99 Sydney Mail, 30 July 1892, cutting in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159. See also World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893, Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits Department of Woman's Work, Charles Potter Government Printer, Sydney, 1893.
country who are inimical to us, judging by the newspapers who suppose that we are supernumeraries, if not superfluous appendages to this World's Fair Commission.\textsuperscript{100}

In the receipt of official recognition women were given a taste of what they sought when they asked for the vote: control over affairs that pertained to them, recognition of their role in 'national life' and a say in 'national affairs'. Committee XII were seized with the sense that it was a great opportunity for feminism, but also hamstrung by self-consciousness and the immense pressure they put on themselves to perform, as well as by the Commission's ultimate unwillingness to trust them with complete authority. The body was also affected by internal division which flowed from the Commission's choice of women committee members.

The same struggles between radical and moderate elements which had occurred in connection with the Board of Lady Managers would be repeated the world over. The Board of Lady Managers saw the potential for these conflicts from the outset, and traced them to women's redefinition of the exhibition as a form of display:

\begin{quote}
In forming committees of foreign women it was necessary to abandon, as had been done also at home the feature upon which expositions depend mainly for success, viz., the promotion of commercial interests, and rise to a higher ethical plane, making the exposition a sociological effort to study the position of women in, and their relation to, modern society...\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

As a result,

\begin{quote}
[the project appealed to quite a different class of persons from those ordinarily connected with exposition work. Ladies of the highest rank and station, and most influential in official, social, political and expert circles were associated on the foreign committees...\textsuperscript{102}
\end{quote}

Differences of opinion speedily arose between the former and the latter groupings. 'As might have been expected, those ladies highest in position and authority were most conservative', wrote Bertha Honore Palmer, president of the Board of Lady Managers in a description of the foreign commissions. Such women were 'opposed to any extreme views about women', did not approve of their entry into the higher professions, and did not support the suffrage movement. At the same time, those women who advocated

\textsuperscript{100} Cited in Darney, Women and World's Fairs, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{101} Board of Lady Managers' Papers, Chicago Historical Society, Inward correspondence, undated, foreign, [description of efforts in relation to the foreign commissions], [n.p.n.].
\textsuperscript{102} Board of Lady Managers' Papers, Chicago Historical Society, Inward correspondence, undated, foreign, [description of efforts in relation to the foreign commissions], [n.p.n.].
equal political rights for women, were as strongly drawn to the Board of Lady Managers, for they saw that the government endorsement, in connection with the work it was proposing to do, would carry the sex another step forward in the gradual advance they are making.\textsuperscript{103}

Palmer went on to describe the 'strong and beautiful union' which resulted from the 'blending' of these two groups in the Woman's Building, but in practice, such widely disparate views on women's work caused deep rifts in the local committees of women.

This was certainly true in Sydney. There can be little doubt that the local pressure which was exerted on the NSW Commission to appoint a Woman's Work Committee came from women who would have fitted into Palmer's second category.\textsuperscript{104} The Windeyers had obviously heard of the event long before they were appointed to the Committee. As we have seen, both women were active suffragists, intimately involved in the foundation of the Womanhood Suffrage League of NSW seven months earlier. Both had, of course, also worked together as Delegate and Secretary of the Education Department at the EWI, and were conscious of the possibilities afforded by an officially-sanctioned exhibition of women's work. But once Committee XII was fully constituted, it contained women with a spectrum of views on women's work, many of whom did not share in the Windeyers' progressivism.

At the 4 December meeting the following women were appointed to the Committee:

Mrs Henry Austin, Mrs Alexander Cameron, Miss Marion Clark, Mrs H. E. Cohen, Lady Darley, Mrs J. R. Fairfax, Mrs J. Carl Fischer, Mrs Dr Garan, Mrs Matthew Harris, Mrs L. W. Levy, Miss Macarthy [sic], Mrs J. S. Mitchell, Mrs O'Kelly, Mrs Pottie, Mrs A. J. Riley, Mrs John See, Mrs Slattery, Mrs W. H. Suttor, Lady Windeyer, and Miss Woolley.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{103} Board of Lady Managers' Papers, Chicago Historical Society, Inward correspondence, undated, foreign, [description of efforts in relation to the foreign commissions], [n.p.n.].

\textsuperscript{104} Mrs Palmer had canvassed a great deal of support for the Board of Lady Managers in a tour of Europe during 1891, and described how this networking had been in large part the cause of the formation of commissions there by women exerting pressure from 'below', especially when 'the Premiers probably would not have taken the trouble to seek interviews with ladies', showing the 'lack of appreciation by them men ... of women's ideals'. Board of Lady Managers' Papers, Chicago Historical Society, Inward correspondence, undated, foreign, [description of efforts in relation to the foreign commissions], [n.p.n.]. See also Weimann, The Fair Women, ch. 6. Women in NSW could have heard of Palmer's efforts through aristocratic connections (especially Lady Jersey, who ended up visiting the Fair), or through communication with other politically active women (as was probably true in the case of the Windeyers).

\textsuperscript{105} Sydney Morning Herald, 5 December 1891, p. 5.
The Committee's final report listed some additional members (Mrs Meeks, Mrs Dadley, Miss Edwards, Mrs Phillips, Mrs Onslow and Lady Manning) and included attendance records. These records show that the core working committee appeared to consist of Fischer, Suttor, Windeyer, Harris, and Meeks, who attended at least 17 of the 23 meetings. On the next level were McCarthy, Pottie, See, Dadley, Edwards, and Cohen, who attended between 7 and 13 meetings. Austin, Cameron, Woolley, Clarke, Levy, Phillips, Slattery and Manning were present at less than 5 meetings, and Onslow, Mitchell and O'Kelly never attended at all.\textsuperscript{106} The group as a whole represented the upper echelons of Sydney's elite. The Committee members were socially prominent and publicly active in charitable work. Their husbands were lawyers, politicians, and university men, many of whom had been appointed to the Chicago Exposition Commission in other departments. This would add an unusual power dynamic to the interactions between the women's and the men's committees.

There were significant disagreements within the Committee XII which resulted from political as well as personal differences. Lady Jersey, who was patroness of the enterprise, held conservative views.\textsuperscript{107} She went back to England a year later and founded an anti-suffrage society.\textsuperscript{108} As the work progressed it is likely that disaffected members of the Committee rallied around her when the Windeyers and Mrs Pottie tried to make their more feminist views material in the display. It is possible too that contrasting views from within the suffrage movement were also at play.\textsuperscript{109} As it had in 1888, the press gleefully leapt on these problems. The 'ladylike faction fights' were sufficiently well-known for the \textit{Bulletin} to make a fuss of them around the time the preliminary exhibition of women's work was open at the Town Hall, although in a frustratingly obtuse way. At the awards ceremony following the Exhibition Lady

\textsuperscript{106} Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on 'Woman's Work' to W. McMillan Esq., President', presented to a meeting of the Commission 21 October 1892.

\textsuperscript{107} See Margaret Elizabeth Villiers, Countess Jersey, \textit{Fifty-One Years of Victorian Life}, John Murray, London, 1922, chs 11, 12 and 14. Jersey would go on to become president of the committee that developed the Women's Palace at the Franco-British Exhibition held in London in 1908, see Greenhalgh, \textit{Ephemeral Vistas}, pp. 184-7.

\textsuperscript{108} Roberts, \textit{Maybanke Anderson}, p. 65.

\textsuperscript{109} Mrs Pottie, for example, had left the WSL following the Lizzie Ashton incident, see Oldfield, \textit{Woman Suffrage in Australia} pp. 64ff.
Jersey openly acknowledged that there had been significant debate during the exhibition's organisation:

There were occasionally differences of opinion among women on the subject of woman's work. Some thought it was within their power to do all that any man could do and a little more besides. (Laughter.) Some were a little more modest in their aspirations. But one and all -- whatever differences of opinion there might be in regard to the way in which the work was to be done -- were, she thought, in accord with the view that the great principle underlying the question was that women had to work for humanity -- to, if possible, raise it from a lower to a higher level, and perfect and complete it. (Cheers.) She did not think that even differences of opinion as to the way in which that was to be done would do any harm. ... And in many ... ways a difference of opinion had a good result because it made them all a little more energetic.110

In 1888 the governor's wife had taken an active role as president and represented unity and harmony amongst the organising committee. In 1892 significant divisions about the nature and execution of women's work were openly admitted by the vice-regal patroness of the enterprise. Further conflict over the representation of 'women's work' was took place over who had been included in Madame Praeger's composite photographs of 'the women workers of Sydney' [Figure 5.3]. Accusations were made that the choice had been prejudiced by connections and favouritism.111 This was heavily glossed over in the Committee's reports. As they had been at the EWI disputes were on the whole kept carefully hidden to preserve an image of unity.

While we know little in detail about these conflicts, clearly they arose from differences of opinion about the extent to which the exhibit carried with it an overtly 'feminist' message. This was true amongst other women's committees overseas, as it had been at the EWI four years earlier. However there were also several important differences. In the US the Board of Lady Managers had moved to suppress extreme views by expelling overt suffragists from its ranks. Here the suffragists were in charge, and therefore involved in the difficult task of balancing their opinions with the views of more traditional women. The feminists were aware that women's aspirations were both enhanced and tempered by what all the women involved held in common: a shared ideal of femininity. This therefore became the site both of contention and conciliation. Feminists used the exhibit to continue reshaping women's work and

110 Sydney Morning Herald, 20 December 1892, p. 7. These comments were later reported in the Englishwoman's Review, 15 April 1893, p. 136.
111 Illustrated Sydney News, 18 November 1892, p. 915.
femininity at the same time as they sought to present themselves as pre-eminently feminine. Accordingly the NSW committee's leader was identified both as a model of womanliness and as a moderate feminist.

The choice of Mary Windeyer as President of Committee XII was an interesting one. Why did a government which was staunchly opposed to women's suffrage appoint the president of the Womanhood Suffrage League to the head of a Woman's Work Committee charged with the responsibility of representing the role of women in NSW? It probably speaks most clearly of the respect and influence Windeyer already held with men in power in NSW.112 Windeyer's progressive views were not shared by all the men who appointed her or by all on her committee, but her tact, diplomacy, intelligence and experience (not to mention her enthusiasm for the project) made her an unrivalled candidate for the job.

Windeyer was also a figure who symbolised the most feminine aspects of colonial feminism. Her personal manner deflected stereotypes of the 'shrinking sisterhood' and was used to good effect by the suffrage movement. It represented a palatable alternative to the sharper and more daring personalities of Lawson, Scott and Wolstenholme, even though Mary Windeyer actually shared many of their views. In 1889 Lawson described the 'popular idea of an advocate of women's rights' at a meeting of the Dawn Club:

she is an angular hard-faced withered creature with a shrill harsh voice, no pretence to comeliness, spectacles on nose, and the repulsive title "bluestocking" visible all over her. Metaphorically she is supposed to hang halfway over the bar which separates the sexes, shaking her skinny fist at men and all their works.113

Windeyer entirely contradicted this stereotype. She was lady-like and matronly, she spoke gently with gravity and refinement, and advocated alliances with men.114 A description of Lady Windeyer from an 1894 edition of the Australian Christian World is typical. The contrast between the 'intense heat of the outer world, and the delicious coolness of the drawing room at Lulworth', Windeyer's home, 'was no more marked

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112 See Martin, Henry Parkes, pp. 95, 155-6, 189-90, 234, 271, 318, 367, 419, 441; Ritter, William and Mary Windeyer, ch. 5
113 Dawn, July 1889, p. 12.
114 Lawson's daughter recalled Mary Windeyer's speeches as 'logical' and 'refined', delivered in a 'soft cultured voice'. Quoted in Allen, Rose Scott, pp. 125-6.
than that between the excited, aggressive female defender of the rights of women and the calm dignity of this lady. Windeyer was quoted as saying that progress for women would be attained by 'quiet persistence and not by noisy aggression.\textsuperscript{115} Another description of a WSL meeting taken from an 1892 edition of the \textit{Wagga Wagga Express}, which took pride of place in a scrapbook compiled by Windeyer's daughter Jane, drew a similar contrast. 'I usually associated woman suffragists with loud-voiced, plain-featured women, who were accustomed to dress in a dowdy fashion, and wanted to act like men' wrote 'Busy Bee'. Instead she found a 'gathering of fashionably attired people, society women', with 'sweet and benignant expressions' of 'intelligence', 'thoughtfulness', 'resolution', 'enthusiasm' and 'persistence'. The president Lady Windeyer was a little, sweet-faced woman, with a gentle presence, a winning smile, and a softly modulated voice ... She spoke in low but distinct tones, and the inflections and deflections of her voice, as well as the use of her hands in declamation, would reflect credit upon a well-trained preacher.\textsuperscript{116}

For her official exhibition portrait, taken by Laura Praeger, Windeyer dressed in a light-coloured, delicate dress composed of endless layers, tucks and frills of seemingly transparent gauze and lace [Figure 5.4]. The choice symbolised purity and softness, the height of womanliness and fashion. It was also a statement that a feminist need not be unfeminine.

Like her excellent political connections, Windeyer's personality was a highly effective tool in the struggle for women's rights. Her eagerness to promote and sustain a public image has already been seen in her treatment of competitors in the EWI's Education Department. Her occasional outbursts of anger and frustration, two of which were connected with exhibition work, reveal the extent of her self-control as much as the extremity of emotion provoked by such situations. In connection with the World's Fair, maintaining an appearance of serenity was especially necessary as pride in colonial femininity, the capabilities of public women, and the fidelity of woman's cause were, in her view, all at stake. Unfortunately for her the weighty responsibility

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Australian Christian World}, 9 November 1894, in Windeyer family scrapbook, ML D*159.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Wagga Wagga Express}, 14 June 1892, pp. 20-21, from 'Scrapbook of newspaper notices' compiled by Jane Windeyer, ML MSS 186/20.
of appearing feminine and efficient was directly in proportion to the conflict and struggle that marked the whole enterprise.

In 1892 the entire NSW Woman's Work Committee to the Chicago World's Fair posed for photographer Laura Praeger [Figure 5.5]. Praeger positioned her subjects informally in a garden, some sitting on a flight of stone steps. Obviously at ease, their focused gazes convey a sense of confidence and authority. Mrs Pottie stares resolutely over the photographer's left shoulder. Mrs John See reclines on the bottom steps, fixing the lens acutely. Mrs Carl Fischer, her face and dark eyes in sharp focus, looks straight down the camera barrel. Lady Windeyer smiles half-bemusedly, comfortable and assured, hatless with the sunlight on her brow. This was how Committee XII wanted themselves to be seen: united, ladylike, noble and secure. The outdoor setting was appropriate. Its flowers and ferns suggested nature, vitality and growth, a tamed Australian landscape. Yet it is hard not to feel that all around, the dark foliage encroaches upon them like a jungle, symbolic of a tangled and hazardous 'outside' world. This interpretation of the image was more in keeping with the experiences the committee would face behind the scenes as it carried out the work it had been officially appointed to do.

'Better adapted to women': Committee XII, conflict and control

_The women's committee was avowedly formed because the work required was deemed by the Commission, better adapted to women, many of the members thereof having given practical proof of their ability in such an enterprise_\(^{117}\)

Committee XII on Woman's Work, 'Report of a meeting. 22 December 1891'.

Through their appointment to the body responsible for the NSW exhibit at the Chicago Fair, Committee XII had obtained in a cultural sense what the WSL was demanding in a political sense: official recognition of women's practical capacities and their special

\(^{117}\) Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting, 22 December 1891'.

perspective on a shared colonial enterprise. But in the discharge of their newly-won duties and responsibilities, its members found themselves struggling to realise their aspirations, as they came to terms with the realities of working with men and within existing masculinist structures. Women had entered into the king’s palace as queens, and expected their feminine authority to magnify and extend their power. This did not prove to be the case. What was supposed to be a show of unity rapidly dissolved into an exposition of disagreement and defiance.

Women’s persistent claims to autonomy and authority lay behind the sometimes fraught interaction between the all-male NSW Commission and the all-female Committee XII. No longer was the organising committee of a women’s exhibition free to act according to its own conceptions of the world. Women’s work was now only one part of a much larger display, and the women organisers were answerable to a higher authority. With recognition and inclusion came the frustration of having to work within structures into which women and their work did not fit easily. Many of the committee members had helped create the EWI. Here they were faced with a new set of responsibilities and a new set of problems. Furthermore, many of them had, in the intervening three years, become part of an organised struggle for women’s rights and womanhood suffrage, which had engendered new articulations of the role of women, and altered their position in the public eye. The story of their efforts to develop the exhibit, recorded in the papers of the Windeyer family and the committee’s own minute book, reveal enormous conflict and tangible frustration. Committee XII were shocked that even the most liberal and ostensibly supportive of men could completely fail to understand women’s lives, and make negative assumptions about women’s capabilities and work. This reinforced their growing belief that women should have control over matters that pertained to them. Yet most of the negative features of the interaction were kept quiet, and did not provoke an open critique of male power until 1893, when the committee’s delegate arrived in America. The committee was as unwilling to expose women’s organisational difficulties as they
were to imply that the official recognition they had received was substantially less liberating than they had hoped.

The conflicts which emerged over the following year between the women's committee and the NSW Exhibition Commission are detailed below. These disputes need to be framed by two related factors which affected the colony's representation as a whole. The first was the economic climate in which the representation was mounted. In 1891 and 1892 the Australasian colonies were in the grip of a major depression. Many of the colonial banks had collapsed. Strikes by shearers, wharf labourers, miners and maritime workers had created an atmosphere of class warfare and political and social unrest. In Sydney the unemployed gathered in their thousands at the Queen's Statue. There was a level of poverty and misery in the colony never before witnessed.\textsuperscript{118} That NSW was the only colony which believed it could afford to send exhibits to Chicago was 'a fact', claimed the \textit{Scotsman}, 'that speaks volumes as to the severe, if temporary, financial collapse at the Antipodes.'\textsuperscript{119} Nevertheless the colonial government committed itself to Chicago in the hope that sales of raw materials to foreign buyers might boost the local economy. In times of depression, such a great expense on the public purse had to be doubly justified.\textsuperscript{120}

The second factor, aggravated by the economic risks involved, was the air of bad feeling which surrounded the colony's Exposition communications and arrangements with Great Britain. The struggles of the women's committee for autonomy, outlined below, were paralleled by the struggles of the colony of NSW for its own independence from the English Royal Commission appointed to the Fair. These problems will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters. Here it is important to note the pressures from above and from below on the entire NSW representation to the Fair. At times it seemed as if NSW would not make an


\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Scotsman}, 18 September 1893, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML. *D159.

\textsuperscript{120} As the \textit{Illustrated Sydney News} put it, 'There will be something "more to explain, too, after the fair is over," and that is in regard to the expenditure. The commission are getting scared, and have commenced to put on the screw, but they are already committed to a very large sum -- more than can be properly afforded.' \textit{Illustrated Sydney News}, 18 November 1892, p. 6.
appearance. Although fired with idealistic zeal, those responsible for organising a display (men and women alike) had to fight to make it happen at all.

Anxiety within the organising body was high, and conflicts between the male commission and the women's committee were not only a result of sexism and ignorance, but manifestations of greater strains and wider frustrations. These pressures increased tensions between men and women but also suppressed explicit feminist discussion in relation to the exhibit or the way the women were treated as they tried to create it.

Committee XII on Women's Work began its life united in a conflict with the NSW Commission which had appointed it. Further struggles would occur in 1892 regarding the financial management of the department, and the patronising and ignorant manner in which the all-male Commission viewed women's work. These struggles were pre-empted by efforts on the part of Committee XII to assert, from the outset, its organisational ability and autonomy in relationship to the Commission. These debates revealed that the pride and confidence these women felt in their own abilities to organise were matched by a corresponding lack of confidence in those abilities on the part of the Commission. They revealed, too, the extent to which the idea that women's work was 'special' could be used to give women access to power, authority and control. Committee XII claimed both that the women's work section should 'rank equally' with the other departments, and that women's work was so substantially different to the rest of the exhibits that only women could superintend it.

Initial debate centred around the appointment of a woman to the position of secretary to Committee XII on Woman's Work. On 18 December 1891, Committee XII presented its first two reports to a meeting of the NSW Commission. They concluded with the resolution 'That Mrs J. Carl Fischer be recommended to the commission as secretary of this committee'. The following day the proceedings of the

121 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work, received by the Commissioners, 18 December 1891' and 'Proceedings of the Ladies' Committee, Town Hall, 17 December 1891'.

meeting were published in the Sydney Morning Herald. The account concluded with
the Commission's response to Mrs Carl Fischer's appointment:

The secretary was instructed to write and inform the ladies' committee that ... the
commission had already a clerical staff which was at their disposal, and that under the
circumstances it was not desirable to add to the expenses of the working of the
Commission

They also suggested that
in order to promote harmonious working some official of the Commission should be
present at their meetings.\textsuperscript{122}

On 22 December Committee XII met at the Town Hall, and attention was drawn to the
report in the Herald.\textsuperscript{123} 'Much surprise' was expressed at the part that referred to the
women's committee.

The lady president stated that ... she had waited upon the President of the
Commission & had pointed out the impracticality of carrying out the Women's
Work Department on the lines suggested. The women's committee was avowedly
formed because the work required was deemed by the Commission, better adapted to
women, many of the members thereof having given practical proof of their ability in
such an enterprise, & the classification submitted for their consideration was a
reprint of their previous work.

Work for the EWI, various philanthropic bodies, the WCTU and the WSL had given
many of the members of Committee XII substantial organisational experience. Lady
Windeyer and Mrs Carl Fischer in particular had both been delegates to the EWI and
were clearly confident of their abilities to carry out the work on their own. The key
argument here, though, was that as the Commission itself had appointed the
Committee on the basis that the women's work department was a 'special section', it
should therefore be run only by women, and have a woman secretary. The Committee
was

unanimous in their opinion that the Exhibition of Women's Work, will be most
effectually served by that appointment being confirmed, & they with all respect
decide to adopt the suggestion that their business shall be conducted under the
direction & in the presence of a member of staff of the Commission.\textsuperscript{124}

The strength of this statement was evidence of their desire for independence, and for
the autonomy to make decisions without constantly consulting the Commission. The
Committee demanded this right on the basis that women's work required a special
approach. Feminine sensibility and separatism became strong arguments for women's
increased power and control.

\textsuperscript{122} Sydney Morning Herald, 19 December 1891, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{123} Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting, 22 December 1891'.
\textsuperscript{124} Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting, 22 December 1891'.

The Committee's argument that only women could fully understand the women's exhibits to gain control over their department was successful. At a meeting held on 13 January 1892, the Committee 'noted with satisfaction the withdrawal of certain restrictions on their proceedings, previously contemplated by the Commission.'\footnote{Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a special meeting, 13 January 1892'.} Mrs Carl Fischer was officially recognised as the committee's secretary. For this she received a salary of £228, nearly half the total cost of the entire department. The following month, Arthur Renwick, the Exhibition Commissioner, addressed the Committee, expressing his 'full confidence in their ability to carry out this important department successfully'. He then gave them some 'valuable hints ... to ensure the work being done in accordance with the modes of other departments [sic].'\footnote{Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting, 23 February 1892'.} This was the last time a man made an appearance at a Committee XII meeting.

Despite this, the Commission still had ultimate control over the Committee's activities, and the women involved knew that the men did not fully appreciate or understand women's work. At a Town Hall meeting held to popularise the exhibition, the Hon. Sir James Abbott, Vice-President of the NSW Commission, 'confessed that, before hearing [patroness] Lady Jersey's speech, he had considered a women's work exhibition would consist of fancy needlework and slippers innumerable.'\footnote{Sydney Mail, 30 July 1892, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D 159.} This horrified the Committee: obviously they thought it was much more than that, especially after the 1888 exhibition. Women's work was in their view meaningful, productive, economically and socially significant labour carried out in both the public and private sphere.

This apparent ignorance of the nature and value of women's work provoked a long series of battles between Committee XII and the NSW Commission over funding and control. At the Committee's first meeting, Lady Windeyer explained to commissioners present that her committee could not at that time state the expected cost of this 'special branch of representation', although, in the light of the economic
downturn, it recognised 'the necessity for exercising the utmost economy'. 128 Within a week it had resolved to apply for £1000, although it expected to spend less. 129 Early in the new year the committee received word that it had been granted only £500, half what had been applied for and half what the other departments received. As well, unlike other departments, the Woman's Work Committee had to pay for its own packing. 130 They noted with disappointment and a little defiance that Committee XII whilst resolved to do their best, cannot pledge themselves to keep within that margin if their work is to be thoroughly done. In many instances, highly capable women workers, cannot afford to spend the money required for exhibits which will be of genuine interest in the Department: and the committee will, to ensure fit representation of the women workers of NSW be compelled to purchase many exhibits. The money so expended will however return with interest to the commission as from the significant character of these exhibits, they will find ready purchase in America. 131

The size of the budget inevitably had an even more stringent effect on the women's exhibition than on the men's. Most of the other sections were dealing with firms or businesses, or rich gentlemen. The women's committee looked for the bulk of its exhibits from self-employed professional women, like seamstresses, who lost valuable time and money preparing exhibition work, with only distant prospect of reward. The Committee (based on the experience of the EWI) resolved that such workers should be provided with materials and paid for their exhibits. The idea was to sell the exhibits when they arrived in Chicago to offset some of these costs.

There was a marked difference between the way working women were approached at the EWI and the WCE. Generally, working-class women were not subjected to the same level of interest or intervention as they were in 1888. Instead there was much effort in 1892 devoted to commissioning work from the best paid workers in the 'feminine arts'. The Windeyer papers contain many letters detailing correspondences between exhibitors and organisers. Perhaps some of the lessons of 1888 had been learned. These letters are generally sensitively handled and genuine.

128 Reports of Committee XII, Report 18 December 1891.
129 Reports of Committee XII, Report of a meeting 22 December 1891.
130 The packing was therefore done in buildings in the grounds of Lady Windeyer's home Lulworth by the committee itself: 'the greatest economy was exercised, cases being purchased secondhand ... The Committee desire to record their great satisfaction at the small outlay for the work, which without very special care would have been very considerably increased.' Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting held 31 January 1893'.
131 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a special meeting, 13 January 1892'.
They display a greater level of understanding on the part of the organisers and increased directness on the part of the workers, although this was of course limited by a significant power imbalance between the two. For example, Ellen McDermott of Williamstown wrote deferentially to Lady Windeyer, but also offered advice on the advantages of particular cabbage-tree hats:

I received your kind letter informing me that you would take one of my hats for the Chicago exhibition. I can make a nice one for £1 one pound. I will do it up nicely for you. I could do one not so expensive but it would not be worth exhibiting as the cheap hats never look much. If you would think the price I have put on not to much if you please let me know the best way to forward it to you. I will give it to Mr Bolton or I will send it to you myself. I will have made it by the end of the month and thanking you most sincerely for your kindness Ellen McDermott [sic].\(^{132}\)

The pressure on poor women exhibitors was only increased by the economic depression. Daisy Dobbin from Goulburn wrote to Lady Windeyer after receiving a prize at the preliminary exhibition at the Town Hall: ‘I am sorry it is a medal, as money would have been far more acceptable’.\(^{133}\) Dobbin was clearly under significant financial pressure to admit to that the medal was a disappointment, while the organisers’ decision to only award medals, and not to repeat the undignified implications of the debate about medals and money in 1888, did little to help exhibitors in her position.

In the light of this adversity the women organisers seemed more sincerely sympathetic to the workers, especially when poor women’s responses to the depression could be seen as dignified, noble and properly feminine in contrast to the social discord created by their menfolk. Exhibitor and Women’s Cooperative Silk Growing Association manager Mary Sanger Evans wrote to Margaret Windeyer in Chicago: ‘The distress here is terrible...the women bear quietly, without congregating at the Queen’s Statue, so they are forgotten’.\(^{134}\) As they had with the Queen’s Fund, ladies could embrace the downtrodden working women within the arc of silent, suffering sisterhood. Once again the women organisers used the Exhibition to assert

\(^{132}\) Ellen McDermott to Mary Windeyer, 11 September 1892, in Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/13. For similar sentiments see letters and receipts in the same volume from E. C. Wittle, Tost and Rohu, M. A. Shaw.

\(^{133}\) Daisy Dobbin to Mary Windeyer, 8 December 1892, in Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/13.

\(^{134}\) M. Sanger Evans to Margaret Windeyer, 18 September 1893, in Margaret Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/17.
the special experiences of women as grounds for common cause, but this time they were less patronising to the poorer exhibitors, and engaged in direct action and open conflict with the male commissioners on their behalf.

Still, there were conflicts. Mrs Hetherington-Carruthers of Darlinghurst, inventor of the electric corset, was not happy with the way in which Committee XII presented her work at the Woman's Work Exhibition. Immediately following the opening of the Exhibition she wrote an angry letter to Lady Windeyer about the way in which her exhibit had been classified and the manner in which she had been treated by exhibition officials. Threatening to withdraw her exhibit, she claimed she had been shown 'discourtesy from the first' by the Committee's secretary Mrs Carl Fischer. 'Upon making personal enquiry from the secretary as to my stand I was to say the least replied to with incivility' she claimed, but her greatest frustration stemmed from the fact that she felt her status as an inventor had been compromised by the way her exhibits had been listed in the catalogue, and the space she had been allocated in the Town Hall. 'I am classed virtually as a staymaker in your catalogue a statement for which there is no justification whatever in the papers of entry as I did not put my exhibit under any class but sent them with a letter stating it was an invention for which I had been granted a patent and I should require a separate table that I might show my invention in operation again under the class "inventions" I am excluded.'

The inventor was most concerned that her opportunity to advertise had been severely compromised. She continued, claiming interference from the lady organisers:

Further at the opening last Saturday the gentlemen of the press were not shown my stall, and the Sydney Mail notice of the Exhibition which it is an open secret was written by your secretary not only omits my name (though it mentions the other inventors) but places in my mouth assertions I never made.

Despite this experience, Mrs Hetherington-Carruthers not only exhibited her 'Electric Belts, Corsets and Towels' at the World's Fair, but accompanied them to Chicago and

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135 Letter from Mrs Hetherington-Carruthers to Mary Windeyer, 13 October 1892. Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/13. In the edition of the catalogue preserved in the State Library of NSW, Hetherington-Carruthers's appliances were collected under the heading 'miscellaneous industries', along with some dress cutting patterns, a flower stand, furs, oil-coats, rug mats, and Sophia Kennedy's cabinet filter. See World's Columbian Exposition 1893, Exhibition of Woman's Work in the Centennial Hall, Sydney, October 1892: Official Catalogue, W. Andrews & Co., Sydney, 1892, p. 23.
'personally explained' them to fairgoers.\textsuperscript{136} As had been the case in 1888, it was professional women with greater social and financial means who were best able to voice their objections to the decisions of the organising committee. In 1891-2, however, the women's committee had also to mediate between exhibitors and another, higher, power.

The NSW Commission did not recognise the special needs of the woman's work committee or its potential exhibitors. Administratively it tried to exercise strict control over a department it believed would fail to manage or meet its budget. It refused to accept requests for reimbursement for purchases from Committee XII, on the grounds that the women were obliged to first seek voluntary exhibits. It demanded that all potential purchases be put to the Commission first. The women's committee again used the argument that women's work differed from that of men to claim the right to have 'discretionary power' and not have to put all their decisions through the Commission.

Many of the best needlewomen are engaged in making up materials supplied to them. The outlay for the material though small in itself is beyond their means, for exhibits, and it is in such cases that a discretionary power should be given to Committee XII, to aid capable and willing workers by purchasing the materials required. To ignore this principle and deny this power will in many cases lead to much disappointment.\textsuperscript{137}

The Commission's controls were eventually withdrawn following the Committee's protests. It was suggested (and apparently agreed) that while large purchases should be referred on, costs up to £5 could be incurred 'without the express Sanction of the Commission'.

The debate about financial autonomy was intertwined with efforts to recognise women employed by the capitalists of NSW. The Committee desire[d] to point out that very many experienced women workers in the colony execute their work for firms whose names appear as exhibitors, whilst the workers are ignored and it is in the hope of recognising the individual workers, which gives the significance to this department that the proposal has been made to purchase exhibits.\textsuperscript{138}

Committee XII, building on the presentation of factory work at the EWI, sought to use the exhibition to reveal women's 'hidden' industrial work. This time they chose not to

\textsuperscript{136} Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, p. 730.
\textsuperscript{137} Reports of Committee XII. Minutes of a meeting held 2 February 1892.
\textsuperscript{138} Reports of Committee XII, Minutes of a meeting held 2 February 1892.
use living exhibits, instead workers were represented by mosaic work sent by members of the Working and Factory Girls Club. In the context of the World's Fair they had other means to achieve visibility at their disposal. Applying an initiative promoted by the Fair's Board of Lady Managers, the Committee tried to have all the NSW exhibits labelled in recognition of the women's work that went into them. At the first meeting, the Committee decided:

that a request be preferred to the Technological Museum, that wax models of fruits, prepared by women, be shown as their handiwork; and an opinion was also expressed that with the consent of employers, the work of female operatives might be shown in the name of these operatives, subordinate, of course, to the heading of the firm giving employment to them.139

The initiative failed because employers failed to fill out the tags. This innovative effort to extend the NSW women's exhibit beyond the Women's Building and beyond traditional notions of women's work was dissipated by the laziness and the unwillingness of manufacturers to expose the level of women's real contribution to colonial industry. The Commission too showed little interest in forcing exhibitors to conform to Committee XII's request.

Equally, efforts to claim sections from the general classification as 'women's work' were not successful. At the same meeting the Committee attempted to claim sericulture from the wool committee, and taxidermy and fur work from the committees of manufactures and livestock, on the grounds that women predominantly performed them. Two days later the Committee agreed with the Commission that, on reflection, 'whilst many of the classes are included in women's work, the groups as a whole could not be taken from the general classification without injustice to some exhibitors, and that duplication by having some classes of exhibits in the general and Woman's exhibition would be better.'140

In 1888 an exclusively women's exhibition held the potential to reveal the breadth and variety of women's work. Three years later the opportunity to tangibly prove women's work in the larger colonial economy was far greater, but much more difficult to achieve. The special women's exhibit offered the chance to show what

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139 Reports of Committee XII, Report received on 18 December 1891.
140 Reports of Committee XII, Report of a meeting held 17 December 1891.
women could do. But in so doing, it also threatened to hurt individual workers, ideologically separate women from the rest of the NSW exhibit, and add to claims that public women were more concerned with self interest than the greater good.

The Commission's low estimation of the importance and nature of women's work was also manifested in its monetary appraisals of the women's exhibit. It clearly did not share the women's ideas about the value of the exhibits or their potential to recoup costs through later sale. When the exhibits were assessed for insurance purposes Mrs Carl Fischer found Mr Hogan's estimate of £460 'rather amusing'.141 Patently, in her eyes, he was incapable of judging women's work. Committee XII's own report valued them at £815 15/- for insurance and at a commercial value of £1,232 5/-142 Once the exhibits were on show in Chicago, the Commission did not have much success in selling them. In the collection of the Mitchell Library in Sydney is a copy of the NSW catalogue of exhibits marked in red ink with the costs and sales of exhibits. It shows that very little of the women's work was sold, although prices often appeared to have been marked down and marked down again. The Secretary of the NSW Commission wrote to Lady Windeyer in 1894, '[y]ou will be sorry to learn that nearly all, if not all, of the exhibits of women's work sent to Chicago have been returned to Sydney', although he did note that this was also the case for the NSW exhibits as a whole.143 Perhaps the women did optimistically overestimate the value or uniqueness of the exhibits. They may also have boosted their valuation of the exhibits in reaction to what they saw as the Commission's inability to understand or appreciate women's work, in order to show the men, in a language they understood, that women's work had monetary as well as symbolic value.

One incident crystallised the committee's fears about men's assumptions more than any other. A bust prepared for the women's committee by Annie Dobson was the

141 Mrs Carl Fischer to Lady Windeyer, 30 December 1892, in Windeyer Correspondence ML MSS 186/14.
142 Report from Lady Windeyer, as President of Woman's Work Committee, to the President of the New South Wales Commission [19 February 1894], in Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/14.
143 Secretary of the NSW Commission to Lady Windeyer, 12 March 1893 [sic], Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/14.
source of a major, and very public, controversy. This quarrel reinforced the committee's belief that the commission was ignorant of the nature of women's work. It also confirmed the women's belief that they were being treated as a second class department, and brought with it much unwanted attention.

In February 1892 the Liberal Arts Committee submitted a list of 'distinguished men' to the NSW Commission to support a proposal (apparently prompted by a directive from Chicago) that a collection of busts be sent to the Fair. The list was long, consisted entirely of men, and included numerous prominent figures under the headings governors, premiers and statesmen, judges, public officials, clergymen, medical men, explorers, industries, trade and commerce, university, literature and science, and presidents and executive commissioners of exhibitions. After some debate the list was rejected as too long. The author of the Herald's column 'Fugitive Notes' mocked the 'quaint suggestion' that a short list of eminent colonial men could be obtained without a greater exhibition of egotism and pride. The idea then seemed to drop from the Commission's notice. It was never mentioned again in published reports of meetings.

What happened next we know because Lady Windeyer preserved the angry letter she sent to the President of the NSW Commission, Sir William McMillan, about Dobson's bust in February 1893. This letter justified and explained the Committee's actions in presenting the Commission with the bill for a bust of Sir Frederick Darley. The Sydney Morning Herald reported that 'considerable debate' had ensued over the action of the Woman's Work Committee in sending to Chicago a bust of the Chief Justice of New South Wales, purchased at a cost of £40, in spite of the fact that the Commission had decided that no busts whatever should be sent to the Exhibition.

144 Sydney Morning Herald, 27 February 1892, p. 7.
145 Sydney Morning Herald, 2 March 1892, p. 3.
146 Detailed reports of every Commission meeting can be found in the Sydney Morning Herald.
147 Letter from Lady Windeyer to William McMillan, 23 February 1893, Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/14.
148 Sydney Morning Herald, 4 February 1893, p. 5.
The report explained that 'the money for the bust had been paid by one of the ladies of
the Committee out of her private account, but that the money had since been refunded
to her out of the funds allotted by the Commission to the Woman's Work Department'.
The Commission, once this had been brought to their attention, instructed the secretary
to write to the Executive Commissioner at Chicago informing that the bust had been
sent by 'mistake' and requesting that he return it without putting it on display.

Windeyer reacted angrily to what she saw as an ignorant affront, having once
again discovered in a newspaper report salient facts about her committee's work that
had not been conveyed to her by official means. In her letter, she indignantly pointed
out that it had been obvious to Committee XII as much as to the Commission, that a
collection of busts did not meet the guiding principles behind the NSW representation
to the Chicago Fair.

Throughout their work the desire of this Committee has been, so far as possible, to
obtain Exhibits of Woman's Work applied to the natural products of the country.
Such a desire has doubtless actuated your honorable Commission as a whole & from
this point of view Committee XII are not surprised—though unfortunately at this late
stage of proceeding—that "a proposal to send a number of busts of representative men
was negatived", as such exhibits would, in no way, have made known the material
wealth of the colony.

She was angrier still that the ignorant assumptions of the commissioners meant that the
women's committee had not been informed of the decision. She wrote, rather
sarcastically:

Your Commission probably did not realise that a collection of Woman's Work
might include something beyond the product of the needle, & it was therefore not
considered necessary to inform Committee XII of the foregoing restriction in the
selection of exhibits.

Had the Commission informed the Committee of 'their wise & well considered
resolution' that no busts should be sent to Chicago, she continued, 'the message
would have been received with a great sense of relief'. The Committee would
willingly have been absolved from the delicate & difficult task—laid upon them by
the obligation to secure the highest order of Woman's Work procurable in the
Colony—of finding a subject for the skill of the Woman Sculptor [.]
Jones, wife of the prominent artist Horace Moore-Jones, was an established painter and sculptor. In choosing Dobson, the committee were also making a statement about the talent of an Australian artist, who had been trained and recognised internationally. One report noted with pride the 'specially meritorious work' of Mrs Moore-Jones, 'an artist who (but for eight years study in Art Schools of Europe, whence she has recently returned) has passed most of her life in Australia'. A member of the Commission's Fine Arts committee had 'by invitation' inspected her work, and was able to 'confirm' their 'estimate of her artists powers'. Windeyer’s angry letter noted that Dobson’s ‘ability has been recognised in the purchase of her work by the Trustees of our National Art Gallery’.

Once the skill of the artist had been assured, the issue then became who would sit for Dobson. This ‘delicate & difficult task’ was made even more difficult by the fact that many of the most eligible subjects were connected to members of the committee. To avoid any charges of nepotism it was ‘unanimously agreed’ that ‘under no circumstances could a bust be taken of any one in the remotest degree related to a member of Committee XII’. On the motion of Mrs Pottie it was resolved that ‘public money could be expended only on a bust of His Excellency the Governor, the Hon. the Chief Justice, or of the Right Worshipful the Mayor.’ The governor declined ‘owing to the number of sittings necessary’, and the Chief Justice ‘courteously though unwillingly consented’. Sir Frederick Darley, Windeyer stated, ‘sat at great personal inconvenience’, and the committee felt ‘under deep obligation’ to him. The bust was prepared in clay, exhibited at the Woman’s Work Exhibition, and then packed and sent to Chicago. It was only in late February 1893, when the cases were well on their way to the United States, that the ‘error’ was discovered.

Windeyer’s letter ended with a refusal to accept any blame for the mix-up. The Committee were ‘fully aware’ that the decision of the commission in ‘no way’

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150 Reports of Committee XII, 'Progress report 12 August 1892'.
151 Letter from Lady Windeyer to William McMillan, 23 February 1893, Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/14.
152 Exhibition of Woman's Work in the Centennial Hall, p. 48.
reflected on them, as it was 'made long before the bust in question was ordered'. Further, 'exception cannot be taken to the choice of subject or to the execution of the work'. That the Committee should 'inadvertently have acted contrary to the Commission in the smallest degree' must be a matter of 'regret', 'though', she concluded, 'they cannot hold themselves to blame'.

The letter was published in the *Herald* as part of a report of a NSW Commission meeting, making it a public and even more powerful criticism of the commissioners. Obviously by this stage Windeyer had little to lose and was at breaking point over what had become a series of private administrative clashes and public criticisms of the Woman's Work Exhibition. The jibe about women's work going 'beyond the product of the needle' seems especially tailored as a feminist statement, one of the few connected with the display while it remained in NSW. The NSW Commission eventually decided to allow the bust to be shown, because if they did not 'they would display a want of chivalry, and probably discourage the ladies from co-operating with them in regard to any future exhibition which might be held'. This patronising statement must have seemed to the women involved the ultimate expression of exactly the attitude Committee XII most resented.

Their final, and most heated, battle would be over who would care for the exhibits once they left Australia. For Committee XII, the ultimate proof of the recognition of women's unique relationship to their work and to the exhibit lay in the appointment of a woman commissioner to superintend the NSW women's exhibits in Chicago. This, stated the Committee, was

> an essential upon whose affirmation & proper carrying out the success of the Department largely depends: not only as regards the number and quality of the exhibits—the first question in response to an application invariably being "who will have charge of the exhibits in Chicago", but also with a view to their artistic arrangement, proper classification &c in Chicago & for the further object of placing the subject of woman's work & the position of women in the colony in their true light before the visitors to the World's Fair.

153 Letter from Lady Windeyer to William McMillan, 23 February 1893, Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/14.
156 Reports of Committee XII, Minutes of a meeting held 19 May 1892.
The Committee found it hard to convince exhibitors that their precious exhibits would be safe during a long journey from home.

A strong opinion was expressed as to the desirability of the Commission deciding in what manner and by whom the exhibits of women's work at Chicago shall be undertaken...as by this means security will be afforded to many desirable exhibitors who, aware of the losses and confusion which have arisen elsewhere in regard to feminine exhibits are now holding back. 157

Only another woman knew how much the piece of handwork might mean to an exhibitor, only a woman knew how to care for and display such fragile, much-loved and possibly valuable pieces:

An instance was given of heavy loss resulting to an Exhibitor in the Indian and Colonial Exhibition through neglect of precautions--which a competent woman would have taken--in the presentation of lace exhibited by a poor but very skilful worker, and abundant evidence is forthcoming as to the confusion elsewhere--Exhibits of great artistic merit, occupying but small space, of delicate texture may by exposure to a strong sunlight, by being exhibited without protection of glass, and in numberless other ways be injured by the neglect of a few minutes and this is one of many interests in connection with this department, which make it incumbent that a woman whose known capacity and proved qualifications offer a guarantee that the whole subject of women's work be treated so as to bring credit upon the colony should be appointed. 158

That woman was Margaret Windeyer, daughter of the Committee's president, suffragist and former secretary to the Education Department of the EWI. Despite her excellent credentials and willingness to undertake the work, Margaret Windeyer was installed as a NSW commissioner in a position of complete equality with her male colleagues only two days before she sailed for the United States in March 1893. 159

Much of the debate over her appointment has been lost but it appears it was bitter and misogynistic. 160 On her arrival in San Francisco the Morning Call interviewed 'Australia's Agent', and she was not reticent about stating why this had been the case.

'There was a great deal of opposition to my being appointed to this place in New South Wales,' she said, 'because I was a woman'. 161 This comment was the beginning of an openly feminist reclaiming of the exhibit, which had to wait until the

157 Reports of Committee XII, Minutes of a meeting held 19 May 1892.
158 Reports of Committee XII, Minutes of a meeting held 19 May 1892.
159 New South Wales Government Gazette, No. 186, 21 March 1893, and papers of appointment, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159. Questions were asked in the NSW parliament about the appointment of a woman to the Chicago Fair. On 2 February 1893 Mr Crick asked if Mrs Carl Fischer, 'formerly a contributor to an evening paper', had been given the commission. Premier Dibbs replied that she had not. See NSW Parliamentary Debates, first series, fifteenth part, session 1892-3, vol. 62, Charles Potter Government Printer, Sydney, 1893, p. 3664.
160 See for example Illustrated Sydney News, 5 November 1892, p. 6; 12 November 1892, p. 6; and Daily Telegraph, 3 March 1893, p. 5.
161 San Francisco Morning Call, 15 April 1893, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
possum fur gloves and NSW tweed reached American shores. Before that could happen, the women's work had to be exhibited on colonial soil, and judged to conform with the Commission's and the Committee's goals of proving the colony's wealth and civilisation.

Conclusion

The Woman's Work Exhibition organised by Committee XII opened at the Sydney Town Hall on 8 October 1892 and ran for a week. Towards the end of the week Margaret Windeyer spent a day away from the exhibits delivering a petition demanding womanhood suffrage to the NSW Parliament.162 The day before the Exhibition closed Lady Windeyer, along with Mrs Lawson, Miss Scott, Mrs Sanger Evans, Mrs Teece and Mrs Russell, waited on the Premier Sir George Dibbs to ask that a clause giving women the franchise be inserted in the Electoral Bill. It was their first suffrage delegation, and they all felt 'very nervous'.163 While visitors were examining the showcases of taxidermy, embroidery and preserves at the Town Hall, in Parliament House the suffragists put their case to Dibbs, a known opponent of the women's vote. 'There is no doubt we will be repulsed', wrote Scott to Sir Henry Parkes, but they persisted 'to show the country and the present ministry that we are in earnest.'164

While it was intended as proof of women's commitment to the cause, the first WSL deputation was not a public relations victory. Dibbs succeeded in exposing differences of opinion within League ranks by enquiring whether women wanted to sit in parliament as well as vote. Mrs Teece returned strongly that she 'did not want to go there', while Mrs Lawson and Miss Scott were in favour of women members. Dibbs then stated that he would not support their request, and made a patronising speech, praising the 'beauty', 'power' and 'ability' of women, but noting that his wife and

162 Rose Scott to Sir Henry Parkes, October 1892, Parkes Correspondence ML A 928, pp. 661-72, 675-6.
163 Rose Scott to Sir Henry Parkes, October 1892, Parkes Correspondence ML A 928, pp. 661-72, 675-6.
164 Rose Scott to Sir Henry Parkes, October 1892, Parkes Correspondence ML A 928, pp. 661-72, 675-6.
nine daughters did not want the franchise. Women were 'fickle' in political matters, he said, and he didn't think that there was one woman in 10,000 who would 'understand the value of the vote'.165 As Scott later reported to Parkes, 'Sir George had nothing to say except that his wife and daughters did not agree and then made himself the mouthpiece of the Creator to dictate to women their sphere of life'.166 Finally, Dibbs asked if the majority of women supported the suffrage cause, and Lady Windeyer had to reply 'candidly and honestly' that they did not. Dibbs reiterated that the women in his household were unanimously opposed to the measure. Lawson responded: '[i]f you would allow me an hour with them I would undertake to convert them all.'

All of the women had spoken, putting most of the 'well-known arguments', but it was Lawson's comments that stood out. She contended that there was no truth in the frequently repeated statement that women desired to vote merely for the sake of public notoriety or to mount the public platform. They asked for it for the sake of their children. It seemed to be the hand of God driving them out to secure political power, and then they would redeem the world.167

She laid the blame for the 'shocking sights' and vice to be seen in the city on 'bad laws passed by wicked men'. With the vote, women would send 'good men' into the parliament to 'reform the present deplorable state of things'. These strong words were 'regretted' by Scott and her more genteel representatives as 'unwise', and 'sure to be the thing the papers seize upon.'168 Arthur Rae, left-wing journalist, republican and official in the shearers' union, wrote to Scott that such statements were 'beside the mark and calculated to excite ridicule'.169 Once again a perceived disunity within the suffrage camp was exposed, suffragist plans to feminise the public sphere were rebuffed, and the WSL leadership, keen to present a public image of sisterhood, competence, clarity and womanliness, was embarrassed by the advanced views and strong words of one of its members.

165 Daily Telegraph, 15 October 1892, p. 10.
166 Quoted in Oldfield, Woman Suffrage in Australia, p. 83.
167 Daily Telegraph, 15 October 1892, p. 10. See also Sydney Morning Herald, 15 October 1892, p. 13.
168 Rose Scott to Sir Henry Parkes, October 1892, Parkes Correspondence ML A 928, pp. 661-72, 675-6. See also Oldfield, Woman Suffrage in Australia, p. 83 and Allen, Rose Scott, pp. 125-126.
169 Quoted in Oldfield, Woman Suffrage in Australia, p. 83.
'Together', taken from Tennyson's *Princess*, was the motto of both the Womanhood Suffrage League and the Woman's Work Exhibition. This was the image both groups wished to project, of sisterly solidarity and fellowship with men, but unity and united effort were not to be hallmarks of the work. The Chicago Fair was, in Lady Windeyer's words, 'the first occasion on which women had been invited to associate themselves with men in a grand national celebration'. It was therefore an opportunity for women to show 'what they could do - not to rival men, but to work with them'. Despite this, her committee clashed repeatedly with the NSW Commission over matters from finance, to autonomy, to classification. Furthermore, not every woman on the committee agreed with the approach of its leadership, causing division and infighting. The committee's president was also president of the WSL, yet the overt feminism of the Exhibition was muted. Instead the creation of an exhibit of NSW women's work to be sent to the Chicago Fair became loaded with feminist significance as an 'unworded proclamation' of women's fitness for officially sanctioned public responsibility. The suffrage debate had set an agenda which profoundly affected the work of Committee XII. Suffragists were characterised in the press as unfeminine and selfish, obsessed with the interests of women as a 'class' rather than concerned for the good of 'humanity'. In response to this, the suffragists relied on a strategy of presenting a moderate, united, feminine front. This would be the image Committee XII struggled to maintain, in the face of significant odds and clearly sex-based prejudice.

The changes that occurred between the Exhibition of Women's Industries of 1888 and the Woman's Work Exhibition held in 1892 were summed up by the vision of femininity encapsulated by their titles. 'Women's Industries' suggested diversity, a range of experiences and views. 'Woman's Work' implied something altogether more homogenous, and idealised universal femininity. But 'Woman' also evoked expressions like the 'woman question' and the 'woman's cause', signifiers in a wider

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170 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 July 1892, p. 5. See also Ritter, William and Mary Windeyer, p. 323.
culture of a major debate over the place of women in society. The dilemmas implicit in both words would trouble and challenge the emerging colonial feminist movement, as diversity of opinion in a small community threatened to shatter a united front, while the possibility of gaining entry to positions of greater power and authority seemed to rest on the idealisation of 'womanliness'.

The role given to Committee XII in the development of the overall NSW display at Chicago was to display the effects of femininity on the emerging civilisation of the young colony. The extent to which the official recognition of women as a group could be used to further feminism was constrained by a sexist organisational hierarchy and its efforts to limit women's access to the real power to control the display, as well as by economic depression, and an overwhelming emphasis on colonial pride in the overall representation. In order for the suffragists involved to prove women's fitness to vote, it was necessary to show that women could sublimate their own claims to the colony's greater good. Committee XII demonstrated women's commitment to 'national' interests by agreeing to construct an exhibit that revealed the colony to be a civilised society, as a supplement to the greater show of raw materials which underpinned the colony's wealth and future recovery. But they also gave that image an added and subversive twist, by connecting women and their work to economic, cultural, and ultimately political progress.
Figure 5.1

*Louisa Lawson.*

From the Mitchell Library.
'Sat on all round: A tale of Sydney city'.
From the Woman, 20 August 1892, p. 1.
'Some of the workers of Sydney', by Madame Praeger. The women are (clockwise from top right): Mrs W. H. Suttar, Miss Jane Foss Russell, Mrs J. H. Goodlet, Miss Woolley, Mrs Carl Fischer, Miss Gould, Miss Ethel Pedley, Mrs Pottie, Miss Macdonald, and Lady Windeyer. The Countess of Jersey is in the centre.
Photograph of the original exhibit, from Mitchell Library Small Picture File - Portrait Groups.
Mary Windeyer, 1892, by Madame Praeger.
Mitchell Library Small Picture File - Portraits.
Committee XII on Woman's Work, 1892, by Madame Praeger.
Mitchell Library Small Picture File - Portrait Groups.
Chapter 6
Improving: Creating the NSW women's work exhibit for the World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893

For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant. There is not tabula rasa. The stubborn American environment is there with its imperious summons to accept its conditions; the inherited ways of doing things are also there; and yet, in spite of environment, in spite of custom, each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons, have accompanied the frontier.¹

Frederick Jackson Turner, 'The significance of the frontier in American history', 1893.

Frederick Jackson Turner first read his influential paper 'The significance of the frontier in American History' before an audience of two hundred historians at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. The grand World's Fair, celebrating as it did the passing of four centuries since the discovery of the 'New World', provided the perfect foil for Turner's ideal of a vital and unique young nation. His 'frontier thesis' declared that the American character had been shaped by the 'continually advancing frontier line, ... the outer edge of the wave -- the meeting point between savagery and civilisation.'² The 'traits of the frontier' derived from the frontier experience were 'coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great

² Turner, 'The significance of the frontier in American history', p. 32.
ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance that comes with freedom.3

In both America and Australia, Turner's vision of frontier independence and innovation was overwhelmingly applied to men. The rugged bushman, whose ghost may be heard in every evocation of national character from Paterson to the Preamble, became in 1890s Australia a symbol of 'freshness and confidence'. The image of the 'pioneer woman', a parallel creation, conjured darker spectres of resilience and survival, of the struggle and strain to scratch a lasting mark on a forbidding and unforgiving landscape.4 Where the supernatural pioneering man waltzed, partnerless, across the land, the spirit of the pioneering woman haunted the tent and the slab hut like a curl of smoke from the hearth, trapped between two worlds, the old one and the new.

These ghosts have haunted an Australian history itself continually revisiting the 'outer edge of the wave', whether to seek the origins of national identity, expose a national myth, or cross to the other side of frontier and perceive it from an Aboriginal perspective.5 The 1890s and the 1990s speak to one another across familiar frontiers, including race, gender, class and culture. Then, as now, voices from the 'edges' have presented alternative identities, and new articulations of those identities in relation to the larger constructs of colony, nation and empire.

During the 1890s there were figures other than the swagman vying for a place in the national imagination of an imagined nation. Genteel colonists sought to create an image of a youthful and vital colony, but also a civilised and British one, striving to be

both distinct and distinguished. Feminists then, like feminists now, rejected the valorisation of an 'unrestrained' masculinity that threatened women and children. In its place they championed the moral powers of domesticity, the creativity of motherhood, and the transformational ascendancy of feminine values.

Turner's description of the frontier and the characteristics it forged in the West's white settlers resonates both sympathetically and discordantly with the image of Australian colonial life represented at Chicago's White City. This chapter and the next explore the impact and significance of the Australian frontier experience on colonialism and feminism through the lens of the NSW representation to the momentous American Fair where Turner first expressed his idea.

Both chapters engage with a significant historical debate surrounding the nationalistic and imperialistic underpinnings of Western feminism, exemplified by the work of Antoinette Burton and Anne McClintock. In Australia, Marilyn Lake has identified a 'contest between men and women at the end of the nineteenth century for control of the national culture', and articulated the genesis of colonial feminism within the 'triumphant unrestraint' the frontier offered men. Lake has described how Australia's version of 'frontier feminism' was shaped by four main aspects of the colonial experience: women's 'special authority' as the agents of civilisation and custodians of the race; the masculine nature of pioneering society and the ensuing feminist focus on the reform of masculine behaviours that threatened women and children; an emphasis on 'protection' rather than 'emancipation' brought about by fears that women were vulnerable in a male-dominated society; and a belief that sexual relations were degrading to women, prompted by recognition of the systematic sexual abuse of Aboriginal women and 'unprotected' white women and girls. Lake has also described the 'double difference' of colonial feminists, who occupied a special space between Old World 'barbarism' and stone age 'primitivism': between an awareness of

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6 Burton, Burdens of History, chs 1 and 2; and McClintock, Imperial Leather, ch. 7.
the oppression of women in western societies and a perception that even greater abuses existed within indigenous cultures. Lake has shown how colonial feminists drew power from the 'special place' allocated to white women as 'the bearers of culture, morality and order', the 'most civilised representatives of the civilised race', in a frontier marked as much by the limits of British 'civilisation' as the fencelines and battlegrounds of the white invasion.  

The connection between women and 'civilisation' was certainly a strong one, one upon which the incorporation of women's work into colonial exhibits at international exhibition rested. But at Chicago in 1893 the feminists involved with Committee XII not only used this association to claim a voice and a place, but modified and added to it to incorporate positive frontier traits of independence, innovation, and personal freedom.

By concentrating on the NSW exhibit of women's work sent to Chicago, these chapters focus on a crucial dynamic in the study of frontier life that Turner ignored: gender. This chapter examines the way in which Committee XII's exhibit presented colonial women bringing together what Turner called 'environment' and 'custom', implicitly connecting colonial femininity with the energy and spirit of the new world, as well as with the moral and cultural authority of the old. This was a redefinition of women's work that extended beyond the simple association of women with tradition, domesticity, civilisation and refinement, to embrace innovation, adaption and progress. The next chapter explores the extent to which this reconceptualisation of femininity could support a wider sphere of womanly influence and action, and form the basis of both feminist and nationalist claims to independence and 'escape from the bondage of the past'. Together, they reveal a feminist engagement with identity that extended beyond the inviolable frontier of motherhood, our traditional centrepiece for conceptualising the 1890s 'woman movement'. The idealisation of motherhood was

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9 Lake, 'Between Old World 'barbarism' and stone age 'primitivism'', pp. 80-91.
only one part of a larger social, cultural and political project. Colonial feminists reconceptualised femininity to embrace positive frontier values in an effort to create a new colonial identity that embraced feminine values. The key to achieving a merging of national and womanly interests lay in a vision of colonial femininity that was improving, adaptive, and transformative. The feminisation of 'national' culture depended, it seemed to Committee XII, on a concurrent 'nationalisation' of colonial femininity, whether that meant women making a recognised contribution to a national undertaking like the Fair, the incorporation of Australian materials or motifs into women's exhibits of traditional work, or fostering a 'national' outlook amongst colonial women through the display.

Committee XII had begun its work with enormous optimism. The government had officially recognised women and given them the chance to represent themselves and the colony on the international stage. The NSW Executive Commission charged Committee XII on Women's Work to gather a display of NSW women's work for the Women's Building at Chicago. The Commissioners expected a small exhibit of women's arts and crafts, intended to give the gloss of civilisation and refinement to what was essentially a display of raw materials. They did not get it. The Woman's Work Committee, a section of Sydney society led by a cluster of active suffragists, attempted to gather together something far more substantial and representative. Committee XII intended the NSW display to show the immense contribution of women to the colony's economic, cultural, and social life. From this, it hoped, would flow further recognition of women's views, abilities and rights.

The responsibility to show the range of women's work, and prove the colony was 'civilised' and 'advanced', was great, and full of feminist possibility. The exhibit was given the task of showing the progress of colonial civilisation, by providing evidence of advanced domestication and female leisure. But Committee XII went further than that. It encouraged women to take up the challenge posed by the entire display: to showcase the colony's wealth in raw materials in an effort to promote
primary industry and stimulate economic recovery. Women's work was applied to local product, revealing the adaptiveness and ingenuity of the colonial woman.

Committee XII saw an immense chance to reshape the image of colonial femininity, to prove women's importance to the colonial enterprise, and link women's advancement to the progress of the colony. It set itself the task of both fulfilling and subverting the requirements of the NSW Commission, refusing to accept a secondary, subordinate or supplementary role. Instead it cleverly used the exhibits to suggest a welding together of colonial and womanly interests, and went about proving that feminist women's concern with the refinement, domestication and feminisation of the public sphere was compatible with social and national responsibility. Suffragists were already putting the argument that women had a role to play in colonial politics because they were the civilisers and refiners of society and keepers of English traditions. As Rose Scott had insisted, woman needed the vote 'because she is bound to help not only in the material prosperity, but the moral growth of her fellow citizens.'\(^\text{12}\) This argument was embedded in the type of exhibits gathered by Committee XII to be sent to Chicago.

By harnessing the women's work exhibit to colonial identity and feminist aspirations the committee also risked undermining their own claims. While the exhibits of women's work were on show in Sydney they were a source of anxiety and criticism about the quality of women's work in Australia, just as they had been in 1888. The Committee openly expressed disappointment about what it had been able to gather from the women of NSW. These statements can, in part, be seen as an indirect public expression of what the Committee felt they could not reveal about the experience of organising the exhibit, the disillusionment, frustration and unhappiness which lay behind the Exhibition's facade. It was also an expression of their disappointment that the Exhibition was not as good as it could have been: that Australian women were capable of better, but had been restrained by external circumstances and inner doubt. Committee XII framed the Woman's Work Exhibition held at the Town Hall late in

\(^{12}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 November 1891, p. 8.
1892 with constant references to the self-consciousness of colonial women, who felt a sense of failure and hopelessness when confronted by the prospect of comparing their work with the excellence they imagined to be the province of women overseas. The press amplified these concerns, critiquing the work on the grounds that it was neither accomplished or original, and questioning whether wider claims could be based on such a poor showing of womanly skill.

But once it arrived in America, the NSW women’s work became a source of colonial pride, and the feminist implications of the representation became clear. At the Fair, the display’s chaperone, Margaret Windeyer, could boldly and fearlessly champion the colonial woman and the progressive near-nation she represented. She could connect colonial women, and colonial feminism, to a future nationalism and a new internationalism. She could connect womanly and colonial independence. She could unite the exhibits of women’s work with claims for womanhood suffrage. The exhibit’s feminist possibilities, it seemed, could only flower and be fully expressed from afar.

This was possible because of a clever feminist reworking of exhibition form and colonial exhibiting practice. This chapter contextualises the NSW women’s exhibit at the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893 within the articulation of colonial identity at overseas international exhibitions. It asserts the central role played by gender in that articulation, tracing the NSW women’s exhibit chronologically from its origins in earlier colonial displays, its conception by Committee XII, its initial reception at the preliminary Sydney Woman’s Work Exhibition of 1892, its refinement and dispatch to America, and finally its appearance in the Woman’s Building at Chicago. Over the course of its development the exhibit conveyed its central message of women’s importance to colonial civilisation and progress with different emphases, and was subjected to different demands. In order to understand why this was the case, and what feminist possibilities lay in overseas exhibits of women’s work, it is necessary to locate the representation to Chicago within the history of colonial displays at international exhibitions over the previous 40 years.
Refined and refining: Women's work and colonial identity

The NSW representation to the Chicago Fair had much in common with previous colonial displays at overseas international exhibitions, but there were also significant new counterpoints to recurring themes. Exhibits revealed the colony's richness in raw materials, as they always had, but within a context of economic depression this emphasis was even more pronounced. A trend which had been emerging towards the greater incorporation of manufactured goods as symbols of economic advance was arrested, even reversed. Coal, wool and wheat represented the colony's contribution to the imperial enterprise and its economic dependence on England, at precisely the moment when many colonists were keen to suggest the colonies' future political independence. NSW went to Chicago to promote its own interests, but as the only colony present from Australasia, it also took on the responsibility of representing the entire continent, a Federalist gesture discussed in detail in the following chapter. The emergent nationalism of a united 'Australia' hinted at in the exhibit was based on a belief in the colony's maturing culture, its rapid progress towards a European model of civilisation. Exhibits of fine arts suggested aspirations to a universal 'high culture' as well as an emerging nationalism. Aboriginal exhibits were included both as a contrast to 'white superiority' and as a means of distinguishing Australasia from the rest of the world.

Women's work too was a part of the show intended as evidence of colonial refinement and civilisation, and for the first time women were in charge of their own exhibit. The conventions surrounding their display were as well-established as those which guided their male counterparts. Women's exhibits signified leisure, amateurism, homelife, and tradition, and the appropriation, domestication and incorporation of Australian 'nature' by British 'culture'. These were the expectations Committee XII sought both to meet and to transform.
International exhibitions were fundamentally intended as displays of imperial power. They brought the far-flung colonies to the great centres of empire, particularly London and Paris. The idealism of their emphasis on universality thinly masked a desire on the part of the British, the French, or the Dutch to display the extent and wealth of their possessions. At exhibitions the whole world was placed before the exhibition visitor, but no visitor could fail to appreciate how much of it 'belonged' to the great states of Europe. Britannia gathered her colonies about her like the folds of a rich and variegated skirt. At the Great Exhibition, for example, the British possessions were brought together in one half of the Crystal Palace. The aim was to show the wealth of raw materials Britain could draw on to produce refined and artistic manufactures: silk from India, ivory from Africa, furs from Canada, wheat and wool from Australia [Figure 1.6].

The display of colonial wealth in this form increased as the fin de siecle approached. Both London and Amsterdam played host to 'colonial' exhibitions, and the Expositions Universelles opulently recreated tableaux of colonial life. Visitors tired of seeing objects that were familiar or repeatedly displayed. Exhibitions fed an insatiable appetite in Europe for the new, the strange, and the exotic. The immense popularity of colonial exhibits with such audiences was linked to their second important function: educating Europeans about their distant possessions. Apart from simply showing the wealth to be drawn from the colonies, colonial exhibits gave visitors a sense of 'ownership' by stimulating their curiosity and thrilling them with the alien and the fantastic. To visitors without means, exhibitions offered travel without travelling, a world tour for the price of a single admission. Visitors were

14 See Greenhalgh, Ephemerata Vistas, ch. 3; McClintock, Imperial Leather, ch. 5.
encouraged first to look at, and ultimately to 'experience', a street in Cairo, or a Javanese village.

Most historical research has focussed on two main aspects of this interaction. The first is the motivations for holding such great displays of 'empire', and the reactions of European or American exhibition visitors to them. The second is the experience of the 'othered' or 'orientalised' colonial subjects brought to Paris or Chicago to people the displays. This chapter examines the other sides of these coins. What motivated colonial governments to make representations to international exhibitions? What were the experiences of white colonists of European origin in connection with these displays?

Differences existed between the exhibits of colonies (like those in Australasia or Canada) where European culture was perceived to have been transplanted into the fresh soil of a 'Terra Nullius', and those where it existed beside other recognised 'cultures' (like India, Asia, or the Middle East). Exhibitions materially represented a hierarchy of civilisation which placed Europe at the pinnacle of culture and refinement, and the centre of progress. This affected the displays of colonies rapidly developing economically, but anxious about their own standard of civilisation and separated from Europe by vast distances. White colonists made use of fine arts exhibits, indigenous people and women's work in efforts to position themselves on the 'scale of civilisation'.

Prior to 1893, connecting gender, civilisation and colonial identity had a long history at exhibitions. In the second half of the nineteenth century, international exhibitions were sites where civilisation and progress were on display.16 The idea that exhibitions were proof of cultural sophistication, and civilising influences themselves, had particular resonances in a colonial context. In the Australasian colonies, fears of isolation and cultural degeneration made exhibitions places to measure progress

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towards taste and refinement, and prove to the world that the outposts of empire had risen above a level of commercialism and savagery.

Colonists saw themselves as transplanting British national characteristics in a land far distant from the centre of civilisation. The introduction to the catalogue of the Exhibition of Arts and Manufactures held in Sydney preliminary to the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1867 claimed 'the Australian colonists have brought with them, not only the industry, enterprise and energy, but also the institutions of their Fatherland.' The colonists thereby hoped, 'in themselves and their descendants, to maintain the genius of its people.' Concern to 'maintain' the 'genius' of Great Britain was exacerbated by the great distance which separated the colonies from their 'Fatherland'. As the NSW Executive Commissioner to the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880-81 commented in his report:

In a country which is far separated from the great centres of civilisation there must always exist the danger that the inhabitants will become too much absorbed in their own immediate surroundings to pay sufficient attention to the doings of mankind at large, and that they will thus fall out with the great movements which are passing over civilised mankind, lose the benefit of great experiments elsewhere as regards the problems of life, and drop behind the progress of the human mind.

Exhibitions, 'by bringing men in direct connection with the world at large' would 'counteract...tendencies' such as lack of proportion and parochialism. There was, it seemed to the Commissioner, a great risk of these tendencies developing in the colonies, where the 'absorbing pursuit of money-making' and the 'struggle for existence' meant there was little time to pursue the arts and sciences. Exhibitions, like art galleries, he argued, brought these seeds of civilisation to the colonists, placing before them such objects as may cultivate and refine the mind, and thus provide the best antidote to that want of refinement which, we cannot conceal from ourselves, in all the Colonies undoubtedly prevails among certain classes.

The Commissioner pointed to the example of the Garden Palace to prove the positive results of exhibitions on the culture of the mass of the people.

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17 See for example Sydney Morning Herald, 15 August 1892, p. 4.  
18 Exhibition of Arts and Manufactures Sydney 1866, Catalogue, Government Printer, Sydney, 1866, introduction, p. 4.  
Local exhibitions and international representations both embraced civilisation as a theme, but with very different emphases. Within the colonies, the focus was on measuring progress and educating colonists in taste and refinement. A circular encouraging the people of NSW to exhibit at the Centennial International Exhibition in Melbourne argued that ordinary exhibitions are intended to show the comparative progress made by different countries; the aim of the Centennial Exhibition is rather to demonstrate the progress made in the same colony at different periods of its history. It is less a competition...than a review or comparison.\textsuperscript{21}

The exhibition commission itself claimed that the display was a 'landmark in the march of Australian progress', allowing the colonies to measure their industrial shortcomings and advantages, and compare themselves to 'older and more cultured communities'. Through such comparison, 'mistakes which may have inadvertently been committed in our educational, aesthetic, economic and industrial methods may be corrected, while we are incited to aim at still higher standards of excellence.'\textsuperscript{22} Exhibitions educated the colonists in matters of taste. In Europe, one Australian exhibition commissioner claimed, it had 'been proved by well-authenticated experience that Industrial Exhibitions, and chiefly those of an International character, have done more to elevate the taste than a far larger amount of school and book learning.' In 'young countries like these Colonies their effect on public taste and refinement generally must be more pronounced and more beneficial.'\textsuperscript{23} Exhibitions in the colonies not only exposed colonists to otherwise inaccessible refining influences, but also exposed the extent to which those influences had been absorbed. It could be a sobering lesson when colonial exhibits came into comparison with those from overseas, and an air of cultural anxiety often pervaded local displays.

Colonial representations to overseas international exhibitions were obviously predominantly about increasing trade and immigration, but a parallel message was that

\textsuperscript{23} Report of the Executive Commissioner on the Melbourne International Exhibition 1880-81, pp. 3-4.
the colonies had progressed beyond the wildness of frontier life. It seems it was continually necessary to prove this, as the colonists' efforts were so often misinterpreted. The overwhelming response of European and American viewers to Australian exhibits was to characterise the colonies as barely civilised. Exhibits which were meant to show colonial progress often came to be interpreted as proof of backwardness. For example, NSW sent a bark hut as part of its display of woods to the Fair in Chicago. It was intended as a relic of the past, and as proof of ingenuity and adaption of traditional building techniques to new conditions. There was not enough room to accommodate it in the Agriculture Building, so it was shown outside on the Wooded Island, along with an American hunter's cabin. There it came to represent a romanticised and strongly masculinist frontier life. In tandem with the American example, commentators saw the exhibit 'suggesting the abodes of the pioneer in conflict with savagery.' The colonists' relationship to 'savagery' was on display elsewhere in the Exhibition.

The display of indigenous peoples, the so-called 'savages', and their work as part of colonial exhibits was intended to show the civilisation of the colonists in sharp relief. As Robert Rydell has argued, at international exhibitions 'the idea of technological and national progress became laced with scientific racism. ... World's fairs provide a partial but crucial explanation for the interpenetration and popularization of evolutionary ideas about race and progress.' By visibly classifying the human species in ethnographic buildings and 'native villages', and thereby creating comparisons between groups which suggested a hierarchy of superiority and civilisation, expositions reinforced racial prejudice and justified imperial power. In the Australasian colonies, Judith McKay argues, exhibits of Aboriginal people and their work allowed whites to 'congratulate themselves on their success as colonists and

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24 Europeans had 'by means of the Exhibition gained an insight into the condition and resources of the Colonies... The seed is sown by the Exhibition, and the harvest will come in due time.' See Report of the Executive Commissioner on the Melbourne International Exhibition 1880-81, p. 58.
26 Snider, World's Fair Studies, p. 144.
27 Rydell, All the World's a Fair, p. 5.
bringers of civilisation'. Valda Rigg has shown how Aboriginal exhibits at the 1879 and 1888 exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne represented the 'arrested' state of development of indigenous people, and the 'inevitability' of their dispossession and 'extinction' in the face of white progress. At international exhibitions such exhibits were less popular McKay argues, because they were 'derogatory' and would bring 'moral condemnation' upon the colony. Certainly in 1889 and 1893, Aboriginal exhibits were shown away from the rest of the NSW displays, in ethnographic buildings. This meant they were included as part of the larger Western project of displaying evolutionary and racial theory at exhibitions, rather than directly contributing to the image of a 'civilised colony'. But the restraint McKay attributes to colonial exhibition commissioners appears 'morally superior' only to the extent that the official exhibits offered a contrast to the blatant exploitation and dehumanisation carried out by showmen like Archibald Meston and Robert Cunningham, who kidnapped Queensland Aboriginal people with the intention of displaying them at the Chicago Fair.

Exhibits of the work of Aboriginal people were sent to Chicago by the NSW Commission to contrast indigenous 'primitivism' with white 'civilisation'. The Commission considered a proposal from a Mr Stockdale to send photographs of cave art from Northern Australia and 'take a company of 50 or 60 Aboriginals from the same district to Chicago' at his own expense. He claimed they would be 'exhibited during the summer months, when displays explaining the native encampment, spear and boomerang throwing, and tribal warfare would be made'. The Herald's column

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29 McKay, Colonial Queensland at International Exhibitions, p. 245.
32 Sydney Morning Herald, 13 January 1892, p. 5. See also 12 March 1892, p. 13 and 9 April 1892, p. 13.
'Fugitive Notes' questioned the economic usefulness of such an exhibit, within the paradigms set for colonial displays at international exhibitions:

Do we contemplate an export trade in blacks, or seek reciprocity in the import of red indians? Or is it only "advertising the colony" that we mean, and do we merely purpose showing the capabilities of the country for the production of the raw material of civilisation?\textsuperscript{33}

If NSW intended to show 'the developments of our civilisation', it suggested, then the commissioners should not stop at Aboriginals, but send a troupe of larrikins as well. It seems neither of these plans came to fruition. NSW made a large showing of photographs and Aboriginal artefacts in the Ethnographic Building at Chicago, including spears stacked in tee-pee shapes, and a set of boomerang arranged to spell out the letters 'NSW' [Figure 6.1].\textsuperscript{34} Aboriginal exhibits also served to distinguish NSW from its imperial overseer. In his report, Executive Commissioner Renwick noted with pride that ignorant visitors came to the NSW displays with the assumption that the colony was part of Britain. The presence of the Aboriginal exhibits 'rather confused this generalisation'.\textsuperscript{35} On the whole exhibits of indigenous artefacts contributed to the idea that the existence and success of colonies proved the superiority of white civilisation.

For the colonists, though, civilisation came more by association than direct connection. Their physical closeness to the rawness of frontier life and the supposed 'barbarians' beyond it made colonial claims to civilisation inherently unstable. The association of Australasia with primary production, an activity which brought the colonists into close contact with the land, carried with it a danger of undermining arguments in favour of colonial civilisation. In the newspaper produced by women at the Centennial International Exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1876, Elizabeth K. Churchill recorded her response to the Australian wool exhibits:

Much to my surprise, I find the suggestive fleeces opening to me, not pictures of the semi-nomadic life of the Australian sheep farms, but the far distant morning of the world, when the patriarchs counted their riches in sheep and cattle.

\textsuperscript{33} Sydney Morning Herald, 13 January 1892, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{34} Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 258-9.
\textsuperscript{35} Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 303.
Colonial exhibits, as she noted, were intended as proof of the fact that 'commerce, flying with white wings from shore to shore, is the civiliser and refiner of the world'. But the colonies' role in world trade was to the provide raw materials which England refined into manufactured goods. It was the processes of alteration and improvement which symbolised the more abstract developments of civilisation and progress that gave spiritual power to commodities, and ideological power to exhibitions. The emphasis in international colonial exhibits on raw product firmly situated the colonies in a subordinate relationship to the centre of imperial power. This carried with it the danger of implying that the colonies were at a commensurate 'raw' level of civilisation. To Elizabeth Churchill in 1876, the NSW exhibits suggested the past, an age where civilisation was rudimentary. Further still, the peculiarity and 'otherness' of Australian natural history exhibits, which were a central focus of all overseas colonial displays, suggested a land trapped in some earlier evolutionary time, a curious, primeval continent only recently discovered by the civilised world.

Displays of raw materials brought the colonies closer to civilisation by association, by connecting the colonists to an empire that was the epitome of refinement in all the myriad uses of the term. Judith McKay's study of the displays sent by colonial Queensland to international exhibitions notes that the exhibits 'provide glimpses of frontier society: white, materialistic, masculinist and brash, and economically dependent on Britain.' It was the demands of the mother country that determined what Queensland showed at international exhibitions, from cotton in the 1860s to minerals in the 1890s. Queensland's exhibition commissioners made no attempt to portray all aspects of colonial life, choosing to focus instead on the colony's immense resources and potential for investment. McKay draws a contrast between the exhibits of the younger colony and those of NSW and Victoria, which did feature arts and manufactures, proof of their cultural advance. She points to the role played by

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36 'The Australian Colonies', *New Century for Women*, no. 18, 9 September 1876, pp. 136-7.
38 Its proposed commissioners to the Chicago fair recommended that their exhibits 'eliminate ... all machinery and nearly all manufactured goods'. McKay, *Colonial Queensland at International Exhibitions*, p. 201.
exhibits of technology like gold crushers in proving the potential for advanced
civilisation in less well-established colonies like Queensland. Combined with displays
representing the colony's indigenous people, exhibits of machinery and raw materials
suggested the contrast between the 'barbarism' of Aboriginal people who were
incapable of exploiting the colony's resources, and the 'civilised' Englishmen who
could. A belief in the refining potential of the white race reflected civilisation onto the
colonists, even though it was the foundries and factories of the mother country that
transformed Queensland's wool into the Empire's cloth.

How were Australian women involved in these presentations? In terms of the
overall representation of the colonies at International Exhibitions, it was the fine arts
which proved that a colony was a civilised community in a public sense.39 To women
and children fell the task of proving cultural and social refinement and improvement
through education and domesticity.40

The link between refinement, leisure and home life was a strong one. As
Veblen described it near the end of the century, conspicuous leisure was viewed by the
bourgeoisie as evidence of a community which had risen beyond the 'struggle for
existence'.41 In this system of meaning, the beauty and skill of women's decorative
work, the result of leisure and taste, became a measure of a family's, and ultimately a
community's, level of civilisation. These genteel skills were on show when women
displayed their work at exhibitions, as a description of the Tasmanian ladies exhibits at
the London International Exhibition of 1862 testified. The work -
all on purely Tasmanian subjects - will amply prove that, whilst cultivating
business habits of practical utility, the fair Tasmanians by no means undervalue

39 For further information on women's contribution to this aspect of colonial exhibiting, most
notably through the brief career of painter Adelaide Ironside, see Kerr, Heritage, ch. 1.
40 The importance of education exhibits to the image of colonial civilisation is explored in McKay,
Colonial Queensland at International Exhibitions, ch 7. Juvenile Exhibitions were held to show that
the 'energy of the sire' had not 'degenerated in the offspring'. They were intended to impress on young
minds 'the dignity and honour of labor', and encourage them to 'cultivate their minds for useful
employment and recreation during leisure hours' and to 'create taste for the fine arts and ornamental
works, so as to make home attractive'. Speech by Sir George Bowen, Australian Juvenile Industrial
Exhibition Ballarat 1878, Official Record, ed. by Charles J. Richardson, F. W. Niven, Ballarat, 1878,
pp. 22-5. See also Intercolonial Juvenile Industrial Exhibition Melbourne 1879-80, Catalogue,
Nathanial Levi & Co., Melbourne, 1879; and Australian Juvenile Industrial Exhibition Ballarat 1891,
Catalogue, Berry, Anderson & Co., Ballarat, 1890.
41 Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions,
Macmillan, New York, 1908, ch. 3.
those pleasing and elegant accomplishments which diffuse an atmosphere of cheerfulness around the enjoyments of home, and elevate and purify the graceful amenities of social life. 42

The home was positioned as the site of both private and public refinement, improving both its inhabitants and the society at large.

The exhibits referred to were characteristic of the type of work colonial women sent to international exhibitions throughout the nineteenth century. Colonial women proved not only their skill and taste, but their ingenuity and adaption of older techniques to new subject matter, familiarising and domesticating the new environment. Women from all over Australasia usually sent examples of traditional women's work applied to native materials: native currant jelly, a muff of parrot feathers, table ornaments made from seeds, wools dyed with seaweeds. They also forwarded natural history specimens, further proof that their leisure time was spent in educational as well as artistic pursuits. More 'traditional' work was left to girls, to show that the young were being educated in the basic feminine arts. The amount of plain sewing, or fancywork with European themes, was surprisingly low. 43 At intercolonial exhibitions (and agricultural shows) the proportion of plainer, more straightforward, work was far higher than at the big overseas shows.

The first international exhibition of all, the Great Exhibition held in London in 1851, is a good example of the standard use of women's exhibits at international exhibitions. Only the women of Van Diemen's Land made a showing at the Great Exhibition. The bulk of the women's work carried Australian motifs. Mrs Burgess of Hobart Town showed two worsted work pictures 'representing a group of indigenous flowers of Tasmania', incorporating Tasmanian birds, and framed in Tasmanian myrtle. Mrs McKenzie of Bothwell, and Mrs Stiegltz of Killymoon, showed gloves and a shawl knitted from possum fur. Mrs Pharland of George Town sent a book of pressed algae 'collected by the exhibitor'. A selection of 'knitted woollen socks,

gloves, stockings and shawls' manufactured by children was sent from the Queen's Orphan Schools.\textsuperscript{44} This pattern of self-consciously incorporating Australian materials and motifs into women's work was to be repeated throughout colonial representations to overseas international exhibitions.

The exhibits described above appeared in colonial courts beside the work of men. The introduction of ladies' courts to international exhibitions, beginning with the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, had profound implications for the status of women's work, as has been discussed earlier. It had little effect on the type of exhibits colonial women sent to displays. Embroideries of Australian flowers, or knitted possum fur gloves persisted. At colonial ladies' courts, exhibits straddled the discourses of intercolonial and international display. Tradition and local adaption stood side by side. Embroideries of acorns were about evenly matched with embroideries of gum nuts. But it did mean that the work appeared as a concentrated statement about 'womanhood in the colonies'. Instead of enhancing or adding to a general impression of the colonies as integrated communities, as was the case if a visitor wandered through the NSW court at the London International Exhibition of 1862, from 1876 women's work was measured and assessed in relationship to the work of other women from other lands. This made the stakes relative to skill and taste far higher. The role of women's work as a measure of refinement intensified, as colonial women competed against one another and then against women from other nations. It was no longer sufficient for women's work to simply be \textit{there} beside the bales of wool and lumps of coal to show that home life had not deteriorated in the race to make money. By the 1880s, the idea of frontier existence was being displaced in Australia by the dominance of a middle-class urban reality. It seemed obvious to the colonists that this should mean the colonies were socially more refined and that leisure was more common. At the same moment, women's work was given its own space at international exhibitions held in Sydney and Melbourne. The work of women, drawn together in a separate class, was judged against itself, not against the general

\textsuperscript{44} Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, pp. 176-83.
exhibits. This gave the colonists an opportunity to measure and compare the colony's general refinement through the work of its women.

These same patterns would repeat themselves at Chicago, with the added factor that women, and feminist women at that, were now shaping the display not only to represent colonial culture, but to show the important contribution of women to the creation of colonial identity. The role of women's work was already well established in colonial exhibition discourse by the 1890s, but never before had it been stated so explicitly in the preparatory stages of an exhibition's development, nor taken up by women at an organisational level intent on reinterpreting or using traditional roles to improve women's access to social and cultural authority.

At Committee XII's first meeting, Executive Commissioner Arthur Renwick and William McMillan, the President of the Commission, briefed the ladies on the part their exhibits would play in the NSW representation: to help show the colony's progress towards civilisation. The two men explicitly stated how women would contribute to the building of a 'new Britannia in another world', by proving their womanly skills in relation to women overseas:

although it was necessary that the material wealth of the colony, and its raw products generally, should be fully represented, it was nonetheless essential that the people of America, and visitors to the Exhibition, should learn that we have made some advancement in Art, Science, and General Refinement, and that the women of NSW, in industrial skill, were not behind their sisters in older established countries.

The role of 'proving civilisation' was not solely allocated to the women's exhibits. Educational displays and the fine arts exhibits would add to the overall impression, but no other department was directed so strongly by the Commission in this way.

The women were given the specific role of supplementing the rest of the display, which was heavily weighted in another direction. The general mission of the Exposition representation, as set out by the Commission, was to convey one key idea to the world: Australia's wealth in raw materials. Renwick reasoned that Australia's unique resources were what would pull the continent out of the economic slump which

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46 The phrase comes from Renwick's speech at his farewell banquet, Sydney Morning Herald, 28 June 1892, p. 6.
had loomed so large over the early 1890s. Of course, the usual aims for an exhibition were also important, namely 'making known far and wide the resources and capabilities of the colony, and thereby promoting immigration, industrial enterprise and trade.' But this emphasis on 'raw products' was more marked than at many previous displays, harnessed as it was to pressing economic difficulty, and indeed justifying any NSW involvement at all. There was every reason not to spend thousands of pounds on a display in distant Chicago, even if it would produce practical results for the colonial economy. An editorial in the Sydney Morning Herald made this position clear:

When the project of taking part in this Chicago Exhibition was first mooted it was pointed out that the only inducement it held out was as an opportunity for advertising our raw material. To send the manufactured article in any form ... would be merely to send coals to Newcastle.

Such an approach was, as McKay suggests, a step backwards for NSW, which had begun to assert the growth of its manufactures as proof of economic progress at international shows like the Colonial and Indian Exhibition held in London in 1886. It had strong implications for women's work. The Commission set up a fairly clear gender demarcation: men displayed these essential raw materials, women added the gloss of civilisation through their domestic handiwork.

A connection between a display of women's work and proof of civilisation was assumed by both the Commissioners and the Committee. The Committee took up

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47 See World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893, Report of the President of the New South Wales Commission, Charles Potter Government Printer, Sydney, 1894, p. 3; and Sydney Morning Herald, 22 October 1891, p. 6.
49 Sydney Morning Herald, 27 April 1892, p. 6. These sentiments were reiterated when it appeared that the colony would not receive as much space as it had expected at the Fair, due to a misunderstanding with the Commission appointed by Great Britain. 'T'W' e [should] restrict ourselves to what we know with tolerable certainty we cannot be beaten in, viz., wool and minerals ... timbers and wines' (Letter from 'Experience'), and 'I should be glad to know how we are to be benefited by an exhibition of our manufactures, which will certainly not cause American manufacturers anxiety as to competition. A compact exhibit of our wools, minerals, timber and wines is all that is required.' (Letter from 'R.M.'), both printed in the Sydney Morning Herald, 27 June 1892, p. 6.
50 Colonial and Indian Exhibition London 1886, Official Catalogue of Exhibits from the Colony Forwarded to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, Thomas Richards Government Printer, Sydney, 1886;
McMillan's directive with gusto, but perhaps not with the same emphasis he had intended. To Committee XII it was essential to give women a more central and active role, to show that colonial civilisation, progress and identity were connected to women's work, place and status. The women's committee set itself the task of showing 'General Refinement' within a framework of incorporating the raw materials into women's work with thrift and economy as well as feminine skill. It also applied itself to revealing women's contribution to McMillan's other categories, Art and Science, as well as highlighting women's production or use of raw materials, and involvement in business and manufacturing. By so doing it hoped to expose women's involvement in the wider colonial enterprise, and prove their commitment to the 'national good'. It commissioned a pamphlet giving a 'full account of the progress of women's work in the colony'\textsuperscript{51} and showing 'the work and influence of women' in all aspects of colonial life.\textsuperscript{52} They intended the pamphlet to contextualise the exhibits within the broader framework of colonial women's political and social status, and their cultural and economic contribution to the community. Although considered by the Committee a 'most important' part of its work, unfortunately it was never published. Nevertheless its commissioning suggested the Committee's desire to give a full picture of colonial women and their lives, and to connect women to all aspects of the colonial enterprise.

The Committee communicated its goals to the women of NSW at a Public Meeting at the Town Hall on 22 July 1892. Patroness Lady Jersey charged NSW women to 'make excellence their standard ... and as far as possible to send articles which might be considered "racy of the soil"'.\textsuperscript{53} The meeting was held to promote the planned Woman's Work Exhibition. It had been decided that to encourage NSW women to exhibit their work to Chicago, a preliminary exhibition would be held in

\textsuperscript{51} Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to 19 May 1892'.
\textsuperscript{52} Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq, President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting of the Commission 6 January 1893'.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Sydney Mail}, 30 July 1892, pp. 247-8. The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines 'racy' as 'having a characteristic quality', 'having a distinctive character', 'rigorous, spirited, lively'.

October 1892. No other department considered this option. The decision was evidence of a desire for the world's fair to give some benefit to local workers, and a belief on the part of Committee XII that women needed extra encouragement to be involved in distant exhibitions. It also gave them the opportunity to canvass the widest range of exhibits to fulfil their expansive aims. But although it was intended as a triumphant show of feminine accomplishment, it became instead a visible sign of the demoralisation of the organisers and their colonial sisters.

'The difference between what is and what might have been': The Exhibition of Women's Work Sydney 1892

*Your Committee has ... had an uphill task to perform, to the difficulties of which the present general depression has greatly added; and it is with the sense of the vast difference between what is and what might have been, that it has now to state what really has been obtained.*

'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work ... presented to a meeting to the Commission 21 October 1892.'

*[The exhibition] shows that even in the lines which are claimed to be those in which they possess special qualities, they are feeble and inefficient. A very apt phrase to describe the characteristic of the whole is "puerile." That is to say, that were it an exhibition of the exercise of male industry and ideality, it would be attributed to the exertions of boys—not touching the level of men's achievements.*

*Bulletin, 22 October 1892.*

Both the high aims and the self-consciousness of Committee XII described in the previous chapter manifested themselves in the Women's Work Exhibition held in the Sydney Town Hall in October 1892. Criticism from a broad section of the press argued that from the evidence of the exhibits the women's committee had failed to fulfil both its required role and its own high aims. The air of discontent came as much from within the Committee as beyond it. Its public statements, filled with apology and regret, had anticipated or even suggested such a failure. The initial enthusiasm of the

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54 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq., President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting to the Commission 21 October 1892'.

55 Bulletin, 22 October 1892, p. 5.
group had soured under the pressure of preparing the exhibit under difficult circumstances. Where in 1888 the poor quality of colonial women's work could become a statement of women's oppression, here it came to symbolise the incompetence of colonial womanhood, undermining feminist claims. At the earlier exhibition the emphasis had been on work. Here it was on identity. The women's work was judged on its contribution to the image of the colony. The Woman's Work Exhibition was meant to be a confident display connecting femininity and colonialism. Instead, the exhibition was shrouded by disappointment and disapproval.

The women's contribution to Chicago was exposed to critical judgement in the colony in a way that the rest of the NSW exhibits never were. Committee XII was the only one of the NSW Commission's appointed bodies to hold a preliminary exhibition. It assumed that women, as individual exhibitors, and relatively inexperienced ones at that, needed special treatment and extra encouragement to send their work to the great fair far away. As well, one of the Committee's unstated intentions was to benefit the professional workers whose skill and high standard of work formed the basis of the exhibits claims to refinement. The preliminary exhibition replicated the EWI in that it gave these women an opportunity to advertise themselves and gain some custom in return for the time and effort they had expended on producing exhibition work (be they needlewomen or photographers). As Lady Jersey commented in her speech at the opening:

> It was always desirable that those who worked hard should have the opportunity of exhibiting the results of their labor, not only to profit themselves by the sale of the goods, also to induce others to do likewise.\(^{56}\)

Another intention was raise the standard of women's work in the colony by educating visitors and encouraging the women of NSW to imitate those good workers amongst them. One Committee report asserted the 'importance of holding a preliminary Exhibition in Sydney to stimulate the Emulation of exhibitors & to arouse interest which would otherwise be dormant'. 'By this means', it was concluded,

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\(^{56}\) *Daily Telegraph*, 10 October 1892, p. 3.
an active interest in the exhibition will be assumed & the display will give an
individuality & significance to the enterprise in the eyes of those who will [be]
able to go to the exposition.\textsuperscript{57}

Initially it was hoped that each country town or urban community might hold
preliminary exhibitions to offset some of the costs of advertising, and facilitate the
choice of the 'articles best fitted to meet the object in view'.\textsuperscript{58} When it came to the
point, the response was poor (a fact much lamented by Lady Windeyer) and only one
preliminary exhibition was held, at Randwick in late September 1892.\textsuperscript{59}

The Sydney preliminary exhibition was the 'necessity considered essential' to
produce more positive results [Figure I.3].\textsuperscript{60} It was opened by Lady Jersey at the
Sydney Town Hall on Saturday 8 October 1892. It contained close to one thousand
exhibits, from, as the \textit{Herald} put it, 'ribbons and laces to jams and jellies and even
hairwash'.\textsuperscript{61} The exhibits, although intended for a foreign Fair with a different
classification, were displayed in Sydney in the classification of the EWI. The
committee had had possession of the hall for less than 24 hours before the opening, so
although the exhibits were in place, the work of judging them had not been completed.
As a result, the names of exhibitors could not be placed with the exhibits, which
frustrated early visitors. The Exhibition was competitive and bronze medals were
awarded to successful exhibitors, paid for by a prize fund of money donated by the

\textsuperscript{57} Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting 22 March 1892'.
\textsuperscript{58} Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting 2 February 1892'; 2,000 circulars and 5,000
schedules were sent to country towns, with the secretary herself visiting many to follow the initial
contact (often coordinating her visit with the local show as she did at Bathurst and Goulburn). A copy
of the circular can be found in the Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML 186/13. The Committee noted
with some regret that the 'result has not been commensurate with her exertions, although honorable
exception may be made as to the help given in some of the localities named'. Reports of Committee
XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq. President World's
Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting to the Commission 21 October 1892'.
Meetings convened by committee members were also held in Sydney suburbs like Darlington,
Balmain, Manly, Parramatta, Five Dock and Potts Point, see Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a
meeting 9 February 1892'. See also \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 22 January 1892, p. 7; 2 April 1892, p.
10; 12 August 1892, p. 4; 15 August 1892, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 29 September 1892, p. 3. The Randwick Exhibition of Ladies' Work
opened at the Coogee Palace Aquarium on 28 September 1892. Held in aid of the Sick and Poor Relief
Society of Randwick and Coogee, it was organised under the direction of Committee XII member Mrs
John See, and Mrs E. M. Campbell. Its largest single class of exhibits were those in needlework, the
sewing of schoolgirls forming the bulk of the display. There were also numerous exhibits of cookery,
horticulture and fine arts, and a loan exhibition intended to further entice the crowds. Overall the
display was deemed 'highly successful' by the \textit{Herald}.
\textsuperscript{60} Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting 9 February 1892'.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 10 October 1892, p. 3.
mayoresses of Sydney's suburbs [Figure 6.2]. Funds raised from door receipts and from the sale of surplus goods left over from the EWI were donated to charity. As well, many of the exhibits (including cut flowers) were for sale for the benefit of exhibitors. The Band of the NSW Artillery began a week-long program of entertainments, which included a display of dumbbell exercises by the children of Enmore Public School. The pupils of the Technical College prepared refreshments. A floral fete and 'procession of fifty flower-decked maidens', a loan exhibition and exhibits of South Sea Islander and Chinese women's work, were all additional amusements intended to draw visitors. News of the death of Lord Tennyson was received while the exhibition was open, and a Tennyson memorial, photographed by Laura Praeger [Figure 6.3], became a focus for the grief of Sydneysiders mourning the loss of the poet laureate who had supplied the Exhibition's motto. During the week it remained open the Exhibition was well attended.

Such success had not been anticipated by the Woman's Work Committee. In its public statements about the display, the Committee set a tone for the responses which followed. The president's speech at the opening ceremony, and the introduction to the Exhibition catalogue were filled with a powerful sense of disappointment and self-consciousness. The general impression given out was that the Committee had not succeeded in meeting the goals it had been set to the standard it had demanded of itself: of patriotically showing the resources of the colony, and proving the quality of NSW women's work compared to the women of the world. This is not to say there was not pride expressed in the work. But these statements were made in the language of negativity and contradiction, of explanation and justification.

The theme which dominated the Committee's own responses to the display was an acute awareness that, as Lady Windeyer put it at the opening of the Exhibition, 'the
committee had had great difficulties in their way. It was 'impossible', she said, 'not to note the striking difference between what they had hoped to achieve and the results which they had actually secured.'66 This sentiment was expressed over and over. It appeared in each public statement made by the Committee. A long explanation of the 'difficulties' facing the Committee dominated the text of a memorandum issued prior to the Exhibition's opening, which was also reprinted as the introduction to the catalogue. These 'evils' had been 'powerful factors against success, and the Committee are deeply sensible of the wide difference between the hopes with which they began this undertaking and their fulfilment'.67 The gap between expectation and results, between aims and realities, so openly expressed at every opportunity, cast a pall over the women's work exhibits. Certainly Committee XII was not alone in feeling that their work had been onerous and difficult. NSW Executive Commissioner Arthur Renwick would later claim that the labour of his commission 'was unquestionably the most arduous ever undertaken on behalf of our country'.68 But as we have seen, the women's exhibit had higher expectations resting on it than any other department: showing the progress of colonial civilisation, the special qualities of the Australian woman, and her fitness for social and political responsibility. The Committee felt constantly obliged to explain what had gone wrong, to ask that women not be judged harshly as exhibitors or as organisers, because circumstances had been so much against them.69

66 Daily Telegraph, 10 October 1892, p. 3.
67 Sydney Morning Herald, 10 October 1892, p. 2; and Exhibition of Woman's Work in the Centennial Hall, introduction, pp. 7-8.
69 Similar sentiments can, interestingly, be found in relation to the Woman's Building of the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876. 'No claim is made to a full representative exhibit ...this is the first attempt of its kind ever made...The greatness of the undertaking should be its own explanation of much of the incoherence and incompleteness which mark this beginning. A want of means has been one great drawback in filling up the Woman's Department generally. The poverty of exhibit[s] in some branches of industry, or, as in certain cases, an entire failure to be represented at all, is due greatly to the fact that women of limited resources make up the majority of those who have achieved any success in either science or art. The ladies of the Commission have consequently been obliged to aid individuals in order to insure them a fair representation. This, indeed, is one of the most praiseworthy features of the department, and shows the earnest, indefatigable spirit animating all connected with it. None of the other departments have had its difficulties to contend with.' New Century for Women, no. 15, 19 August 1876, p. 115.
So what were the 'difficulties' the Committee identified as having impeded their efforts? The first were a set of external factors, beyond the control of the Committee or women exhibitors, which exerted a powerful effect over the entire NSW representation. Economic difficulty affected the display at every level, from the government's decision to go to Chicago at all, to the Commission's emphasis on raw materials, to the seamstress in Darlinghurst who could not afford the time or materials to complete exhibition work. The second factor, 'greater than all' declared the Exhibition catalogue, was the doubt (discussed in detail in the following chapter) surrounding whether NSW would attend the Fair at all. The problem of 'convincing people that there was anything in sending their articles so far across the sea' was exacerbated by the perpetually recurring controversy as to the amount of space, and the conditions under which the colony would be represented -- the uncertainty as to there being any representation existing until within the last two months.

The exhibitors' lack of confidence resulting from the bleak economic climate and the cloud of uncertainty hanging over the representation as a whole was, it was argued by the Committee, matched by a corresponding lack of self-confidence amongst colonial women. The Exhibition had been promoted as something of a test for the women of the colony. Their work was to show that they were the equals of women closer to the centre of civilisation. The preliminary exhibition prompted the extraordinary revelation by Committee XII that colonial women actually felt inferior, and had been inhibited by this feeling from taking part in the exposition. The demands of the Board of Lady Managers, and accounts of the 'magnitude of the resources, the large population, and the advances made by American women', explained the catalogue, 'impressed the small community in this new land with a self-consciousness that the best they could produce would not be equal to the works of their elder

70 Sydney Morning Herald, 10 October 1892, p. 2; and Exhibition of Woman's Work, introduction, p. 7.
71 Exhibition of Woman's Work, introduction, p. 7.
72 Daily Telegraph, 10 October 1892, p. 3.
73 Exhibition of Woman's Work, introduction, p. 7.
Drawing attention to the self-consciousness of the Australian woman was probably intended to explain the paucity of the exhibits by referring to the humility of potential exhibitors, as M. L. Manning had done in 1888. But it also hinted at the Committee’s own self-consciousness, and their disappointment in the women of NSW.

Feelings of doubt and insecurity were, it was argued, enhanced by a belief that the work of women from distant colonies was not treated with sufficient care or respect. Colonial women had 'learned, by experience', argued the catalogue, 'how little regard is shewn at Exhibitions to small contributions from foreign sources, which to the senders are very precious, and that loss of exhibits is a frequent result.' As they had been in 1888, women were differentiated from their fellow exhibitors by the nature of their work, and their investment in it. A vast difference was drawn between an individual woman exhibitor, whose quilt (perhaps) represented an investment of personal and essentially private time and emotion, and a display of biscuits or spectacles or washing machines sent by a businessman or manufacturer, who had no

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74 Exhibition of Woman’s Work, introduction, p. 7. These feelings were not limited to women in colonial NSW. The women of Connecticut felt rather similar. On the difficulty of measuring up to the BLM’s brief that the “building and all its contents shall be the inspiration of woman’s genius”, one commented on the problems associated with procuring good examples of the homely art of sewing. Meanwhile, we tried to meet intelligently the demand for needlework. Not the gusset and seam and band familiar to the women who look well to the ways of their households, but in the newer field of modern fancy work. And here again we met with the rule, “only original work desired.” “No stamped articles will be accepted.” This meant that first we must find an artist able to originate a design of beauty, and willing to place the free-hand drawing onto mere cloth. Then we must find the artistic needlewoman who, with a proper knowledge of color, combine the patience to bring out the design stitch by stitch. The two do not often inhabit the same earthly tenement of clay, and, when the work was finished, whose would it be? It was like the matrimonial puzzle in the New Testament, and, like cowards, we gave it up, salving our conscience with the repletion that the Sisters of Charity of France would exhibit infinitely finer plain sewing. The Mexican women with their exquisite drawn work could give any spider of our acquaintance an object lesson in cobwebs. The Senoritas of Spain with their needlework portrait medallions of royalty left us nothing but the kodak for fair competition, while the fact that the Egyptians made and wore lace thousands of years before “the little yellow spot upon the map” which represented us was even dreamed of, made us feel so hopelessly and unpleasantly new in our efforts that we decided competitive needlework in any of its branches was not for us. ... from Knight, History of the work of Connecticut Women, pp. 13-14. Similar sentiments to those expressed by Australian women were also made regarding the work of the women of Texas at the New Orleans World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition 1884-5. The Texas exhibit of woman’s work is the largest in the Woman’s Department. It is all the work of amateurs. Some of it the tottering first steps of beginners; much of it of sufficient merit to rank with the best, and is “proof positive” that the women of Texas are not behind their older sisters in taste, culture, and refinement. From New Orleans, World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition 1884-5, Woman’s Department, Report and Catalogue of the Woman’s Department of the World’s Exposition, Held at New Orleans, 1884-1885, Boston, Rand Avery & Company, 1885, p. 168.

75 Exhibition of Woman’s Work, introduction, p. 7.
personal connection to his goods, and who could better absorb any losses. This was argued across the board for female exhibitors, irrespective of the fact that most were professional workers and businesswomen themselves. The idea that women's work embodied emotions and was therefore infinitely 'precious' to its maker (described in chapter 3) was deemed universal, unaffected by the fact that the exhibit might have been made for money. It was also a powerful argument for the appointment of a female commissioner to superintend the exhibits in Chicago.

In further explaining why women had not been stimulated to exhibit, the Committee *did* distinguish between these two groups of workers. The Committee's report to McMillan immediately following the preliminary exhibition stated:

> Of Woman Workers, those most capable of producing work worthy of exhibition, are in many cases least able to give their work, in other instances they are discouraged by the hopelessness of producing anything worthy to be exhibited in the World's Fair.\(^76\)

The women who lacked confidence, it implied, were the amateurs, those who did not complete their work for remuneration. Those who had to earn their own living were more likely to be prevented by economic circumstance. If some workers felt they lacked the abilities or resources required to produce a good exhibit for the fair, some never considered trying in the first place. The catalogue placed first on its list of 'evils' (though not first in importance) the 'lack of interest in the enterprise with those who have no prospect of seeing the Great Fair'.\(^77\)

The apparent small-mindedness of some women obviously irritated some members of the Committee, particularly Lady Windeyer, who made pointed references to what she perceived as a lack of vision and nationalistic commitment in her speeches and in the Committee's reports. At a WSL drawing room meeting Windeyer had expressed the hope that the suffrage might mean that 'women, who are now permitted to have parochial minds' might develop 'national minds'.\(^78\) Her thoughts on the

\(^{76}\) *Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq. President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting to the Commission 21 October 1892'.*

\(^{77}\) *Exhibition of Woman's Work*, introduction, p. 7.

\(^{78}\) *Daily Telegraph*, 30 July 1892, p. 9.
connection between a national outlook and women's emancipation underlay much of Committee XII's expressed disappointment. One Committee report commented:

With small exception, no patriotic zeal to show that refinement, art, industry and capability exists among the women of Australia, has inspired those in the country to work up in their separate districts an interest in this great enterprise.79

Windeyer felt let down by those (male and female) who did not feel that the colony's reputation was at stake, who appeared to have no concept that NSW was representing the whole of Australia, and who in her opinion could not envisage much beyond their own front doors. At the opening ceremony she asserted that

[it]he feeling that it [the colony] was but a part of the federation of the world had not entered the minds of those who had not recognised how small a place the world is, and thinking, perhaps, that this far-off country bounded their ideas of the world, it was thought, perhaps, that there was no advantage in showing at Chicago either what they could do or what their country could produce.80

This was a revealing outburst of frustration from the Committee with the potential exhibitors who, for all the reasons they had outlined at length, did not contribute to making the woman's work exhibit a representative success.

Through all of this disappointment, some qualified causes for optimism did emerge. The most potent of these was the previous exhibition of women's work. The EWI was seen to have been an important moment in the history of women in the colony. It had in the Committee's opinion stimulated, proved, and improved women's work. The catalogue to the Woman's Work Exhibition noted that 'in many departments there is gratifying evidence that the Exhibition of Woman's Industries exerted a salutary and lasting influence, and that Industries initiated then are now flourishing.'81 These sentiments were made material in the 'memorial' to the Exhibition displayed by Mrs Carl Fischer. It consisted of a frame of Australian pine containing a photograph of Lady Carrington, exhibition schedules, models of medals, and copies of certificates.82 Countering its own argument about the self-consciousness of women exhibitors with evidence of the positive effect of exhibitions, the Committee

79 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq. President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting to the Commission 21 October 1892'. The same report described how the non-arrival of exhibits promised from inland towns in May and June, & the withdrawal by many exhibitors of works selected have seriously hampered and disappointed your committee'.
80 Daily Telegraph, 10 October 1892, p. 3.
81 Exhibition of Woman's Work, introduction, pp. 7-8.
82 Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, p. 738.
claimed this memorial showed that 'women's industries have already attained such development as exhibitions give'.

But in October 1892 the possibilities for salvaging something positive from the preliminary exhibition seemed fairly small, especially in the light of a very negative press response. This was a different style of criticism to the one which had greeted the EWI. With the exception of the *Bulletin*, the press critiques focussed on the exhibits and how the colony would be perceived when they were sent to Chicago. There was no debate about class or industry associated with the display. This could simply have been because the Exhibition was small in comparison to the EWI, and had had less attention drawn to its development. But it was also a response to the Committee's own representation of the display. The openly expressed disappointment of the Committee that the women of NSW had not responded to their call for work, the identification of 'self-consciousness' as a major factor in their failure to do so, and the declared intention of measuring the colonists work against that from the women of the world, fed or even provided the newspapers' dominant line: that the Exhibition was substandard and evidence of the decline of women's traditional work in the colony.

Exhibits were judged by the press not so much on their intrinsic worth, but on the extent to which they would contribute to the image of NSW. Only the *Sydney Mail* and the *Australian Star* responded really positively to the exhibition, while the *Sydney Morning Herald* was generous in its coverage without becoming effusive. It was to a degree natural that the *Sydney Morning Herald* and its sister publication the *Sydney Mail* should be supportive. The secretary of Committee XII, Mrs Carl Fischer, had been the music and drama critic and author of social notes for the two papers since 1879.

Whether it was written by Jenny Fischer or not, the *Sydney Mail*'s report expressed many of the emotions of Committee XII, perhaps more tellingly and more

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83 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq. President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting to the Commission 21 October 1892'.

84 Clarke, *Pen Portraits*, pp. 116-118.
openly than their own minutes did. The language used was far more emotive than that seen in any other forum. The piece described once more how the organisers had had 'serious evils to fight against', and how only 'enthusiasm and persistence' had got them through. It claimed that the Exhibition did not 'aspire to the standard' set by the US board. 'Here our women ... are infants in art' it argued. The 'very elaborate and lofty standard' set by the Board of Lady Managers had 'rather scared the readers in this new land, whose life is barely half a century old, and made them chary of submitting the results of their labours to the ordeal of criticism.' Perhaps projecting some closer feelings, the author described how the exhibits were evidence of how much 'difficult work' was done by women in NSW. In a similar vein, later Sydney Mail reports of the Exhibition made much of the 'heavy duties' which had attended a 'week of hard labour' for the organisers.

The Australian Star alone thought that the Committee had succeeded in completing the NSW exhibit and meeting its stated goals. It focussed less on explaining the context in which the exhibits should be viewed, and openly praised them instead. This praise, however, was matched with a patronising tone, and tempered by an underlying masculinist rhetoric which expressed surprise at the exhibits which connected women with public life. The report, a cutting of which is preserved in the Windeyer family scrapbook, contradicted even the Committee's own views about the exhibit. 'Judging by the extensive and elegant display at present in the Town Hall', it began, 'the ladies of Sydney, and indeed of New South Wales, have entered into the self imposed task of making as complete as possible the colony's representation at the great exhibition with a spirit that is commendable.' When the women's exhibits were brought into play with the 'more substantial and commercial portions' of the NSW representation the colony would compare well with the 'oldest countries in the world'. In order to counteract the implication that the women's

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85 Sydney Mail, 15 October 1892, p. 874.
86 Sydney Mail, 22 October 1892, p. 915.
87 Australian Star, [13 October 1892], in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
exhibits were neither centrally important nor connected with the public world of money, the reporter hurriedly continued:

Not that there is a lack of substantiality or commercial worth in the women's work, but somehow the tenor of the times is not to connect the gentle sex with the grim realities of everyday life and the bustle of business.

This was ironic, considering the real impact of the economic depression on the display, the efforts of Committee XII to encourage poor but professional workers, and its open admission that the downturn had constrained the display. At least the exhibits succeeded in conveying the uniqueness of the colony, if to this journalist's eye rather the savage, untamed, continent populated by men of mark than the cultured community the committee had intended to project:

Right through there is an expression of Australia, the scenes being in many instances of Australia's wilds, and the portraits of Australia's great men. The flowers are representations of Australia's flora, and there is the stamp of colonialism all round. In addition there are collections of antiquities, through which the progress of the colony can be traced step by step.

The woman's work committee had, of course, intended the women's work exhibits, not the loan collection of antiquities, to convey these notions of colonial advancement.

'Australianness' was identified by the press as one of the crucial qualities to be conveyed to visitors to the Chicago Fair. The Evening News, which had been so antagonistic towards the EWI, was among the milder critics of the 1892 Woman's Work Exhibition. It argued that altogether the exhibits did not suggest strongly enough the unique qualities of the colony. Its summary, although not as damning as some, was not encouraging to Committee XII:

Altogether, as a Sydney show, it is of interest; but, as an exhibition of Australian women's work fit for the Chicago exhibition, it is not good.

'The exhibits individually are good', it explained, 'but taken as a whole, the work is ordinary and not typical.'

What was greeted with praise was work that spoke directly of Australia: native animals stuffed by women taxidermists, and the work of 'native women'. For the Evening News, and its sister paper the Daily Telegraph, the stranger, more exotic work of the taxidermist or the Aboriginal woman had greater value than more traditional work, which it claimed was out of place on the world stage.88 'Faustine'

88 Evening News, 11 October 1892, p. 6. This article was repeated in the Town and Country Journal, 15 October 1892, p. 55.
(the pen name of Lizzie Ashton of WSL fame), in her Telegraph column 'Passing Notes', agreed with most of the commentators that the taxidermists and South Sea Islander women's work was the best thing on show, the taxidermists because 'theirs is a branch of work not usually associated in one's mind with women', and the work of the islander women because of its 'mystery', and the comparison it offered with the work of white women.

I examined this exhibit last; and after a long course of things familiar, unless they rise to an extraordinary perfection, the barbaric has its charm.

With these words, 'Faustine' must have sent a familiar chill through the heart of every white colonial exhibitor at international exhibitions, especially the female ones. The potential for the 'everyday', familiar and possibly second-rate work of colonists to be uninteresting or unattractive to European or American audiences was great. The decision of Committee XII to seek the work of taxidermists and Aboriginal women was in part motivated by this very fear. Their work was unusual and fascinating. Identifying the Aboriginal women's work and the 'dressed skins' as the 'most interesting' exhibits, the Evening News had no time for the 'tortured' wildflowers, or the display of needlework. It deemed such traditional exhibits 'odd', on the grounds that it was inappropriate to send such 'ordinary' (in every sense of the word) work to Chicago.

Especially, as the Telegraph claimed, if that traditional work was poorly done. The paper's general columns gave a sympathetic ear to the protestations of the Committee. 'That most of the ladies of the executive committee worked with the utmost energy and enthusiasm', it was commented, 'there can be little doubt, and they deserve the encouragement for what must at many times have been a most thankless task.' But there was 'something quite pathetic' in the statement made in the introduction to the catalogue about the difference between what was and what might have been, and there was 'much food for sad reflection' in the Exhibition. The paper then made a link between feminist claims for women's enlarged sphere, and a marked decline in the standard of women's work.

To judge from the exhibits, it almost seems as if in these days of much talk of what women can and cannot do as if women's skill in essentially feminine arts had deteriorated. As an exhibit to serve any educational or artistic purpose the fancy
needlework is practically useless; as a whole it is weak in design and false in coloring.

Although there were some 'striking exceptions', on the whole the traditional women's work was found to be at fault for lacking skill, taste or originality. It was, the paper argued, well below the standard of earlier generations. The plain needlework showed 'a considerable falling off from that of days gone by'. 'As a whole', it declared finally, the essentially feminine exhibits are inferior' and the 'exhibition cannot be called a brilliant success'.

'Faustine' was not so reserved. She began her column of 15 October with the claim that she had gone to the display determined to prove its detractors wrong. "Not up to the mark," was the verdict given by several friends who visited the Woman's Work Exhibition before I did. So I went, to a certain extent, prejudiced; let me make that confession at the start. Fierce contradiction I was prepared to meet the detractors with did I get the slightest excuse for quarrelling with their decision, for I know all the difficulties workers in the affair have had to face and how bravely and perseveringly they have met and laid them. But somehow I came away crestfallen after measuring the general level of the work sent in. Much, very much, doesn't rise above mediocrity, and a considerable amount falls below it.

Faustine felt she had to admit that even taking the 'difficulties' so clearly outlined by the Committee into account, the colonial women's work was vastly inferior to that of their sisters overseas. She addressed the issue rhetorically.

It isn't fair to expect extraordinary perfection I know. Still, there it is, down in black and white—"Commissions will be asked to recommend to the board of lady managers work of such supreme excellence as to be worthy of admission to the gallery of the woman's building." "Supreme excellence" is a strong term. Have we come anywhere near it? that is the question.

In the view of most of the Sydney press, the answer was no. The Australian women's work was exposed, by the very means through which it was to be championed, as deficient and weak, inadequate to meet the purposes or demands of an international showing.

The Bulletin, predictably, went further. As it had done in 1888, much of its satirical ink flowed in the direction of the organisers, mocking the pomposity and petty jealousies of the colonial 'aristocracy'. With her usual light dose of poison, Sappho Smith made fun of the committee members who 'tore ahead' of Lady Jersey in their

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89 *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1892, p. 9.
90 *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1892, p. 9.
eagerness to show her some of the more special exhibits, and had especial fun with the
'simply awful' refreshments:
"I'll eat it," said a girl, valiantly, as one of the honorary waitresses brought her an
evil-looking plum-tart. "I hope you won't be ill if you do, dear" said the "waitress"
sympathisingly.91

Sappho summed up her opinions on the matter by recounting a story she thought
embodied the entire enterprise. 'Things happen very apropos sometimes' she mused,
At the closing of the Sydney Women's Work Exhibition (a muddled up affair made
worse by ladylike faction-fights) I saw three vinegary, poker-backed old society
dames with frozen sympathies and Arctic souls looking out of their steely eyes. And
where do you think they had seated themselves? Right under a label with "Ices" upon
it.92

This was a comment very much in the vein of the criticism which had greeted the EWI
-- the Bulletin saw the exhibition as a chance to send up the 'ruling classes'. But
Sappho Smith also pushed the line of the other papers one mark further, sarcastically
'explaining' the practical problems of the display, and bemusedly describing how the
exhibits might be seen in distant lands.
You couldn't be a Daniel come in judgement amongst the women's work, because
you were told that "half the things weren't unpacked," ... I couldn't see the trans-
Pacific force ... of a not astonishingly well modelled tweed frock, trimmed with fur-
nor did a deserted pink tea gown, with no particular points of colour or cut, appear
quite eligible to represent the outward aspect of our looser moments.93

Her fellow reporter in the 'Society' column agreed, if in less humorous tones, that the
exhibits made the colony look foolish. 'Society' poured acid on the deluded self-
interest of the exhibitors who sent items plucked from the back clothesline. Where
Sappho had questioned the quality of the exhibits, 'Society' questioned the nature of
the exhibits themselves.
A few items from the women's work exhibit which N.S. Wales is sending to
Chicago Exhibition [sic] "Knitted counterpane," "open-work silk stockings and
socks," "knitted shawl," "gentleman's socks," "infant's robe," "dressed doll," "child's
chemise." What an exhibit! And just think of the diseased vanity of the woman who
picks her husband's common, every-day socks off the line in the back-yard, and sends
them off to the biggest exhibition the world has ever seen, for all the nations of the
earth to stare at.94

Counterpanes and socks were too trivial and domestic, too mundane. Echoing the
response to Queen Victoria's corset in 1888, the women were mocked for displaying
the private world in public, for exposing what should have remained hidden in an

93 Bulletin, 15 October 1892, p. 8.
embarrassing exhibition of the more ridiculous aspects of colonial pomposity and insecurity.

Since 1888, the Bulletin had found a new, and perhaps better, target for its barbs than ordinary genteel women: feminists. The most telling piece on the Exhibition in what was avowedly a men's paper linked the display to the women's movement in Sydney. It appeared in a column which reported current event through the supposedly unsolicited letters of correspondents. Its main thrust was the suggestion that it was 'peculiarly unfortunate' for the Womanhood Suffrage League that they should have taken a deputation to the premier at the same time as there was a women's work exhibition on at the Town Hall. The correspondent, 'T', explained why:

The exhibition furnishes the most crushing conceivable proof of women's incompetence to participate in serious affairs. The aims of women, in practical directions, are by it exposed as being of the paltriest conception, and the feeblest execution.95

This was vitriol of an even greater pitch than the comments made about 'blundering men' being lynched at the EWI.96 Arguments like those in the Daily Telegraph which suggested that the standard of women's work was deteriorating were here provided as evidence that women should not be allowed a greater role in public life. The rise of the suffrage movement had driven the masculinist press to even more extreme and overt attack. The exhibition was to them a lesson in the worthlessness of the female sex, rather than proving (as Lady Windeyer might have argued) that women were economically vulnerable, central to but invisible within the colonial economy, marginalised from meaningful work and higher social questions, forced into trivial pursuits by custom and ignorance, and deprived of an education that might lead them to do better. Instead press criticisms of the Woman's Work Exhibition focused on the extent to which the exhibition exposed the ineptitudes of colonial women, and by association the deterioration of femininity in the colonies. The women apparently lacked both skill and originality. This in turn brought into question feminist claims

95 Bulletin, 22 October 1892, p. 5.
96 Bulletin, 22 October 1892, p. 5.
based on the superiority of femininity, and on the incorporation of the private and the domestic into public life.

The Monday after the Woman's Work Exhibition closed, two men, Mr Burdett-Smith and Mr J. F. Burns (members of the NSW Commission) visited the display to choose which exhibits should be sent to Chicago. The men 'delegated' their power of choice to Committee XII only in 'sections where the judgement of women was essential'. 97 It can be assumed that these sections were predominantly associated with the feminine arts of needlework, knitting and lace. There can be little doubt that the choices of the two men made sure the women's exhibit conformed to the Commission's overriding aims, but it should be remembered that these decisions only concentrated the types of exhibits the Committee had already gathered. They did not significantly reshape it. The fact that at this late stage the Committee did not claim responsibility for choosing all the exhibits themselves is intriguing. Perhaps the choices were obvious, or there was an existing dialogue about what specifically should be sent. Perhaps they were tired and, stung by criticism of the standard of the exhibits and suggestions of favouritism, incompetence and nepotism, they hoped to answer their critics by referring the decision to independent judges. Perhaps the Commission pulled rank. Perhaps Committee XII wished to show that they were willing to work with the men and ensure that women's interests were visibly commensurate with those of the entire colony. Whatever the reason, around 185 exhibits were chosen from the thousand on display to make the trip to Chicago and represent the women of NSW.

Civilisation and uniqueness: The women's exhibits sent to Chicago

The objects which were chosen from the WWE at the Sydney Town Hall in October 1892 to be shown in the Woman's Building at Chicago were intended by Committee XII to be an 'object lesson' in the role of women in colonial society. The reports it produced describing the exhibits read like an essay in things. Together they suggested

97 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 October 1892, p. 5.
a complex picture of the Australian colonial woman, including both urban and rural life, the leisured lady and the paid worker, the amateur and the professional. The Australian woman was shown to be artistic and practical, active and original, as well as socially and politically involved.

The Chicago Historical Society holds two reports submitted by Margaret Windeyer to the Board of Lady Managers on the 'NSW Exhibits of Woman's Work'. The first begins with the number of exhibitors (105) and the number of exhibits (183), and then states the rationale behind the display:

These exhibits were of interest either because they were peculiarly of Australian product, or because they showed that the women of New South Wales are neither lacking in inventive or constructive ability nor inefficient in different branches of needlework. 98

It goes on to describe the exhibits in terms of these guiding principles.

Windeyer's statement sums up the committee's intentions. The exhibit would show that the women of NSW were not behind their sisters in older lands in the feminine arts. This may have been one of the primary aims of the display, but in practice there was a distinct lack of confidence on show. It is revealing that Windeyer's statement was couched in so many double negatives, such as 'not lacking' and 'nor inefficient'. As we have seen, the fear that the NSW women's work might actually be of a lesser standard underscored much of exhibition preparation. By the end of 1892 the women involved began to re-express and externalise these concerns to contradict the negative expectations of outsiders about colonial work. The exhibits sent to Chicago were intended to show that the women of the colony were inventive and ingenious, particularly in their adoptions of the feminine arts to include 'peculiarly Australian products'. Windeyer's distinction between the two categories was not reflected in the exhibits, the majority of which actually combined traditional arts with unique materials or motifs.

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98 World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893, Board of Lady Manager's papers, Chicago Historical Society, 'The New South Wales Exhibits of Woman's Work', [in Margaret Windeyer's handwriting], vol. 28. Correspondence relating to these reports can be found at vol. 16. Index - President's Letters, 6 October 1893 - 15 March 1894, p. 562. Windeyer, Miss Margaret, dated 4 January 1894. Bertha Palmer wrote: 'Your report is a most gratifying one, and I am pleased to have such an able and interesting statement of your work.'
The exhibits as a whole presented evidence of the colonial woman's ability to create, to improve, transform and reinvent, rather than simply repeat, duplicate or copy the patterns of custom and convention. The exhibit gave material expression to a feminist reconceptualisation of the Australian woman that embraced the transformative powers of both old world tradition and frontier adaption. It asserted the successful transplantation of a superior British refinement, balanced and blurred the distinction between amateur and professional, and drew attention to new world notions of independence, freshness and confidence, self-consciously using these markers of civilisation, progress and identity to benefit the women's cause.

**Traditional women's work**

Traditional women's work was included as evidence that Australian women could compete with women anywhere in age-old feminine occupations. The main types of exhibits shown to prove this were needlework, knitting and lace. There were only a few examples of cooking, obviously a result of the impossibility of sending perishables to a world's fair in the United States which would be open for more than six months. Out of 183 exhibits, 76 fell into the 'traditional' category (this includes exhibits, listed below, which incorporated Australian product like possum fur into the work). Examples included crochet, tatting and darning, eight exhibits of ladies' underwear, 12 examples of lace-making, several infant's robes, one dozen assorted sauces, and more elaborate work such as a white silk lace shawl knitted by Mrs Simpson of Guildford, 'who was chosen to knit a silk burnous, presented to H.R.H. the Princess of Wales on the occasion of her marriage.' 99 Again, as has been discussed in detail in chapter 3, these exhibits functioned as symbols of women's productive labour prior to the introduction of machinery. Here, attention was also drawn to the manner in which these 'homely but important industries' were intended to be compared to the work of women in other countries. 100 In reality it was Mrs

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100 Reports of Committee XII, 'Meeting at the Town Hall', 22 March 1892.
Simpson’s work that bore most of these comparisons. In a progress report the committee noted it had been ‘fully assured’ that her work would ‘bear favourable comparison with any of the same character in any part of the world’.\textsuperscript{101} Committee XII’s report following the preliminary Town Hall Exhibition stated:

There are exhibits in Needlework of all sorts; Lace work, excellent specimens, and in especial, a very large collection from one lady; Knitting, some of the exhibits are as good as could be produced anywhere.\textsuperscript{102}

Mrs Simpson’s work had been recognised by the British royal family, and was therefore of indisputably supreme excellence.

The greatest irony (or perhaps the feminist coup) of the Exhibition, was that although the Committee had, in accordance with the request of the Commission, sought to display the refinement of the colonial home and its leisured lady-like inhabitants, most of the exhibits were in fact produced by paid workers whose occupations were very much part of the public sphere. Usually the presence of amateurism represented proof of antipodean leisure and taste. But in 1892 the work of amateurs was deemed not to be of sufficient quality to be displayed on an international level. In order to find really skilled needlework and beautiful knitting, the committee had to pay professional needlewomen. The ladies of Committee XII became patronesses, commissioning exhibits from the best professional workers. To encourage those workers to take part, it had to promote the display, particularly the preliminary exhibition, as an opportunity for these women to advertise themselves, and thereby gain more custom. As might have been predicted, the preliminary exhibition contained far more plain sewing, particularly the work of schoolgirls, as well as cookery which fell into the EWI-derived classification of ‘domestic industries’.\textsuperscript{103} However, little of this work was sent on to Chicago. What was sent was the work of professional needlewomen like Mrs Simpson, Mrs Hogan, Miss Terry, Mrs Wisby, Mrs Middleton, and Miss Dobbin, some of whom had been

\textsuperscript{101} Reports of Committee XII, ‘Progress report 12 August 1892’.
\textsuperscript{102} Reports of Committee XII, ‘Report from Committee XII on Woman’s Work to W. McMillan Esq. President World’s Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting of the Commission 21 October 1892’.
\textsuperscript{103} Exhibition of Woman’s Work, pp. 9-19, 41-6.
supplied with materials and most of whose work had been bought by the Committee in recognition of the loss of income which resulted from completing exhibition pieces.\textsuperscript{104} It seems that in order to show the world that the women of NSW were not 'inefficient' in their homely arts it was necessary to employ professional paid workers to produce the exhibits.

**Professionals and amateurs: The fine arts, civilisation and gentility**

Where did the exhibits of women's fine art fit into the committee's scheme for the display? The Committee combined exhibits from professional and amateur artists, using and blurring the distinction between the two in order to suggest women's talent and independence at the same time as showing the colony's progress towards 'General Refinement'.

The connection between civilisation and fine arts was well established at exhibitions. The particular colonial complications of this simple equation informed the NSW representation to the Chicago Fair. Caroline Jordan has described these nuances in her study of amateurism and colonial women artists.\textsuperscript{105} Jordan demonstrates how misleading the connected dichotomies between amateur and professional, women and men, private and public were in nineteenth-century Australia. Not all amateurs were women, and many women regularly showed their work in public. Jordan points out that the lack of professional artists in the colonies meant amateur artists, both male and female, dominated the public sphere in Australia. 'Since amateurism was associated with wealth, leisure and a superior education', its public presentation proved that these things were present in the colony, as well as fulfilling a middle-class duty to 'inculcate

\textsuperscript{104} Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, pp. 716-42.

the community' into its standards of taste. Women played a central role in this 'dissemination' of gentility through art.

That amateur status was often conspicuously linked to social power and prestige, and hence to public life in the colonies, challenges modern assumptions of the amateur's marginality and visibility. Colonial women artists were an integral part of this respectable amateur culture, working, exhibiting and publishing alongside male professionals and gentlemen amateurs. We should not forget that gendered hierarchies still existed within amateur culture, and that colonial women artists almost always occupied a place outside 'high art' discourse. Nevertheless, their presence was more pervasive, and considerably more public, than our twentieth-century perspective usually allows us to recognise.106

In the colonies, old world connotations of professional supremacy and the superiority of 'high art' were interrupted as well as confirmed by class aspirations.

This connection of gentility with advancing civilisation was the context into which the fine arts exhibits as a whole fitted into the entire NSW representation to the Fair. In July 1892 'An Australian Native' wrote to the Sydney Morning Herald, arguing that the colony should commit itself to sending a good exhibit of fine art to the Exposition. He claimed that

Australia is too often thought of as a wild and undeveloped country rich in natural productions, but entirely lacking in those refining influences which are the mark of the higher civilisation.107

'All Australians know this to be an absurd error', he argued, and should 'show by the nature of our exhibits that Australia is on the level of the most advanced nations in all that relates to culture and refinement.' The planned display presented the Colony as a 'mere sheep-walk, interspersed with coal and gold mines'. A 'collection of pictures sent from this country' would show a 'young and vigorous nation engaged in solving some of the great problems of the age' and 'making immense progress in all branches of art and science'. It would 'create the more profound sensation from it being entirely unexpected'. In the following days more correspondents, including Julian Ashton, artist, proprietor of the Julian Ashton Art School and husband of the controversial Lizzie Ashton, wrote endorsing these views.108 The author of the column 'Fugitive Notes' wrote confirming that 'Art and a taste for it' was one of the proofs that there was 'something else in this part of the world besides the struggle for existence with

107 Sydney Morning Herald; 2 July 1892, p. 7.
108 Sydney Morning Herald; 4 July 1892, p. 7; 5 July 1892, p. 9; 7 July 1892, p. 3.
Nature's primitive forces, and that after 100 years of existence we have found some time to devote to the cultivation of the liberal side of life.\textsuperscript{109} In the end, NSW was allocated an inadequate amount of space in the Fine Arts Building at the World's Columbian Exposition, so the bulk of the art exhibits were hung in the NSW building instead. This had the happy effect of suggesting the colony had an especially strong association with art, contrary to popular expectations. Renwick noted that visitors 'expressed supreme surprise that anything so excellent could come from a country so young'.\textsuperscript{110}

Obviously the fine arts and women's work were carrying a similar symbolic message to Fair visitors: the Australasian colonies were refined and civilised. So where did women artists fit into this scheme? Annoyingly for the big name male exhibitors in the Fine Arts section it was a woman, Ellis Rowan, who was the most highly praised and successful Australian artist at the Fair. Rowan was awarded one of the few exposition gold medals for her display of 99 flower paintings. These works were hung not in the Palace of Fine Arts, or in the Woman's Building, but in the NSW Building, which they completely dominated [Figure 6.4]. Rowan had explicitly demanded that her work not be shown as 'woman's work'.\textsuperscript{111} Early on, Committee XII declared that women artists could decide for themselves where they might exhibit, but made a strong case that women should embrace an opportunity to show the world what women could do as a sex, above and beyond what they might gain by showing as 'artists' alongside men:

\textit{It was also resolved after discussion that the decision of the Art Society of NSW to send a collective exhibit was not prohibitive of the Lady members Exhibiting also in the Woman's Department, particularly as in the Collective Exhibit, their individuality would be lost, & the object of Committee XII is to add to what according to the published opinions of the Americans is to be a "novel feature of the fair, an International Exhibit", in a building planned by a woman architect & decorated exclusively by women designers. There will be ... a gallery of paintings by female artists.} \textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 6 July 1892, p. 5. A leader sounding a note of caution about sending work by artists purely on the grounds that they were Australian was published on 7 July 1892, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Report of the Executive Commissioner}, p. 225.

\textsuperscript{111} Her success at the Melbourne Exhibition of 1888 had made her unpopular with male artists, and wary of ladies courts. See Judith McKay, \textit{Ellis Rowan: A Flower Hunter in Queensland}, Queensland Museum, South Brisbane, 1990; and 'Marian Ellis Rowan', in Kerr, \textit{Heritage}, pp. 8 and 442.

\textsuperscript{112} Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting 9 February 1892'.
The potential of such a show of feminine force was their preferred option for women artists.

The small group of women's fine arts exhibits which were finally sent to the Women's Building were hung not in a gallery devoted to women artists, but alongside the other NSW exhibits. The large number of works shown at the preliminary exhibition were pared down to 34 exhibits which were sent to Chicago.\textsuperscript{113} Much of this work met the Committee's dual aims by depicting Australian subjects, particularly Australian flowers. Mrs Wright of Glen Innes, for example, sent six oil paintings of the 'flora of New South Wales', and Mrs G. B. Hetley of Sydney sent a set of 15 similar watercolours which were bought by the NSW Commission. Those works that did not depict flowers were predominantly portraits of notable people associated with the colony, including the actress Nellie Stewart, the children of Lord and Lady Carrington, and Sir William and Lady Windeyer. Oil and watercolour painting dominated, women's decorative arts such as painting on ivory, terracotta, tin and china formed another smaller category. Only two examples of drawing were sent, both the work of schoolgirls, and intended as evidence of artistic training in the colony.

Most of the fine art exhibits sent by the women of NSW were the work of amateurs. One piece which was most deliberately chosen as the work of a professional, the bust prepared by Annie Dobson, was the source, as has been previously outlined, of a major controversy between the Committee and the NSW Commission. Furthermore, it became a source of criticism and sarcasm from the masculinist \textit{Bulletin}, which revelled in poking fun at the colonial aristocracy's claims to the inheritance of high culture, by mocking the folly of their foolish patronage of artists.

Windeyer's angry letter about Dobson's artwork, discussed in chapter 5, chastising the NSW Commission for its ignorance about women's work was a response not only to internal friction, but to public controversy about the bust. The \textit{Bulletin} in particular took great pleasure in using the incident to pour ridicule on the

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits}, pp. 730-733.
woman's work committee and its aims. In December 1892, Sappho Smith, the journal's acidic female columnist, used the story of the bust, in tandem with another incident relating to the fine arts, to question the 'culture' and 'refinement' of the colonial elite's feminine representatives. Smith's comedy came from revealing the ineptitude and ignorance of the committee women with regards to art, particularly to the aristocratic tradition of patronising artists. '[A] certain ladies' committee', she reported, had gone to a sculptor's studio view the 'bust of a legal Sir Somebody ordered for the show'.

The plaster presentment was sloped off (as is the somewhat top-heavy style of busts) just at the clavicle, but when the cultured females saw it they were stricken with mortal disappointment. "The likeness is very good," said Lady Blank, at last, in a tearful voice, "but only look at the shoulders--not half wide enough. Sir Somebody has fine shoulders--he isn't pinched up like this!"

Smith then recorded the explanation of the 'astonished Pygmalion', but added that his remonstrance was drowned in a war of female voices. "If those aren't shoulders, I know nothing about art," said one fussy old lady with unconscious truthfulness, and the disgusted clayworker (just from Hingland) knew that the Philistines had indeed come upon him.114

Smith's deliberate changing of the sculptor's sex from female to male was apparently necessary in her account to bring the ignorance of genteel women about art into sharper relief. She expanded her critique of these 'Philistine' women in the next paragraph, which detailed this ignorance turned into practical ineptitude and negligence. Describing the Committee's failure to pay for a commissioned series of 'pictures from an artist to go to the World's Fair', Smith imputed that muddle-headedness is all that can be expected from a group of women.115 She went further still, accusing the members of the Committee committed to the suffrage cause of hypocrisy. Again, a 'certain committee' was revealed to be 'making an ass of itself' over a set of paintings ordered for the fair.

First a big one was ordered, and painted, but when it was up to framing-point, the committee femininely enough changed its mind, and altered to a couple of small ones.

115 In March 1893 the bust was still worthy of discussion. The Bulletin commented 'There was a display of masculine candour, hardheaded business capacity and chivalric devotion to the fair sex at the meeting of the prosaic Chicago Exposition Commission yesterday ... rejected Mr Daniel insisted that the Chief Justice's name should not adorn the bust of Sir Frederick Darley done in mud to be forwarded to the exhibition.' Bulletin, 4 March 1893, p. 12.
These were done, the artist was waiting to hear, but the committee seemed to have 'forgotten all about it'. The 'artist-man', Smith reported, had 'whole stacks of convincing official correspondence' which 'he' could use to make these 'unbusinesslike scraps ... pay up in any law court'. Again the author shifted the sex of the artist from female to male to make the point that the ladies were ignorant and distant from the real world, in this case not just about art but also about simple financial transactions. It is most likely that the artist in question was Mrs G. B. Hetley, who had produced a set of 15 botanical watercolours eventually purchased by the NSW Commission. This fact did not prevent Sappho from ramming home her point. The artist, she claimed, 'doesn't want to frighten 'em out of their wits, and besides, no man expects anything else from a woman.'

But Smith had more in mind than simply mocking the women of the colonial gentry for ineptly mimicking aristocratic patronage without possessing any taste or knowledge of art. She used the opportunity to hit another of her favourite targets - not just ladies, but ladies of a feminist bent. 'Mind you', she added, 'there are some of these daisies who shriek loudest for female suffrage and the equality of the sexes! They might pause and reflect that if the sexes had been made equal, a lot of 'em would now be telling their ages in the witness box.' Smith's caustic conclusion reserved the greatest chastisement for the feminists on the Committee, who were presented not only as ignorant and presumptuous, but also unbusinesslike, hypocritical, and lacking 'taste' through their relations with art and professional artists. Art was used here in the same way as it had been in 1888, as the ultimate measure of women's organisational ineptitude. Again too, the criticism carried an additional sting, given that Committee XII's secretary Mrs Carl Fischer was the art and drama critic for the rival *Sydney Mail*.

The art exhibits had been the subject of severe criticism when on show at the WWE in 1892. 'Faustine' reserved her strongest barbs for the exhibits of fine arts,

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which she described as 'deplorable'.\footnote{Daily Telegraph, 15 October 1892, p. 9.} 'If such a collection...is going to represent woman's standard of artistic excellence in New South Wales' she commented caustically, 'so much the worse for New South Wales.' Good work (she named three artists as examples) 'only accentuate[s] the crudeness of the rest'. 'Faustine' had no time for arguments that encouraged visitors to look with a kinder eye upon the amateurs.

"Not all professional artists," points out one benevolent optimist, who doesn't like to see budding genius crushed by honest truth-telling, "Give the amateurs a chance."

She was scathing in her reply, which stripped away some of the veil of false modesty from such exhibitors, and concluded with the lament that artistic education in Australia did not amount to much. Considering that 'Faustine' was the alter-ego of the wife of one of Sydney's most prominent art teachers, these were strong and well-considered words. She must have based her judgement of amateur artists on considerable exposure at close range:

As if "the amateurs" were not the most determined to rush into fame of anybody, and the most indignant and offended if you dare to hint that they are not Raphael, and Titian, and Rubens, and Velasquez [sic] rolled into one.

'Faustine' spoke as part of the growing elite of professional artists in the colony. She sought to apply those professional standards to the women's art, especially because it was being sent to represent NSW at an overseas Fair. It was not enough to excuse execrable daubing by pleading 'amateurism', as if it carried some aura of character and refinement. It was the amateurs most of all who sought their own aggrandisement, who deluded themselves that their work had merit, and were unable to see it from 'outside' and thereby gauge its true worth. In an international context, ruled 'Faustine' as Committee XII itself had done, good professional work was what was needed.

There was a wide range of professional work on show in the women's exhibit. Many businesswomen used the exhibition as a means of advertising their enterprises. Louisa Lawson, for example, sent copies of her feminist newspaper the \textit{Dawn} to Chicago to illustrate that it was possible for a journal to be written, typeset, printed and
published entirely by women. But perhaps the most interesting, and most revealing, example of advertising was the exhibit of the photographer Madame Laura Praeger.

Praeger was a professional photographer from a well-to-do-family who came to Sydney and opened her studio after divorcing her husband in Queensland. Active in Sydney between 1890 and 1894, she was known primarily as a portraitist to Sydney's elite.¹¹⁸ Praeger sent 17 photographs to Chicago. Committee XII purchased an enlargement of the photograph she had taken of the delegates to the Federal Convention of 1891.¹¹⁹ Praeger exhibited a controversial composite photograph 'Group of Women Workers in Sydney', which incorporated the portraits of 11 prominent Sydney women, under her own name [Figure 5.3]. She also showed other Portraits of Sydney residents, &c., including images of the President of the NSW Commission William McMillan, the St Cecilia Choir, a 'life size' portrait of Tasmania's Hon. Stafford Bird, and a group shot of Committee XII itself.¹²⁰

Revealingly, and fortuitously for the historian, Praeger took two photographs at the Woman's Work Exhibition held preliminary to Chicago, including one of her own exhibit [Figure 6.5].¹²¹ It represents one of the few images from which we can gain an understanding of how and why an exhibitor displayed her own work at such an event. The photograph shows a trestle-style table covered with framed photographs of varying sizes. While three larger frames (containing portraits and the enlarged photograph of the Federal convention delegates) provided a strong enclosure of the display space, the uncluttered symmetry they set up was not followed through in the foreground of the exhibit. Praeger arranged variously sized photographs in freestanding metal holders, or squeezed what seem to be the original small prints of photographs into frames of enlargements. Among the images in stands appear copies

¹¹⁸ See 'Laura Praeger', in Kerr, Heritage, pp. 10, 432. Examples of Praeger's photography are held at the Mitchell Library. Of the thirteen known extant examples of Praeger's work, eight were either taken for, or displayed at, the Chicago fair.
¹¹⁹ This photograph is held in the Mitchell Library.
¹²¹ The first photograph is or wreaths and flowers surrounding the Tennyson memorial, the second is of Praeger's own exhibit. Photographs filed in the Mitchell Library Small Picture File, under Sydney-Public Buildings-Town Hall.
of some of the background portraits, most particularly that of nurse Nellie Gould. From the evidence of this photograph, Madame Praeger looked upon such as display as advertising, even as a place to sell her most popular images. Within the small area allotted to her, she exhibited her skill as an artist, her technical proficiency as a photographer, her distinguished patronage, and her commercial ability as a businesswoman. In taking a photograph of the exhibit she added yet another dimension to her professional image, capturing the spectacle of the display for permanent use.

Praeger also propagated her business by involving herself in the social rituals of Sydney society. In March 1893, for example, just as the last of the NSW exhibits made their way towards Chicago, she held an afternoon tea for selected ladies and gentlemen to show portraits at her William St Studio. A familiarity with her subjects resulted in candid, confident portraits of sitters who more often appeared stiff, bored or mildly anxious. This subtle combination of fraternising and advertising enabled Madame Praeger to strike a fine balance between business and art, professionalism and feminine accomplishment. It also gave her a reputation as a photographer with feminine sensibilities. Commenting on the work she displayed at the Woman's Work Exhibition in the Daily Telegraph, 'Faustine' claimed her photographs had a 'pleasantly artistic sentiment about them that a mere mechanician cannot give us'. Happily for Committee XII, Laura Praeger's work showed both taste and skill, professionalism and artistry, as well as gentility seamlessly combined with paid employment.

The presence of this professional photographer with a 'womanly' touch for portraiture was matched by the finely executed landscape photography of a lady amateur, Ethel Pedley. Pedley, a musician who would later gain posthumous fame as the author of the beloved Australian children's book Dot and the Kangaroo, showed a

122 Illustrated Sydney News, 1 April 1893, p. 21.
123 Daily Telegraph, 15 October 1892, p. 9. She was also a painter and exhibited a work at the WWE.
selection of 'Australian views'. These consisted of 'photographs of portions of the National Park, near Sydney', and of the 'Camden Park estate of Mrs Onslow (nee Macarthur)'. These photographs were deemed 'especially interesting as representing part of the estate of a family who were Pioneers in the Colony's great staple product wool', serving to reinforce notions of the colony's genteel history and pastoral development as well as the continuing importance of its primary industries. Pedley's amateur status was consistently reiterated by the Committee. The catalogue noted with satisfaction: 'each stage in the photograph the work of the exhibitor (amateur)'. Pedley's name was invariably followed by this 'amateur' in brackets in unpublished reports, where her work was also proudly described as showing her 'proficiency in the art'. The 'artistic' quality the amateur and professional photographer both shared was deemed especially feminine.

Photography fitted Committee XII's requirements perfectly, suggesting colonial women's technical and mechanical abilities as well as their aesthetic sensibilities. Where the professional Madame Praeger brought a feminine touch to portraiture, the amateur Pedley conquered the masculine realms of landscape and technology. Both photographers successfully captured the Committee's own picture of the colonial woman: refined, artistic, versatile and inventive.

**Ingenious and indigenous: Exhibiting adaptability and ingenuity**

[Special attention has been directed to applying the work of women to the material of the country]

Report from Lady Windeyer to the Hon. W. McMillan, 6 January 1893.

Where the amateur workers excelled beside the professional workers was in the application of Australian product to women's work. 60 of the exhibits proudly

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125 The latter were commended to the Exposition visitor in the catalogue on the grounds that 'Mr Macarthur and Mr Onslow were pioneers of the wool industry of New South Wales'.
126 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to the Hon. W. McMillan 6 January 1893'.
127 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to the Hon. W. McMillan 6 January 1893'.
128 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Lady Windeyer to the Hon. W. McMillan, 6 January 1893'.
incorporated Australian materials or motifs. Great ingenuity was shown in the construction of these exhibits. This had the twofold effect of creating an appealing novelty for international audiences at the Fair, and making a statement about the adaptability and resourcefulness of the Australian woman. It also suggested that rather than merely replicating the traditional crafts of Europe, the women of the new land had creative abilities too, that they had sufficient taste and confidence to innovate and reinterpret. One Committee report described how many 'creditable' articles were 'original in design and workmanship'.129 Colonial women were presented not only as the bearers of tradition and re-creators of home, but also as originators of new approaches, equal makers with men of a new Australian society and culture.

Exhibits of invention expressly fulfilled Margaret Windeyer's claim that the women of NSW were 'ingenious'.130 Women's inventions were strongly sought by the Committee. In April 1892 Mrs Slattery forwarded them a list of inventions patented by women, and efforts were made to secure examples of each.131 In its report immediately following the preliminary exhibition, the Committee described how 'gratifying' it was to be able to say that it would be exhibiting the following exhibits in this 'important section':

Diagrams showing Mrs Parnell's invention for freeing gold from the base metals; an invalid bed, the merits of which have been attested by eminent medical men; another bed for invalid use; electric belts and corsets, also proved immensely beneficial; and an appliance for washing which practical women see to be most useful.132

Clearly the aim was to prove the practicality, usefulness, and recognised application of the inventions. Much was made of the fact that the women had also been involved in every part of the invention's development. One report described the 'filter invented by a lady, who herself chiselled the stone, designed the globe and superintended the blowing, [and] designed and carved the wooden case', and similar comments

129 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq. President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting of the Commission 21 October 1892'.


131 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting 5 April 1892'.

132 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq. President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting of the Commission 21 October 1892'.
peppered the Exhibition catalogue. The exhibits proved, in the Committee's view, that 'the creative faculty and ingenuity are possessed by the women of NSW'.

The fact that many of the exhibits were medical in nature had the added bonus of showing women approaching a traditional role, caring for the sick, with creativity and practicality. Further, these exhibits were the inventions of professional women health workers. The nursing staff of the Hospital for Sick Children in Glebe Point showed a model cot and appliance for treating hip disease, complete with 'doll patient, bandaged, &c., by nurses'. Mrs Guille, formerly Matron of Goulburn Hospital, sent her 'Improved Bamber Bed', which had been exhibited in Lady Windeyer's Education Department at the EWI, and Miss Fox Harding of Sydney showed her 'Improved Invalid Mattress'. Margaret Windeyer clearly thought these two beds were a highly significant part of the exhibit. She took great pains in her report to the Board of Lady Managers to describe, and even illustrate with hand-drawn diagrams, how the two inventions worked. The pride which was taken in the professionalism of these women was further enhanced by the approval of the medical establishment. The catalogue noted with pleasure how Miss Fox-Harding's invention had been positively received by medical men and women. The mattress, it stated, had been 'tested and warmly approved by doctors and nurses in the hospitals and for private nursing'. Mrs Hetherington Carruthers's collection of electric belts and corsets had also been 'pronounced immensely beneficial'.

133 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting 5 April 1892', and 'Report of a meeting 19 May 1892'. The filter was the work of Miss Sophia Kennedy of Stanmore, see Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, p. 734.
134 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to the Hon. W. McMillan 6 January 1893'.
135 Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, p. 735.
136 See Dawn, November 1892, p. 2.
137 World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893, Board of Lady Manager's papers, Chicago Historical Society, 'The New South Wales Exhibits of Woman's Work', [in Margaret Windeyer's handwriting], vol. 28.
139 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq. President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting of the Commission 21 October 1892'.
The adaptability of the colonial woman and her traditional crafts was made manifest in exhibits like the costumes of 'New South Wales tweed', one designed by Miss Greig of William St, and sewn by 'girls born in Sydney', the other trimmed with platypus fur 'dressed and prepared' by the taxidermist Ada Jane Rohu. The Daily Telegraph declared these 'an excellent adaption of native material, the articles being deliciously soft, are warm, and having the appearance of great durability'. Committee XII purchased two cabbage tree hats, 'an Australian specialty', from makers on the Hunter and Shoalhaven Rivers. Miss Fischer of Woollahra sent three dozen bottles of jams, 'chiefly Native Currant, Passion Fruit, Loquat, and other Australian Fruits'. Great ingenuity and patience was shown by the 'self taught' Armidale sisters Mesdames Penrose, Drabch and Jurd (formerly Gore), who made model kangaroos, native bears, horses and calves from wax forms, painstakingly coated hair by hair. Members of the Working and Factory Girls' Club exhibited articles incorporating 'imitation old Roman mosaic', including a jardiniere made of ebonised NSW pine and three tiles mounted in Australian woods. Decorative items made by both professionals and amateurs also included Australian materials, and took up Australian flora as a worthy subject for fancywork. Committee XII purchased flowers made from fish scales by Miss Emmeline Shaw. Mesdames Palmer & Green, professional workers from Paddington sent Australian native flowers, including rock lily, flannel flower and christmas bells, wrought in gold and silver bullion. Mrs McMyles of

140 Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, p. 721.
141 Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, p. 723; Reports of Committee XII, Report of a meeting held 18 December 1891.
142 Daily Telegraph, 15 October 1892, p. 9.
143 Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, p. 723. They are referred to in one committee report as a 'Special Australian Industry', see Reports of Committee XII, Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq. President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting of the Commission 21 October 1892.
145 Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, p. 718. The sisters had exhibited at the EWI. Examples of their work are held by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences and the National Trust. See 'Mary Jane Gore', in Kerr, Heritage, pp.178, 360.
Bathurst contributed flowers 'made from Feathers of Birds on the Lachlan (New South Wales), gathered and arranged by the Exhibitor; no dye or colour used; every feather in its natural tint'.\textsuperscript{147} Louisa Butler of Surry Hills exhibited a plush panel of Australian wildflowers such as waratah, flannel flower, christmas bells and bachelor's buttons, made of the rubber substance gutta percha.\textsuperscript{148} Miss McCarthy displayed a 'fancy bracket...Australian flowers made from Australian sheepskin; the fancy leatherwork by the exhibitor'.\textsuperscript{149} Wattle, flannel flower and bottlebrush were also subjects for embroidery and woolwork, as well as the main motifs in all forms of painting and drawing [Figure 6.6].

Creating such items required the maker to go beyond the patterns and instruction which were available in women's magazines, and make up her own designs, adapting traditional skills and techniques to the peculiar shapes and strong colours of native flowers, and arranging them with taste and artistic flair. They made the new subjects and materials seem beautiful, not odd. Such exhibits, then, had double the significance for the colonial display, because they suggested taste as well as refinement in home decoration, and originality as well as skill in their execution.

By far the largest single group of objects which used women's work to prove the continent's uniqueness were the 34 exhibits of the art of taxidermy. At its first meeting, Committee XII unsuccessfully laid claim to taxidermy and fur work from the general classification, 'as it is understood that a good deal of bird and animal stuffing, done in Sydney, is performed by females'.\textsuperscript{150} The Committee pursued these exhibits of Australian fur and feathers with tenacity and purpose. Lady Windeyer's correspondence contains numerous letters procuring specimens of platypus and other

\textsuperscript{147} Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, p. 727.
\textsuperscript{148} Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, p. 729.
\textsuperscript{149} Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, p. 728.
\textsuperscript{150} Reports of Committee XII, Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work, received by the Commissioners, 18 December 1891. Subsequent research has shown the validity of these claims. Over the second half of the nineteenth century the majority of Sydney's taxidermy firms were either owned by or employed women. For a longer discussion of colonial women taxidermists, and the careers of Jane Tost and Ada Rohu, see Martha Sear, 'Curious and peculiar? Women taxidermists in colonial Australia', in Joan Kerr and Jo Holder (eds), Past Present: The National Women's Art Anthology, Craftsman House/Art& Australia, Sydney, 1999, pp. 85-91. This research also formed the basis for the exhibition 'Most curious and peculiar: Women taxidermists in colonial Sydney', held at the Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, 1996.
animals from men in the country, and receipts from taxidermists for preparing the skins. The bulk of this work was purchased by the Committee, or members of the Committee, to ensure its appearance at Chicago.

Taxidermy fulfilled almost all of the Committee's ideological and practical requirements. The women who produced it were professional and reliable, and the returns possible for the sale of purchased goods in America seemed certain: the work was of exceptional interest and excellent quality. The Committee noted with satisfaction that the collection of furs, which had been valued at between £160 and £180 by 'competent judges', had been procured at 'less than half the smaller amount'. These 'unique exhibits', the Committee predicted, 'will command the attention of curators or museums and by their sale leave a large margin beyond the cost'. The exhibits proved the colony's uniqueness by utilising animals 'most curious and peculiar to this country'. As well, they were 'ample evidence of the skill of Sydney women taxidermists'.

Taxidermy also carried with it associations with domesticity, art, science, and leisure. Fancywork manuals encouraged ladies to undertake taxidermy as a decorative art alongside making shell boxes or feather flowers. Professional women taxidermists like Tost & Rohu offered lessons in the art, and often sold fancy work goods beside the stuffed animals and furs. Most of the articles taxidermists produced were intended for home decoration, and taxidermists struggled to have their work seen as art, and as the epitome of taste. Ideologically taxidermy functioned in the

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151 See Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/14, passim. See also Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq. President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting of the Commission 21 October 1892'.
153 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to the Hon. W. McMillan 6 January 1893'.
154 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq. President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting of the Commission 21 October 1892'.
155 Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to the Hon. W. McMillan 6 January 1893'.
156 See Sear, 'Curious and peculiar', pp. 87-8.
157 Tost & Rohu began as a taxidermy studio and fancy work depot, and E. C. Wintle, a woman taxidermist who also exhibited at Chicago, was a fellow of the Royal College of Music and a professional music teacher. See Sear, 'Curious and peculiar', pp. 86-7; 'Eliza Catherine Wintle', in Kest, Heritage, pp. 173, 478.
Victorian home as a representation of man's triumph over nature. In a colonial context, these associations resonated particularly strongly to suggest that nature had been domesticated, that the weird and the wild had been brought into the home and tamed [Figure 6.7]. This, combined with the fact that women were the colony's most proficient taxidermists, meant these exhibits were perhaps more steeped with significance and meaning than any others sent to Chicago.

Most of the taxidermy and fur work was done by Ada Jane Rohu, of the firm Tost and Rohu in William St.158 Tost and Rohu, founded in 1860 and run by Ada and her mother Jane Tost, had a long Australian exhibiting history dating back to the London International Exhibition of 1862. Besides Ellis Rowan, Jane Tost and Ada Rohu were probably the most consistent and most successful Australian female exhibitors ever at international exhibitions. They won more than twenty medals between 1862 and 1900.159 Their success was a result of their high levels of skill (they were the Australian branch of the most important and influential family of taxidermists in Great Britain), as well as the novelty value of the animals and birds they stuffed. Their work was seen as of the highest professional standard, artistic, tasteful and decorative, as well as startingly strange and eye-catching to international visitors.

Their proven record in all of these fields made them the perfect exhibitors for Committee XII's purposes. Ada Jane Rohu exhibited fur work like collarettes and muffins made from red and grey possum, Australian black swansdown, rock wallaby, native cat, grebe and platypus, and rugs made of dingo, kangaroo, and native cat skins. Her most spectacular applications of Australian animals to domestic furnishings exhibits were a rug of 456 possum tails, and a fire screen made out of a 'native companion' (brolga). She sent a case of 17 Australian birds (including lyrebird,

158 See 'Jane Tost and Ada Rohu', in Kerr, Heritage, pp. 113-4, 464. One of Ada Rohu's Chicago Exposition medals is held by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences.
159 Tost & Rohu exhibited at London in 1862 and 1886, Paris in 1867, Sydney in 1879, Calcutta in 1883, Melbourne in 1888, Launceston in 1891-2 and Chicago in 1893. The firm also exhibited at the colonial preliminary exhibitions, the Sydney agricultural shows and, in the twentieth century, at Australian Manufactures and Products exhibitions. Their impressive swag of medals was consistently used in their advertising.
laughing jackass, satin bower bird and boobook owl) and a collection of 13 'Indigenous Animals of New South Wales' (including native bear, flying fox, bandicoot and ring-tailed possum). As well she contributed individual specimens of eight other animals, a black swan, and two Apteryx (kiwi). Two other women taxidermists also exhibited their work. Mrs E. C. Wintle (a taxidermist and music teacher) exhibited dingo and native bear rugs, three emu skin mats and one of dingo skin complete with head. She also prepared various collarettes, toques, tippetts and muffs of black swan, wallaby, platypus, emu and golden-breasted water rat. Miss Emma Lockhardt, who with her sister worked for Lawrence & Co. (Tost and Rohu's main competitor in Sydney), sent a platypus fur rug, and four muffs made from plucked and unplucked Australian swanskin, and platypus fur [Figure 6.8]. The exhibition catalogue made much of the fact that these women had carried out every stage of the work, from preparing the skins to sewing the linings.

Their exhibits were tremendously popular and successful in Chicago. Exhibition guides drew much attention to them. 27 of the 34 exhibits in these classes were awarded medals. 14 of these medals were won by Ada Rohu alone. Medals were awarded for the skill and quality of the work, but also for the manner in which they stood out beside other more familiar examples of similar work. Emily Wintle's Emu skin mats, for example, were praised for the 'peculiarity and beauty of the emu feathers' [Figure 6.9]. The exhibits of the women taxidermists fitted the Committee's (and the Commission's) requirements perfectly, conveying exactly the required message of uniqueness, skill and taste.

160 Mrs Wintle was a taxidermist and musician, who came to Australia with her husband (who was a 'wine, spirit, ale, porter and cigar merchant; taxidermist, furrier, photographer and dentist) in 1874. 'Eliza Catherine Wintle', Kerr, Heritage, p. 478. Wintle's papers are held at the Mitchell Library ML MSS 225. They include her Chicago medal and certificate awarded for the emu skin mat.
162 See Report of the Executive Commissioner, appendix G.
163 Certificate in Wintle papers, ML MSS 225.
The taxidermy exhibits formed a conceptual link between the fancywork which took up natural motifs and the exhibits which proved the colony's natural uniqueness more plainly: the scientific collections. Collecting natural history specimens had been a popular ladies' pursuit since the 1840s.\footnote{Russell, \textit{A Wish of Distinction}, pp. 86-7, 97-8; and Claire Hooker, Australian Women Scientists 1788-1950, PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sydney, nearing completion, ch. 1.} At the Chicago Fair these collections served the purpose of showing a leisure activity of ladies seeking self-education, whilst again showing the continents special natural resources. The Committee purchased a case of NSW butterflies from Mrs Ritchie. Mrs Kelly and Lady Abbott showed 71 specimens between them of 'New South Wales timbers, mounted on ebonised panel' which had been polished by Mrs Olivia Whitehead. Mrs Mullins showed two albums containing specimens of ferns and seaweeds which had been collected and dried by Mrs Elizabeth Bate of Bermagui.\footnote{Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to the Hon. W. McMillan 6 January 1893'.} The specimen collections suggested the scientific pursuit of amateurs supplemented by the knowledge of experts. Much was made of the fact that the specimens had been scientifically arranged and identified.\footnote{Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, pp. 717, 720.} The ferns, for example, had been 'correctly' named specially by Mr J. H. Maiden of the Sydney botanical gardens, which the Committee felt 'enhanced' their 'value'.\footnote{Reports of Committee XII, 'Report from Committee XII on Woman's Work to W. McMillan Esq. President World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, presented to a meeting of the Commission 21 October 1892'.} Windeyer's report to the Board of Lady Managers, and the exhibition catalogue, carefully named each specimen of animal or plant on show scientifically, at the same time as it often noted the corresponding Aboriginal name.\footnote{World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893, Board of Lady Manager's papers, Chicago Historical Society, 'The New South Wales Exhibits of Woman's Work', [in Margaret Windeyer's handwriting], vol. 28; and Catalogue of New South Wales Exhibits: Department of Woman's Work, passim.}

The incorporation of Aboriginal language and motifs into the NSW women's exhibit was not matched by the addition of the work of indigenous women. Although some had been included in the Woman's Work Exhibition and judged to be of 'exceeding excellence', of greater interest than traditional European women's work to
an international audience, it was not sent to Chicago. Instead the exhibit used white women’s work to mediate the existence of indigenous people in the colony.

Windeyer’s deliberate foregrounding of Aboriginal words was a way of making colony’s exhibits seem distinctive. She drew her information from two books on show in the exhibit by Sydney author Mary Anne Fitz-Gerald. Australian Furs and Feathers, first published in 1889, was an illustrated companion to Australian fauna prepared for schoolchildren. It attributed Aboriginal names to featured animals and birds, in the belief that these words would soon be all that remained to remember the indigenous people by. The cover of King Bungaree’s Pyalla showed King Bungaree, and elderly Aboriginal man with a white beard, identified by a breastplate, apparently telling stories to a group of children, six girls and one boy. The book contained ‘stories illustrative of manners and customs that prevailed among Australian aborigines’ which Fitz-Gerald claimed to have been told when she was a child.

Both books were intended to make native-born little Australians proud of their own animals, plants and ‘stories’. Fitz-Gerald took great delight in using Aboriginal words to add a distinctive ‘Australian’ flavour to her writing. She encouraged the adoption of these words at the same time as noting the introduction of European elements into indigenous culture:

The advent of civilization gave the Aborigines, who were quick to imitate, occasion to modify the character of several of their original legends; such, for instance, as those of the Beleck Beleck and the Dilbong.

The women’s exhibit at the Chicago Fair saw the adoption of Aboriginal techniques into white women’s work, most markedly the creation of possum fur rugs, the incorporation of Aboriginal stories into a colonial ‘mythology’, and the adoption of Aboriginal words into a colonial lexicon. This served both to connect and separate white colonial women from indigenous womanhood. On the most fundamental level,

169 Sydney Mail, 15 October 1892, p. 874.
171 Mary Anne Fitz-Gerald, King Bungaree’s Pyalla, and Stories Illustrative of Manners and Customs that Prevailed Among Australian Aborigines, Edwards, Dunlop & Co., Limited, Sydney, Brisbane, and London, 1891.
172 Fitz-Gerald, King Bungaree’s Pyalla, preface.
Aboriginal women were deprived of the chance to represent themselves in even the simplest and most direct way, by showing their own work. Instead their culture was re-presented, translated and 'civilised' by white women, to make the colonial exhibit distinctive, and enhance the claims of colonial women to ingenuity, adaptiveness, civilisation and uniqueness.

Conclusion

On the last day of 1892, Mrs Carl Fischer wrote wearily to Lady Windeyer, "[w]e began the year with Chicago, and cannot unfortunately say goodbye with this year, but it is getting nearly done'.\(^{173}\) Having dealt with yet another 'difficulty', 'inducing many workers to permit their exhibits to be sent so far', the Committee prepared the women's work for transport.\(^{174}\)

The exhibits were packed at Lulworth, the Windeyers' Sydney home. It was 'a very tedious process' involving 'great skill and care'. The Committee took 'an active interest' in the packing for reasons of economy and because they believed that women's work required a woman's understanding and attention.\(^{175}\) They declared they were 'great[ly] satisfi[ed]' with the dispatch, but their satisfaction was no doubt tempered by the news some months later that one of the cases had been dropped while being unloaded in San Francisco.\(^{176}\) Almost all the glass on the showcases and picture frames was broken, stuffed animals were damaged, Sophia Kennedy's hand-carved cabinet filter was 'smashed', and the unfortunate clay bust was broken too.\(^{177}\) This may have seemed an inauspicious beginning to the US leg of the exhibit's journey, but it was to prove instead the end of the committee's run of bad luck.

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\(^{173}\) Letter from Mrs Carl Fischer to Lady Windeyer, 30 December 1892, Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML 186/13.

\(^{174}\) Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting 31 January 1893'.

\(^{175}\) Reports of Committee XII, 'Report of a meeting 31 January 1893'.

\(^{176}\) The exhibits sailed to America in the 'Morowai', which left Sydney on 23 January 1893, see Report of the President, appendix E.

\(^{177}\) Letter from the secretary of the NSW Commission to Lady Windeyer, 2 July 1893, in Mary Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/14.
Committee XII had been driven by two central principles in gathering the exhibits for the Chicago Fair: proving women’s connection to colonial uniqueness and to civilised refinement. The exhibit which appeared in the Woman’s Building was a material embodiment of those goals. While the exhibits remained on colonial soil they were judged by the press to represent the failure of the Committee’s efforts, and by association the failings of the colonial woman and the colonial feminist. When they reached Chicago it was another matter entirely. The Executive Commissioner could report that the display was an ‘attractive and much admired’ exhibition of ‘taste and skill, which had ’extracted commendatory remarks from the crowds of fair visitors from all parts of the world. Furthermore around half of all the NSW women’s exhibits won medals [Figure 6.10]. In February 1894, Mary Windeyer ended her final report by describing the committee members ‘congratulat[ing] themselves’ with ‘much satisfaction’ at the outcome of the exhibit, and reproducing with some glee the positive comments of one Exhibition reviewer. What had happened to cause such a change in mood surrounding the NSW woman’s work exhibit?

At the end of the introduction to the catalogue of the Exhibition of Woman’s Work, Committee XII again commended the poem which had been the talisman of the EWI to ‘every worker’, in ‘acknowledgment of many who have loyaly acted in the spirit’ it evoked, for the Exposition.

Work for some good, be it ever so slowly;
Cherish some flower be it ever so lowly;
Labour, all labour is noble and holy
Let thy great deeds be thy pray’r to thy God!

The symbolic significance of nobility, even of noble failure, was central to the exhibit of women’s work which was gathered for the World’s Columbian Exposition. In concluding her speech at the opening of the Woman’s Work Exhibition, Lady Windeyer attempted to salvage some idealism from the ‘disappointment’ felt by the Committee. Drawing on concepts of selfless giving and feminine sympathy, she

179 See Report of the Executive Commissioner, appendix G.
180 Report from Lady Windeyer, as President of the Woman’s Work Committee, to the President of the New South Wales Commission, 19 February 1894, loose leaf in Windeyer Scrapbook, *D159.
painted the Exhibition which had been amassed as transcendent of self-interest and commercialism. She congratulated the government for choosing to take part in the 'great movement' that was the Exposition, because in it there was 'something more than advertisement' and something 'nobler than money making'. The sentiments which had prompted such a decision were, she claimed, those that had motivated other noble or charitable acts. These 'higher', more abstracted ideals were, of course, exactly the type of messages it had been intended that the women's work department would convey in the NSW representation: colonial refinement, taste and emerging identity. But Windeyer pushed them a step further, taking the feminine attributes of selfless compassion of charity, and the purity and nobility, and directly linking them to larger issues: government, nation, international federation. This feminist strategy (already seen at the EWI) used assumptions about women's nature to push for an enlargement of woman's sphere of influence. The implications of this twist that Windeyer was able to put on the women's exhibits gathered for the Chicago Fair are discussed in the following chapter. In the United States her daughter Margaret would use the association of the NSW women's exhibits with abstracted ideals like social progress, advancing civilisation, and new ideas in new lands to press for a feminist voice in national and international affairs.

181 The feeling', she argued, which had provoked the decision to be involved was 'the feeling which prompted this Country when it gave of its wealth to the Crimea, to the starving operatives of Lancashire, and the starving people of Ireland.' Daily Telegraph, 10 October 1892, p. 3.
The NSW exhibit in the Ethnographic Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893.

**Figure 6.2**

*Woman's Work Exhibition, Sydney 1892, bronze medal.*

Collection of Martha Seear.
The Tennyson memorial at the Woman's Work Exhibition, Sydney 1892, by Madame Praeger.
Mitchell Library Small Picture File - Sydney - Public Buildings - Town Hall.
Interior of the NSW Building at the World's Columbian Exposition.
Figure 6.5

Madame Praeger's exhibit at the Woman's Work Exhibition, Sydney 1892.
Mitchell Library Small Picture File - Sydney - Public Buildings - Town Hall.
This table painted with native flowers is typical of the type of work submitted by Australian women to nineteenth century exhibitions. It was painted by Miss H. Bell, and exhibited at the Tasmanian Juvenile and Industrial Exhibition, Hobart 1883. Miss H. Bell, decorator, and Samuel Smith, cabinet-maker. Table c. 1883. Collection of the National Gallery of Australia. Reproduced from John McPhee, *Australian Folk and Popular Art in the Australian National Gallery*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1988, p. 55.
Kookaburra hand-screen c. 1892. One of a pair, provenance not known. Local taxidermists adapted Australian fauna into traditional designs. Fans and handscreens made from pheasants and owls were popular in the second half of the nineteenth century.
This swandown muff, similar to those exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair, was made by the firm of Mrs J. S. Palmer & Son, furriers and taxidermists, of Hunter St, Sydney, between 1880 and 1886.

Certificate awarded to the Sydney taxidermist and furrier Eliza Wintle for emu skin mats exhibited in the Woman's Building of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893.
Mitchell Library.
Medal won by Mrs Moorehouse of Darlinghurst for a collar in fine tatting, shown at the Woman’s Building of the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893. Collection of Martha Scar.
Chapter 7
Asserting her independence: Identity and feminism at the World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893.

I say I see, my friends, if you do not, the illustrious emigre,
(having it is true in her day, although the same, changed,
journey'd considerable.)
Making directly for this rendezvous, vigorously clearing a path for herself, striding through the confusion,
By thud of machinery and shrill steam-whistle sudismay'd,
Bluffed not a bit by drain-pipe, gasometers, artificial fertilizers,
Smiling and pleased with palpable intent to stay,
She's here, installed amid the kitchen ware!1

Walt Whitman, 'Song of the Exposition', 1871.

[What's the use of a woman coming to America if she doesn't assert her independence?]2

Margaret Windeyer, quoted in the Chicago Evening Post. 1893.

In 1894 Margaret Windeyer, NSW Commissioner to the World's Columbian Exposition, gave an interview to the English ladies' magazine the Queen [Figure 7.1].
Under the headline 'Women of the Newer Worlds', Windeyer described her colony's display in the Woman's Building at the great Chicago Fair:
"Altogether," said the lady commissioner, "we did not do badly; but we did not perhaps quite get all the credit we deserved, as we were literally under the shadow of the English flag, and the Union Jack appeared to wave over some of the exhibits that our blue flags properly surmounted. And people, as they passed by, had a disagreeable way of saying our things were just like the English, only not so good."

Such comments were especially galling to Windeyer, and to the Committee she represented. Charged by the NSW Commission to show the progress of the young

2 Article reprinted in the Australian Star, 28 December 1893, cutting in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
3 Queen, The Lady's Newspaper, 23 June 1894, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
colony towards civilisation and refinement, Committee XII on Woman's Work had gathered what they thought was an unmistakably Australian collection of exhibits which applied the traditional feminine arts ingeniously to products peculiar to the new continent. The Union Jack had fluttered over gloves knitted from possum fur, native flowers constructed from Australian bird feathers, fish scales and sheepskin, and books of Aboriginal 'fairy tales'. In the colony, concerns had been expressed about what type of impression the Australian women's work might give. In the United States, things were different. The NSW exhibits, in the Woman's Building and throughout the Fair, were much admired. It seemed as if the daughter colony might finally step out of the mother country's shadow.4

Visiting England, many a colonist's spiritual 'home', in 1894 Margaret Windeyer found the assumption that NSW was an inferior version of Britain 'disagreeable' and unfair. She and her exhibit had both undergone a transformation in Chicago. The ideological raw materials sent to the Fair were reshaped by her into a new creation, an identity that could accommodate colonialism, nationalism, federalism, imperialism, feminism and internationalism.

In this final chapter, the thesis gaze shifts from objects to people, and from Australia to the United States. Superficially at least it also appears to shift from the material and the practical to the abstract and the ideal. But what happened when the NSW exhibit and its woman commissioner reached America defies such simple progressions. Once the crates were cracked open and the exhibits were set up in Chicago, they glowed with symbolism and significance. The imaginative possibilities of the display were made material, the colony's international aspirations were realised, and the visionary potentiality of an Australian nation seemed suddenly more vivid.

In 1893 the exhibition dynamo began to turn to the colony's benefit. The ordinarily unequal world's fair 'bargain' suddenly worked in the colony's favour. The

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4 The republic of America did not take so kindly to the display made by the colony's monarch in the Woman's Building. Queen Victoria had forwarded an exhibit of her own work, which included the two flax table napkins which had made such a celebrated appearance at the EWF five years earlier. It, suggested the American press, would have been better left at home. Weimann, The Fair Women, pp. 270-1.
NSW exhibit at Chicago succeeded like no other. The colony stood out, attracted flattering and sustained attention, drew authority and confidence from its leading position, and asserted its own independence from Britain. A struggle with the Home Office over the stature of the NSW exhibit, and the overt 'Australianness' of the representation, made it the first and only federalist display at an overseas exhibition.

Margaret Windeyer made sure that women were a central part of this transformation. The NSW display in the Woman's Building was meant to show women's contribution to the social, economic and cultural life of NSW. Under the influence of their chaperone the exhibits now came to prove women's actual and potential contribution to political life. Committee XII had successfully laid the groundwork on which the connection of women with progress, and the active and progressive role of women, could merge into claims for the vote, and a larger say in national government. Their efforts to reshape Australian femininity were played out in the personal transformation of Windeyer herself.

Jill Roe has described how 'from time to time, Australian nationalism has created space for women abroad as well as at home.' The World's Columbian Exposition presented Margaret Windeyer with one of these moments of possibility. On her arrival in San Francisco 'Australia's Agent' had complained that 'there was a great deal of opposition to my being appointed to this place in New South Wales because I was a woman'. But ironically, while there was vehement opposition to her mission in the months leading up to the Fair, once she had arrived in the US as 'the only lady Commissioner ... appointed to ... Chicago from a foreign country', her presence came to be seen as a positive measure of the 'position of women in the colony'. Furthermore, both at home and abroad, the 'official recognition' accorded to the women of NSW through Margaret Windeyer was presented as evidence of the

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5 Roe, 'What has nationalism offered Australian women?', p. 30.
6 *San Francisco Morning Call*, 15 April 1893, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
7 *San Francisco Morning Call*, 15 April 1893; and *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 April 1893; in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.*
progressive character of Australasia. Windeyer's personality, at home seen as 'odd' and 'rough', became, through her own passionate nationalism and the press's delight at finding a real 'character' from a little known-place, emblematic of a 'national type'.

In the United States, Margaret Windeyer was taken as a model of Australian womanhood. The press, eager to speak with the only woman appointed by a foreign government in an official capacity to the Fair, were quick to describe her individuality, her activities and interests, and her forwardness as 'national' characteristics. Even more interestingly, Windeyer herself recognised, propagated, and made use of this identification in the construction of her own self-image, and in her feminist work and identity.

In America in 1893-4 Margaret Windeyer was the archetypal 'Australian Girl'

celebrated in Ethel Castilla's poem:

Her frank clear eyes bespeak a mind
Old-world traditions fail to bind.
She is not shy
Or bold, but simply self-possessed;
Her independence adds a zest
Unto her speech, her piquant jest,
Her quaint reply.
O'er classic volumes she will pore
With joy; and true scholastic lore
Will often gain.

The image of the 'Australian girl' became prominent in Australian literary and visual culture in the 1880s and 1890s. She has been under scrutiny in Australian cultural studies for more than a decade. Characterised by her pluckiness, her wholesomeness and resourcefulness, her rosy cheeks and sunny companionable disposition, her intellect, accomplishments and common sense, her vivacity and confidence, all of which culminated in her transformation into an ideal mother, she has been discussed

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8 See for example the Daily Evening Bulletin, 15 April 1893, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML D159.
more as a literary construct or a national ideal than a lived 'type'. As an example of native-born femininity she has been contrasted, by Beverley Kingston, with the classed identity of the 'lady', a near-impossible British ideal to which colonial girls were encouraged to aspire.\textsuperscript{11}

The Australian girl's relationship to feminism has been hotly debated. Locating her between the literary devaluing of romanticism and an emerging feminist voice in colonial journalism, Christopher Lee has argued that the Australian girl was a 'discursive device which played an important role in an active, directed, and effective feminist movement in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia.'\textsuperscript{12} This had more to do with her potential as a vehicle for the personal expression and literary subversion of young Australian women writers, and her embodiment of a unique national character, than any suggestion she actually attended suffrage meetings. The Australian girl, like the tensions implicit in genteel femininity or the idea of 'work' exposed at women's exhibitions, represented another beginning for feminism, but a largely personal and inarticulate one. Her possibilities and her problems for feminists lay in her connection with an emerging national identity. This became more obvious when she came into comparison with her sisters in print.

The Australian girl appeared before the New Woman, who arrived on a bicycle in 1894,\textsuperscript{13} but the two caricatures would ride on, past the signposts of Federation and World War well into the 1920s, sometimes alone and sometimes in tandem. The Australian girl suggested the type of femininity to emerge from a colonial environment: as Bernice McPherson states, she was 'an ideal that was a complex mixture of the old world and the new; of the introduced culture adapted to Australian conditions.'\textsuperscript{14} She represented for feminists and non-feminists alike the youthful vigour of a new nation. The New Woman suggested the arrival, from 'somewhere else', of more suspicious characteristics: women's emancipation, female sexuality, and the modern. She

\textsuperscript{11} Kingston, \textit{The lady and the Australian girl'}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{12} Lee, \textit{The Australian Girl catches the first feminist wave'}, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{13} Penny Russell, \textit{Recycling femininity: Old ladies and new women'}, \textit{Australian Cultural History: Bodies}, no. 13, 1994, pp. 31-51.
\textsuperscript{14} McPherson, \textit{A colonial feminine ideal'}, p. 5.
embodied many of the possibilities of feminism for women - in particular that rich but undefined ideal, 'freedom' - but she was equally a means of mocking and subverting feminist claims. Louisa Lawson declared that the New Woman was a myth, invented to put ink in the 'fanny man's' pen.\textsuperscript{15} As Penny Russell points out, the discovery of the New Woman necessitated the invention of the 'Old Woman', who continually fell off her new bike and got mud on her ill-fitting new clothes.\textsuperscript{16} The Old Woman was merely the 'angular hard-faced withered creature' already associated with feminism, dressed up by the cartoonists in a cycling skirt. Direct feminist action, particularly suffragism, was already popularly associated with the image of the Old Woman, the wowser, a reminder of the Old World. To both caricatures the Australian girl offered a sharp contrast, emblematising aspects of personal freedom within a young body shaped by a new country. She did not symbolise organised feminism, but an absorption of new ways that might be seen as natural evolutions in a New World, rather than the active inventions of a transformative sisterhood.

Margaret Windeyer herself confounded every stereotype. The native-born daughter of a knight, she was both a lady and an 'Australian girl'. She possessed the independence and frankness of the Australian type but she also deviated from that model. She had a temperament more rational than romantic, she was not conventionally 'pretty', and showed little interest in sports or marriage. Most significantly of all, she was a young, articulate and active feminist. She was conscious of both the possibilities and the limitations of idealised femininity, and deliberately and joyfully set about using and reinventing them for her own feminist ends.

As the only woman delegate appointed to the Commission of the only Australian colony present at the Chicago Fair, Windeyer consciously took on the role of being emblematic of a sex and a continent, or as she hoped, of the women of a new nation. Nevertheless, as a representative figure, she diverged in a number of significant ways from conventional femininity. She was unmarried and travelled

\textsuperscript{15} Russell, 'Recycling femininity', p. 49.
\textsuperscript{16} Russell, 'Recycling femininity', p. 50.
without a chaperone. She had opinions, about politics, 'Art', fashion and traffic regulation, and expressed them freely. She was an appointed government official of rank, status and authority. But most importantly, she was a prominent and vocal campaigner for women's rights. As a feminist, she made the Australian girl a political figure.

As a feminist too, Windeyer was certainly engaged in what Marilyn Lake has described as a 'struggle for control of the national culture' through efforts to redefine masculinity and feminise public institutions.\textsuperscript{17} But she was also engaging with other aspects of nationalist discourse in both a public and a personal way, integrating femininity and nationalism through multifaceted notions of 'independence', 'idealism' and 'identity'. Nationalism and feminism were not necessarily 'oppositional discourses' as Gail Reekie describes them.\textsuperscript{18} Windeyer saw no contradiction between being an enthusiastic feminist, a committed internationalist, a loyal imperialist, and an ardent federalist. Indeed, in debates surrounding the World's Columbian Exposition, her claims for the independence of women and the independence of the colonies were united in one rhetoric of peculiarity, progress and principle. This chapter explores the interrelationships between these three conceptual identities - that of being the non-citizen of a colony, the prospective citizen of a new nation, and a 'citizen of the world' - through the identity of one woman.

Margaret Windeyer is one of Australia's least-studied turn-of-the-century feminists, despite her impeccable pedigree and vivid personality.\textsuperscript{19} A forthright, 'original', and 'thoroughly individual' woman, she was well-known in her time as a 'brilliant conversationalist' with a 'fine intellect' and 'ever ready wit'.\textsuperscript{20} She was born

\textsuperscript{17} Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability', pp. 1-3.
\textsuperscript{18} Reekie, 'Contesting Australia', pp. 145-6; see also Sheridan, 'Louisa Lawson, Miles Franklin and Feminist Writing', pp. 29-47.
\textsuperscript{20} Quotes from the San Francisco Morning Call, 15 April 1893, an unattributed Australian paper, a biographical sketch from Elite (Chicago), and the New York Evening Herald, 20 March 1894, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159, and from an obituary in St John's Darlinghurst The
in 1866, the fifth daughter of Mary and William Charles Windeyer. 'Exceptionally bright', she was educated at home and later at Miss Hooper's school, passing the junior public examination in five subjects in 1882. After that, her learning was to be almost entirely self-directed. She enthusiastically embraced three activities as the core of her perpetual education: reading, talking and travel. She had a particular fondness for the writings of John Stuart Mill, and the novels of George Meredith.\footnote{Windeyer spoke of the authors at meetings of the WLS, and delivered a speech on the novels of George Meredith at the Women's Building in Chicago in 1893, see Minutes of the Woman's Literary Society, [1890s], ML B693; and Margaret Windeyer, 'George Meredith's Novels', in Mary Kavanaugh Oldham Eagle (ed.), The Congress of Women Held in the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, U.S.A., 1893, W. B. Conkey Company, Chicago, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 97-100.} A poem written by her siblings summed up 'our big sister': 'Full of life and brains and laughter...She it is who ne'er is quiet/Always coming, always going'.\footnote{Monthly Paper, September 1939, in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X. See also Dawn, January 1894, p. 10.} In 1887 she made her first overseas journey when she accompanied her family on their travels through Europe, the United States and Canada.\footnote{San Francisco Chronicle, 20 April 1893, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159, and 'Biographical Note' accompanying Windeyer, 'George Meredith's Novels', p. 97.} It was this trip which apparently stimulated her move into public life. When she returned home, she took on the role of secretary to the education department of the EWI, and then became a founding member of both Louisa Lawson's Dawn Club and the Women's Literary Society. She was also an active member of the committee formed to establish the Women's College within the University of Sydney, and was elected the first recording secretary of the Womanhood Suffrage League at the same time as her mother was voted first president.

Margaret Windeyer's voice carried the logic and culture of her mother's, but also some of the audacity, fire and pointedness of Lawson's. Although sharing many of her mother's opinions, she was markedly of a different generation of women and of campaigners for women's rights. She left for Chicago at the age of 26, a single woman with a burgeoning career in public life who 'lost dancing partners at balls as a suffragist'.\footnote{St John's Darlinghurst: The Monthly Paper, September 1939; and Sydney Morning Herald, 27 October 1938; in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X.} At the same age her mother had already been married for six years and
borne several of her nine children. Where the mother emphasised the importance of men and women working together to better women's lot, the daughter looked to solidarity between women as the key to improving their position. Where her mother's success as a feminist was often associated with her softly-spoken gentleness and feminine conventionality, Margaret was unashamedly opinionated and outspoken. For Margaret Windeyer thought and speech were vital and inseparable, and so, as her siblings put it, she could never be quiet, in private discussion or public debate. In 1903 the Bulletin would describe her as the 'best woman speaker in the Commonwealth'. She attributed her success to the fact that she addressed the audience 'as if they were a group of naughty children at the bottom of the garden stealing green fruit'. That strong voice was first heard at its fullest at Chicago in 1893, when Windeyer spent six months as a NSW Commissioner to the World's Columbian Exposition.

Windeyer sailed for San Francisco in the Mariposa in March 1893, with international temperance advocate Jessie Ackermann, writer Robert Louis Stevenson, and champion boxer Griffo as shipboard companions. A year later Louisa Macdonald, Principal of the Women's College at the University of Sydney, wrote to a friend in England:

I know all the Windeyers very well. ... Margaret is the cleverest, with a good deal of eccentricity, possibly because of that, but as good and unselfish and with all her occasional oddness as sensible a young woman as you could find. She has been for more than a year in America, and will be a year in England before returning home: and, if England and America affect her as they ought to affect anyone of her capacity, and the wear and tear of travelling and mixing with other people rub off something of the roughness of manner, she ought to become a remarkable and distinguished woman. 27

Macdonald made several interesting observations here about the general role of travel as an enlightening, socialising and refining influence on a young woman from the

26 Bulletin, 23 May 1903; and Sydney Mail, 6 July 1939; in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X.
colonies. She also made some specific assumptions about the polishing effect travel should have on the 'eccentric', 'odd' and somewhat 'rough' character of Margaret Windeyer. Macdonald was an acute surveyor of personality, and a shrewd observer of cultural forces, but she was wrong about the effect of travel on the young Australian. Windeyer's journey through America to England between 1893 and 1895 widened her interests and deepened her self-confidence, but it did not iron out her idiosyncrasies, tame her manner, or soften her expression. Margaret Windeyer was certainly to become a remarkable and distinguished woman in the United States, but she did so by continuing to speak her mind and behave as she always had, only with increasing assurance and authority. After all, as she told the Chicago Evening Post, 'what's the use of a woman coming to America if she doesn't assert her independence?'.

Windeyer's journey took her to a nation in tune with her own vitality and a city primed for boundless possibility. The World's Columbian Exposition was perhaps the greatest manifestation of American pride and idealism the nineteenth century. The Chicago Fair 'was the first expression of American thought as a unity', remarked Henry Adams. In 1894 Windeyer wrote home to her mother:

I can never thank the dear father enough for giving me the opportunity ... of seeing the exposition, the majesty of which in the direction of the arts and sciences will be recognised for all time.

The city which played host to this grand celebration of American advancement since the arrival of Columbus was itself a symbol of breathtaking progress. Utterly destroyed by fire in 1871, Chicago was rebuilt from ruins in twenty years to become

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29 Australian Star, 28 December 1893, cutting in Windeyer Family Scrapbook. ML *D159.
32 Margaret Windeyer to her family in NSW, 1 May 1894, in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X.
the second biggest city in the United States, and the seventh greatest in the world. In skyscrapers of brick and glass it rose like a modern phoenix, a city of aspiration, surging higher and higher on the shore of Lake Michigan. In 1893 another metropolis appeared on its southern flank, the fairgrounds, a city of vision and idealism. Windeyer and her exposition sisters would later remember it as 'our beautiful dreamy White City' [Figure 7.2]. These two cities were her home for six months. The vitality of the real city sparked Windeyer's enthusiasm, while the ideal city fired her imagination.

The excitement and significance of showing NSW to the world in the New World was not lost on any of the Australians present. Margaret Windeyer's 'home' at the Exposition was the NSW Building, situated between the national buildings of Haiti and Canada, facing the lakeside Clam Bake [Figure 7.3]. Designed and built by an American architectural firm for £1,000, 'Australia House' was a simple single-story classical structure, with a portico of Doric columns. It was supposed to be a recreation of Sydney's old General Post Office, a symbol of the colony's connection with the world. NSW Executive Commissioner Sir Arthur Renwick described it as 'very commodious and imposing'. Inside, the space was dominated by the flower paintings of Ellis Rowan. Nearly 100 were hung frame to frame along its walls [Figure 6.4]. From its rooms the NSW Commissioners (including Margaret) superintended the colony's various displays throughout the Fair.

Small as it was, the NSW Building stood proudly distinct from the palace of Great Britain. It had been built, said Renwick, so the colonists could 'fly our own flag'. An air of bad feeling had surrounded the colony's Exposition communications and arrangements with the 'mother country'. From its formation, the NSW

34 Anna Simpson [secretary of the National Council of Women of Germany] to Margaret Windeyer, [n.d.], in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook. ML 4653X.
Commission had chosen to communicate directly with officials in Chicago about the colony's representation, particularly its claim to space, rather than arrange matters through the British Royal Commission. It was understood from the Exposition authorities that NSW had 300,000 square feet available in which to mount its display. In June 1892, with the departure of the Executive Commissioner Sir Arthur Renwick for Chicago imminent, it suddenly became clear that that figure was the total amount that had been allocated to the Great Britain and all of its colonies, not just NSW. The British Royal Commission then demanded that the colony apply for a proportion of that space through it, rather than deal with the Americans. Disturbed and annoyed, the NSW Commission objected strongly, arguing that as it had been 'practically left to New South Wales to represent Australia, ... this gives us an additional claim to liberal treatment'.

On the 24th of June, Premier Dibbs, in England on an official visit, cabled the Government in NSW that he was threatening to withdraw the colony from the Exposition altogether, as a protest and to express his 'dissatisfaction' with the treatment it had received. In the week that followed however, the Cabinet accepted an offer of 50,000 square feet from the British Commission. But tempers remained high. On his way back to Australia the newly-knighted republican premier was asked his opinion of the forthcoming Fair. 'Damn Chicago!', he is said to have responded.

Regardless of this diminution of its role, the colony continued to challenge the pre-eminence of the 'home country' simply by virtue of the magnitude of its display. William E. Cameron's history of the Exposition claimed that NSW spent US$243,325 on its representation to the fair. This placed it sixth on the list of nations after Germany, France, Japan, Brazil and Great Britain. By comparison, the 'mother country' spent US$291,000, a mere $47,695 more than its tiny colony.

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38 Sydney Morning Herald, 18 June 1892, p. 5.
40 Sydney Morning Herald, 29 June 1892, p. 8; see also Report of the President, pp. 12-3.
41 A republican, Dibbs claimed to have accepted the honour 'just to oblige a lady'. See Irma and Cyril Pearl, Our Yesterdays: Australian Life Since 1853 in Photographs, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1954, p. 114. See also Leslie Finlay Crisp, George Richard Dibbs, 1834-1904: Premier of NSW, Prophet of Unification, L. F. Crisp, Deakin, 1980.
42 Figures from Cameron, History of the World's Columbian Exposition, p. 347. By these figures, NSW spent more on its display than Spain, Canada, Sweden, Belgium and Russia. Renwick's report
Executive Commissioner Renwick's report was a lengthy and exultant depiction of the NSW representation as an unparalleled triumph. He was especially proud that NSW was the first country to place exhibits at the Fair. All of the exhibits in its combined total floor and wall space of 112,403 square feet were ready when the Exposition opened in May 1893.\textsuperscript{43} The colony made its biggest showings in the Horticulture and Mines Buildings. In both spaces, Renwick claimed, the exhibits were 'universally acknowledged as the finest and best arranged in the building'.\textsuperscript{44} Published accounts of the Fair certainly suggest that NSW completely dominated the Mines Building, thanks largely to Broken Hill Proprietary Company's massive silver trophy, a glittering 40 foot high column topped by the figure of Atlas carrying the earth [Figure 7.4].\textsuperscript{45} In the Agriculture Building, the colony's court was flanked by great arches made from exposed bales of wool. Inside, visitors admired the maize trophy, another arch constructed from an artistic arrangement of corn cobs, and the pyramid of preserved meats, standing like huge tin beehive [Figure 7.5].\textsuperscript{46} The exotic Australian fern court was a popular retreat in the Horticulture Building, while in the Fisheries Building Renwick had arranged a shoreline diorama featuring several stuffed seals as the centrepiece for the NSW display [Figure 7.6].\textsuperscript{47} Massed spears and large framed photographs of Aboriginal and South Sea Island people were a feature of the colony's display in the Anthropology Building [Figure 6.1].\textsuperscript{48} In the Transport Building models of the Zig Zag Railway and the Cockatoo Island Dockyard suggested technological progress and ingenuity, while the panorama of Sydney and photographs of local buildings in the Liberal Arts Building presented the colony's capital as a grand and growing metropolis. In recognition of the strength of its displays, NSW was allotted five positions on the Exposition's judging panel, one of which went to

\textsuperscript{43} Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{44} Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{45} Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 105.
\textsuperscript{46} Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{47} Report of the Executive Commissioner, pp. 80 and 95.
Margaret Windeyer, who awarded prizes in the artistic section of the Manufactures Building. There NSW showed horseshoes, watches, a device for cleaning high windows, and a billiard table turned from Australian woods. There, too, visitors found Mrs Hetherington-Carruthers promoting the benefits of her electric corsetry, and Matron Guille's and Miss Fox-Harding's improved hospital beds, which had been separated from the NSW exhibit in the Woman's Building due to lack of space.\(^\text{49}\)

The colony's exhibit in the Woman's Building stood as proudly as the rest, despite some initial difficulties faced by the Commissioners in its arrangement [Figure 7.7(a)].\(^\text{50}\) NSW was squeezed into a small space adjacent to the British exhibits on the ground floor of the building's Northern wing [Figure 7.7(b)].\(^\text{51}\) The only known photograph of the display (sadly dominated by a fire extinguisher) shows an alcove crammed full, walls jam-packed with paintings and photographs, frames jostling shoulder to shoulder, showcases brimming with needlework and lace and dressed dolls, and perched above them, the Gore sisters' little wax cows, grazing contentedly on the case tops. Ada Rohu's black swan peeks up to survey the cluttered scene [Figure 7.8]. Not visible in the shot was a coat of arms, proudly supported by the paws of two stuffed kangaroos.\(^\text{52}\)

The NSW exhibits at the Chicago Fair expressed a pride and confidence in Australianness different to that seen at previous exhibitions.\(^\text{53}\) Twopeny's dream for a truly 'Australian' exhibition had become a reality. Summing up the representation, Renwick noted the colony's 'unique position' at the Exposition. 'Never before' had NSW occupied 'such a distinguished place as at this world's fair'. NSW had appeared in her proper rôle, as the mother Colony and the gracious standard-bearer of Australia and the South Seas. As was confessed by every visitor, the exhibits were worthy of

\(^{49}\) Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 135. Lady Abbott and Mrs Kelly's wood exhibits were also relocated to the Forestry Building.

\(^{50}\) Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 282.

\(^{51}\) NSW had 384 square feet of floor space and 1,200 square feet of wall space in the Woman's Building. See Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 10.

\(^{52}\) Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 282.

\(^{53}\) There was especial pride taken, for example, in the fact that almost all of the NSW Exposition staff were Australian. When suggestion was made that Americans or Englishmen might be employed, usually common exhibition practice, a furture erupted, see Sydney Morning Herald, 22 October 1891, p. 3; 20 April 1892, p. 5; 27 April 1892, p. 6; 18 May 1892, p. 6; 3 June 1892, p. 3. See also Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 34.
her great resources and representative of her advancement in education, science and art.

Commission President William McMillan called Chicago the 'most successful Exhibition ever known in the history of this colony.'\(^5^4\) Even the British Commissioner conceded that the NSW exhibits were 'deservedly accorded places in the foremost rank among the nations which exhibited'.\(^5^5\) James Dredge, another English official, noted that NSW had 'shone most luminously' at the Fair.\(^5^6\)

The NSW representation to the Chicago Exposition was imbued with a strong federalist sentiment in a manner that was never repeated at an overseas exhibition. Its uniqueness was the result of timing. The Federal Convention of 1891 had roused considerable enthusiasm for the idea of Australian unification, and the NSW representation to Chicago was conceived in that moment of possibility. The momentum of the convention was lost, however, in the financial collapse that followed. NSW made no major representation to an international exhibition overseas in the ensuing decade, years that saw the revitalisation and realisation of the federal idea as a people's movement.\(^5^7\) That made Chicago a singular statement of federalist dreams on the world exhibition stage.

Although Commissioner Renwick was eager to show 'the nations of the world' that 'the names New South Wales and Australia were not exactly convertible', and that 'New South Wales was the leading colony of all Australia', as well as being the 'premier colony of Great Britain', federalist ambitions underpinned the NSW display. NSW had tried unsuccessfully to encourage all the colonies to exhibit together, as the Fair was an 'excellent opportunity of presenting to the world a practical proof of the value and importance of the federal idea'.\(^5^8\) Because of the financial collapse, NSW became the sole representative of the newest 'new world', and some colonists drew

\(^5^4\) Report of the President, p. 29.
\(^5^5\) Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 303.
\(^5^6\) Report of the President, p. 24.
\(^5^8\) See Report of the President, pp. 4, 9; and Sydney Morning Herald, 13 January 1892, p. 5.
particular symbolism from the mission to America. Farewellng the Executive Commissioner, NSW Attorney General Edmund Barton spoke of how Renwick 'went forth from us to represent this country in the greatest of known confederations', the United States, whose 'history was a living example to every man who wished a future for Australia.' The NSW representation, he argued, should therefore be 'truly Australian and truly federal.' The Mayor of Sydney, W. P. Manning, went further, claiming that in the future a federated Australia would 'vie with America', for 'in this land there was an embryo of a nation greater than America was'. Renwick himself, a committed federalist along with many of the NSW Commission including President Sir William McMillan, declared himself 'animated by patriotism' in carrying out the work, for 'in every possible respect New South Wales was not only a colony, but was fast budding into a great country'. Special significance flowed from the recognition of NSW as an entity independent of its imperial mother. 'At this Exposition the NSW Commission was acknowledged as a distinct national commission', wrote Renwick in his final report, 'in view of the future this was an important matter.\(^{59}\)

The NSW Commission, like Committee XII before them, delighted in this 'official recognition'. On his arrival in Chicago the Executive Commissioner drew a special federalist symbolism from the fact that the name 'Australia' appeared on the interior of the dome of the Administration building, and that a clock in the Exposition railway station kept NSW time. But this gesture also revealed the kind of intercolonial rivalry that would stall Federation in the early 1890s. On arrival at Chicago, the Commissioner found the clock face marked 'Melbourne'. It was soon changed to 'Sydney'.\(^{61}\)

A committed federalist herself, Windeyer shared the vision of a united Australia with her fellow Commissioners. She used her appointment to Chicago to publicly link feminism with federalism on the world stage. As a woman who 'wished a future for

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\(^{60}\) Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 305.

Australia' she consistently reiterated Barton's sentiments in connection with the Fair. 
Explaining that she 'belong[ed] to the fourth generation of her family in Australia', she 
told the New York Herald that federation was one of her 'chief undertaking[s]', for 
which the United States provided an inspirational model. In Australia, she argued, 
"[t]here are only five colonies ... to join in a federal government, whereas in the 
United States there are forty-four States, and yet the plan of federation is successfully 
carried out. Yes, when I return home I am going to work heart and soul to gain this 
end. It would be a great thing for the colonies."

Windeyer was intensely proud to be appointed as a representative of her colony, and, 
as NSW was the only Australian colony at the Exposition, of the entire region. As 
Catherine P. Wallace, wife of the US Consul in Melbourne, wrote to Margaret in 
Chicago in August 1893, 'in the States you will be recognised not so much from NSW 
as from Australia and the whole island continent will share in the honour and glory.'

At the opening of the Woman's Building and other Fair ceremonials, Windeyer sat on 
the platform as 'Australia's Agent'. At the World's Congress of Representative 
Women, a gigantic women's conference held parallel with the Fair, she addressed the 
opening session as delegate for what she called 'that country of great actualities and 
greater possibilities, Australia'. At Chicago, Windeyer was able to connect the 
potential of women with the glorious future 'Australia' articulated in connection with 
the Exposition.

Windeyer's belief in federation was inextricably linked to potential 
improvements in women's status, particularly the vote. Citizenship was at the core of

62 New York Herald, 25 April 1894, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159. Windeyer joined 
the Australian Federation and Progress League in 1896, and with Maybanke Wolstenholme encouraged 
the membership of the National Council of Women of NSW to follow her example, see Margaret 
Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 186/18 & 19, and National Council of Women of NSW, 
Minutes of the First Meeting held 26 August 1896, National Council of Women of NSW Minutes 
November 1895-April 1904, MLK 3009.
63 In a letter to Premier Dibbs, Lord Jersey wrote: 'I have just left Chicago and am pleased to tell you 
that the exhibits from NSW have created an Extraordinary amount of interest. They are allowed on all 
sides to be amongst the chief features of the Exposition. When you see Sir William Windeyer will 
you tell him that we found his daughter, Miss Margaret, very much occupied and quite delighted with 
the importance of her work of the grand commission which you gave her'. Lord Jersey to Sir George 
Dibbs, in a letter from the Chief Secretary's Office, 19 July 1893, in William Charles Windeyer 
Correspondence, Windeyer Papers, ML MSS 186/10.
64 Catherine P. Wallace to Margaret Windeyer, 2 August 1893, Margaret Windeyer Correspondence, 
ML MSS 186/17. See also the comment of Mary Sanger-Evans of the Women's Silk-Growing 
Association: 'We are greatly pleased at the honor you are gaining for your country', Mrs Sanger-
Evans to Margaret Windeyer, 18 September 1893, Margaret Windeyer Correspondence, ML MSS 
186/17.
Windeyer's feminism. The vote was the only means by which women could enter fully into the life of the new nation. Windeyer was scathing of arguments about womanly influence on enfranchised men. At the Fair's Women's Congress she had addressed a session on 'Woman's Political Future' with the simple assertion: 'I would like to point out that women have no political present when they do not exercise the franchise'. Women's vote in the federal sphere was, she believed, an essential recognition of women's special interests:

women in the colonies have very little interest in voting purely in municipal [elections] ... for all these officers are chosen by the men. It is in the great questions of national government that they desire to take part, where principles are involved.

Windeyer's feminist nationalist vision rested on the conception that 'femininity' and 'the nation' shared a common sphere of concern with 'great questions' and higher 'principles'. By implication, then, the improvement of women's status was a project for the new nation, and the movement for women's rights was a nationalistic project. Federation was therefore a feminist goal.

While Windeyer admired American unification, she thought there was much that Americans could learn from socially and politically advanced Australia, especially from the position and role of its women. Windeyer overtly connected the vibrant youthful progressiveness of NSW on show at the Fair with its active and progressive womanhood. She made repeated claims to women's groups and the press about the advanced state of social relations and political practices in the colonies. 'Miss Windeyer has but a poor opinion of the institutions we have for the care of children', wrote the New York Herald, and 'considers her native land to be far ahead of New York State' in the matter of woman's suffrage. She spoke at 'several meetings of the City Woman's Suffrage League and pointed out how far Australia is in advance of us in that particular.' At one such meeting she delivered a speech on 'Women in

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66 New York Herald, 6 April 1894, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
67 New York Herald, 6 April 1894, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
Municipal Affairs in Australia', which contained 'much that Miss Windeyer thought
Americans could easily adopt to their immediate benefit'.69 Her ideas about other
colonial innovations which might prove beneficial were not confined to direct
improvements in the status of women and children, but extended to traffic rules and
political culture. 'There are some strangely inconsistent things in America', she told
the Washington Post:

The people are wonderfully clever, and their marvellous energy is a matter of
unceasing admiration. But with all their cleverness they tolerate a degree of
imposition and corruption that would not be countenanced anywhere else in the
civilized world.70

While never afraid to criticise the 'glorious Republic', she was always quick to
champion the American woman as a model of advancement, and a 'potent' force for
reform.71 'I have been greatly struck by the women of this country' she told the
Washington paper:

How intelligent, how full of life, how far ahead of the men! The Western woman, in
particular, is a revelation. She is the most progressive thing in this wonderful
country, where progress stalks over the land with seven-league boots.72

At the same time as she characterised and defined the 'American woman', connecting
the pioneering West to the progressive woman like a feminist Frederick Jackson
Turner, she also actively contrasted the Australian woman with women from other
nations. There was less unhappiness ... among Australian women ... than among the
English' she told the Queen, because 'there was greater freedom of intercourse
between men and women'.73

Freedom to communicate from a position of equality with men was only one
characteristic associated both by Windeyer herself and the foreign press with a form of
femininity deemed 'native' to Australia. Windeyer was a celebrity at Chicago, worthy
of lengthy articles in the local newspapers. A story in the Chicago Evening Post began:

Miss Margaret Windeyer, lady commissioner from New South Wales, walks daily in
the Art Palace, a godsend to the unfortunates there who do not clearly know what
they have gone out for to see. ... Miss Windeyer is a young woman gifted with more

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69 New York Herald, 6 April 1894, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
71 Queen, The Lady's Newspaper, 23 June 1894, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
73 Queen, The Lady's Newspaper, 23 June 1894, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
than ordinary intelligence and ideas. Added to this her education has been sound and far-reaching, and she lacks not of words wherewith to clothe the ideas that come. Taking all this into consideration, it not hard to understand what a valuable aid she would be to a person of comparative ignorance thrust suddenly into a dazzling new world of Art, with a capital 'A'.

It then described Windeyer 'explaining' with a 'twinkling eye' Spalmack's 'Percet!' to what she called 'a couple of unhappy men ... [who] don't know what it means' - much to the horror of her American companion. Although a woman, she felt no inhibition about addressing 'unhappy men' on the subject of 'Art with a capital "A"', or regaling complete strangers with commentaries on Roman blood-sports. Nor was she ashamed to describe aspects of one of the more revered paintings at the Exposition as 'stupid'. This exchange symbolised Windeyer's awareness that she was unusual, 'brave' and 'challenging' of conventional femininity. It also revealed the American press playfully, but approvingly, mocking the brash colonial.

Once the report filtered back to Australia it was subject to an empowering reinterpretation by its colonial audience. The American press was fond of emphasising how 'Australia's agent' was 'frank', 'plucky' and 'pardonably enthusiastic'. These qualities were always attributed to Windeyer as an 'Australian woman leader' or 'antipodean ambassador'. But while the San Francisco Morning Call claimed she had 'the true English girl independence style about her', the colonial press took these signs of independence as a measure of the unique vigour of Australia and Australian womanhood. The Australian Star reprinted the description of Margaret in the Art Palace from the Chicago Evening Post, and in their new context the references to Windeyer as a 'young Australian' took on a more nationalistic tone.

It was the tone, or perhaps more correctly the tonal qualities, of Windeyer's voice which were taken as the greatest indicator of her Australianness. That an

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74 Article from the Chicago Evening Post, reprinted in the Australian Star, 28 December 1893, cutting in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
75 San Francisco Morning Call, 15 April 1893; and San Francisco Chronicle, 20 April 1893; in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
77 See for example 'New South Wales Exhibits At Chicago', unidentified Australian newspaper cutting in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159, which spends the larger amount of words discussing the good reception of Windeyer and the women's exhibit in Chicago, and the last quarter on the colony's display in the Mines Building.
Australian inflection was discernible in Windeyer's speech was noted by the *Chicago Daily News*, which reported that the Australian delegate to the World's Congress of Representative Women was a "small woman with a charming accent".\textsuperscript{78} One Australian paper took some pleasure in reprinting a 'comical paragraph' which had appeared in the *New York Evening Sun* under the headline 'They know all about it!'. The story claimed 'Lady Margaret Windeyer' was the 'representative of New Zealand at Chicago last summer'.

Margaret Windeyer was a young woman, tremendously popular, full of fun, astoundingly dressed, and with plenty to say for herself in the most astonishing of dialects. When Miss Windeyer got hold of a vowel, she gave it three or four twists before letting it go. Whether this was a personal peculiarity or the speech of her country no one knew, but it added greatly to the piquancy of her speech, and her welcome to every platform and every group.\textsuperscript{79}

The colonial press seemed proud of their feminine representative, and ridiculed the ignorance of the foreign papers about colonial matters. But the reference also carried an undertone of recognition that the colonies were not important enough on the world stage to be distinguishable other than by personal peculiarity and accent. Appearing as a representative of a southern land certainly brought with it some problems of identification. On the 21st of May 1893 the *Chicago Herald* reported from the World's Congress of Representative Women:

Margaret Windeyer, of Australia, closed the meeting with a beautiful reading upon 'The Amazon Land'. It was descriptive of an Amazonian funeral; and its rounded periods, its pathos, its exposition of the characteristics of the southern continent elicited marked attention, and at its finish a hearty applause, flattering alike to the reader, who is of Brazilian birth, and the Great Republic of South America.\textsuperscript{80}

Although the image of Margaret Windeyer as an Australian Amazon is a fitting one, it was an unfortunate misunderstanding for the continent's female representative at the Congress. She had indeed spoken in the session, on women's political future in her 'far-away home', but the newspaper had confused her with another delegate, Martha Sisselberg, who followed her with an ode to the 'land of the Amazons'.\textsuperscript{81}

The greatest public display of Windeyer's own nationalism came at this international women's meeting. The World's Congress of Representative Women was

\textsuperscript{78} *Chicago Daily News*, 20 May 1893, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{79} 'They Know All About It!', unidentified newspaper cutting in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.*
\textsuperscript{80} *Chicago Herald*, 21 May 1893, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{81} *Chicago Times*, 21 May 1893, p. 2.
held between the 15th and 21st of May at Assembly Rooms in Chicago itself. Over the week more than 330 speakers appeared at 81 sessions. Sometimes there were 18 meetings going on at once.  

Although she was appointed as the representative of New South Wales, and even more specifically of the Womanhood Suffrage League of NSW, Windeyer always appeared as the delegate from the entire continent. This was despite the fact that a number of other Australian women were also present. Windeyer was seated amongst the highest dignitaries on the platforms at the openings of the Woman’s Building and the Women’s Congress as the Australian delegate, beside American feminists Clara Barton, Isabella Beecher Hooker, Julia Ward Howe, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucy and Alice Stone [Figure 7.9].

Windeyer was filled with pride at the chance to represent both Australia and Australian womanhood. At the opening of the Congress Windeyer was asked to respond to the opening addresses in her capacity as delegate for Australia. 'Coming as I do from the newest country represented in this august body,' she said, words fail to express how highly I esteem it an honour and privilege to be among your number. The members of this Congress stand upon the immovable basis of a common interest, viz., the advancement of women and through them the whole human race; and it is no light matter to stand among you as the representative of that country of great actualities and greater possibilities, Australia.

Speaking almost as if her dream of a federated Australia was already a reality, Windeyer simultaneously articulated the advancement and potential achievements of her 'native land' and a universal femininity which embraced all women. At the World's Congress of Representative Women, all the multiple meanings of being 'representative' became visible to her. But at the same time, in a forum which addressed 'great questions' and higher 'principles' through 'the advancement of women', Windeyer found her national identity, her feminist vision, and her own self-image merging into one.

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84 Sewall, *The World’s Congress of Representative Women*, pp. 24-5. See also *Chicago Times*, 16 May 1893, p. 5.
Her exultant emotions were not shared by the other Australian women at the Congress. C. C. Montefiore delivered a speech on the 'progress of women in NSW', which pointed out that women were becoming equal with men in education, the professions, the arts, politics and social reform. This advancement was framed, though, by a strong sense of Australia's inferiority:

If this brief record of women's progress in NSW would seem small and insignificant it must be borne in mind that these colonies are, comparatively speaking, young, and that it is only within very recent years that there has been leisure for the cultivation of the higher faculties either among men or women.

Here again was the mood that had been seen in Sydney during the Woman's Work Exhibition: a feeling of division, disappointment and inferiority amongst colonial women.

All traces of this attitude were absent from Windeyer's speeches. She represented Australian women as courageous, active, and proud; geographically isolated from the women of the rest of the world, but united with them through the stronger ties of sympathy and sex. She asserted that:

Though widely separated from the thinking women of Europe and America, there are women in Australia who have the courage of their opinions; who unflinchingly strive toward the good and true; who try to bear each other's burdens; who seek to obtain right and justice for all; who show themselves capable of higher education, and of taking an active part in the organisations which exist for the welfare of the young and for the alleviation of human misery.

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85 Montefiore was a member of the large and influential Sydney Jewish family, see Australian Dictionary of Biography, vol. 8, 1891-1939, pp. 460ff. It is not known why she was in attendance at the Congress. Following the conclusion of her husband's governorship, Lady Jersey took in the Chicago Fair as part of her travels, but gave it short shrift her in her autobiography Countess Jersey, Fifty-One Years of Victorian Life, pp. 348-54. Spence, as has previously been noted, was in America to promote election reform, see her Autobiography, ch. 17. The curious collection of women's organisations listed as 'Australian' in the register in the Women's Building's 'organization room' suggests there may also have been other colonists present. See Register of Women's Organizations Kept in the Organization Room of the Women's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago Historical Society. The Chicago Herald noted that Josephine C. Locke addressed the World's Congress of Representative Women on the 'system of education in Australia': "Two Australian girls, she said, had gained University honors similar to those gained in England by Miss Ramsay and Miss Fawcett. School mistresses in Victoria state schools could earn a possible $1500 as their yearly salary. Many girls, with the degree of BA and MA, received from the University of Melbourne, were teachers in private schools, had private schools of their own. Literature was in its infancy in Australia, the speaker said, and it was a very terrible infancy. The press in the large cities, however, was admirably conducted. There were some dozens of women reporter in Sydney and Melbourne, and some of the brightest poems and stories appearing in the papers were the work of Australian women." Chicago Herald, 21 May 1893, p. 2.


87 Sewall, The World's Congress of Representative Women, pp. 24-5. See also Chicago Times, 16 May 1893, p. 5.
This was a quote from her mother's speech at the first meeting of the Womanhood Suffrage League of NSW, and so on the world stage the voices of the old and the new woman became one.88

Windeyer was aware that at the Congress she spoke not only to the women in the room, but to the people of the world, especially those in Australia. Windeyer's speech at the Congress was therefore also an affirmation of feminist women in NSW, the women who, in her characterisation, had opinions, fought for justice, and worked together to improve the lives of all. She championed the 'thinking women' of Australia by drawing attention to their separation from the rest of the world as well as their isolation within the colony, an isolation that had been amply demonstrated in the year during which Committee XII had carried out its work. After Chicago, Windeyer and the colonial women's movement would benefit immeasurably from connections forged with other women who shared their progressive goals.

Windeyer's journey helped foster the internationalism which was already a fundamental part of Australian feminism, particularly as a result of the world-wide network of the WCTU.89 Her travels (a decade before Vida Goldstein's, Alice Henry's or Miles Franklin's) kept the Australian feminist community intimately in touch with 'the movement' overseas.90 Personal contact with Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Julia Ward Howe, May Wright Sewall, Lady Aberdeen, the Fawcett, Mrs Warner Snod, Carrie Chapman Catt and innumerable other women the

88 Daily Telegraph, 13 June 1891, p. 10.
world over, as well as the endless stream of pamphlets, newspapers, books and speeches she posted home, fed the eagerness and enthusiasm of Australian feminists.

In America, Windyeyr also added internationalism as another string of identity to her personal Amazonian bow. At the Congress she experienced a powerful sisterly solidarity. In a letter home, published in part in the *Dawn*, she described the experience of suddenly feeling part of the history and the united world of women:

As I waited after presenting my letters, the beauty of the building rushed upon me. The great names shone with the added lustre of combination, and the golden letters were dimmed [sic] as one thought of the inspiring ennobling influence they would have upon numbers of women. ... We had lovely music at Mrs Potter Palmer's reception in the assembly room on the Woman's Building. Imagine the Battle Hymn, a five [sic] soprano singing in good voice, and then a thousand people standing and singing the chorus.91

The Chicago Fair offered Margaret Windyeyr a very real sensation of connection with other politically or socially active women, and with the full force of idealised femininity, connections otherwise occluded by distance and the derogatory associations of colonialism. At the Fair, colonial women could share in the 'lustre of combination', and add their voice to an apparently immense new chorus hymning the 'power of womanhood'.

By the late nineteenth-century internationalism emerged as a powerful, universalising ideal, connected with progressive dreams for the coming century. As Lenore Coltheart has pointed out, internationalism could be understood as a multi-faceted term that embraced imperialism, colonialism, pacifism, and humanitarianism, 'creeping capitalism or radiant socialism'.92 Socialists and feminists alike drew on the imaginative power of internationalism to critique the current social order and establish alternative identities.

The World's Columbian Exposition provided two opportunities for women, largely deprived of real power in national politics, to establish both ephemeral and enduring internationalist feminist alternatives. Ironically, plans to translate the Woman's Building into a permanent Memorial Building faltered and failed.93 But it

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91 *Dawn*, August 1893, p. 10.
92 Lenore Coltheart, 'The world is my country: Internationalism and interpretation', paper given at the Research School for Social Sciences at the Australian National University, March 1993, pp. 2-3.
was the more intangible expressions of the World's Congress of Representative Women that were to find lasting form, in the International Council of Women it helped found, and in what became the dominant mode of internationalist feminist expression of the twentieth century: the women's meeting or gathering.94

At this moment of profound idealism, the rhetoric of internationalism and exhibition culture could be turned effectively to women's advantage. In Chicago, wrote Maude Howe Elliot, women 'tasted world citizenship'.95 The exhibition form's balancing of internationalism and nationalism, brotherhood and patriotism, difference and unity, was here used to an effective feminist end. The women involved with the Fair used and renegotiated exhibition ideology to suggest women's contribution to the coming age in a way that had not been previously possible. The women's involvement in the World's Columbian Exposition revealed the opportunities afforded by a feminist strategy of separation within integration, when historical circumstances were favourable. A moment of national celebration in 1876 had not allowed for such realisations at the Philadelphia Exhibition. The Chicago Fair represented a vision of America as a forward-looking nation rather than a reflective assessment of a century's progress. This perspective, combined with deeper, official inroads made by women into the organising body, created a real and an imagined space in which women, in the view of the Board of Lady Managers, could reinvent themselves and the 'world'.

While the exhibition form provided the vehicle for these changes, the Exposition's main lessons for the feminism of the future had to do with organisation and the strategic negotiation of separatism and integration. The President of the Board of Lady Managers, Bertha Palmer, described the body she headed as an innovative coup for women:

The powerful organization which we have secured extends around the world, and stands with perfect solidarity for the purpose of serving the interests of our sex and making the industrial conditions easier for them. We have such an organization as has never before existed of women for women.96

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95 Elliot, *Art and Handicraft in the Women's Building*, preface.
96 Elliot, *Art and Handicraft in the Women's Building*, p. 7.
Most feminist historians have focused on the Exposition as a pure expression of feminist separatism, but this approach misses the complex and dynamic interaction the Board envisaged between the women's exhibits and congresses and the Fair as a whole. The integration of recognisably female voices, work and exhibits into the entire event not only presented women with access to exhibition rhetoric and ideology, but also to real organisational power. The confident separateness Palmer described was rendered significant by the organisational recognition granted to the Board of Lady Managers, and the division's relationship to the rest of the enterprise. As Mary K. O. Eagle put it:

With united effort and singleness of purpose our Board has worked with the view of uplifting and benefiting all classes of women the world over. All the results of their labor they can not hope to see, but the children of to-day may behold it to-morrow. This department, providing for interchange of ideas and the close communion of thought, which always tend to overcome prejudice, and knit together the highest interests of humanity, will not be an unimportant factor when the grand result of the perfect whole is calculated.

At the World's Columbian Exposition, the expression 'woman's world' carried two meanings simultaneously. It meant both a separate place where women's experiences, work and interests took priority, and a future 'world' that emancipated women would help to create. Both worlds were most effectively articulated at the World's Congress of Representative Women held in parallel with the Fair.

The Exposition was the backdrop for several large congresses, created in the hope that the crowning glory of the event would not be 'material triumphs, industrial achievements and mechanical victories ... however magnificent', but something still 'higher and nobler': ideas. Accordingly, the motto of the World's Congress Auxiliary was 'Not Matter but Mind; not Things but Men'.

The congresses were created to complement the Exposition, but they would soon supersede the exhibition as the means of expressing the higher ideals of 'humanity'. Exhibitions had provided the nineteenth century with a tangible representation of the forces that, in the opinion of their champions, had brought the

97 Freedman, 'Separatism as strategy', pp. 513-5; Darney, Women and World's Fairs', p. 75; Cordato, Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere, p. 15.
98 Elliot, Art and Handicraft in the Women's Building, pp. 47, 145.
99 Elliot, Art and Handicraft in the Women's Building, p. 145.
100 Weimann, The Fair Women, p. 523.
world together and lifted it to a higher plane: manufacturing, imperialism, and commerce. These were concepts easily accompanied by recognisable physical or material symbols: bales of wool, silk shawls, or brass-barrelled revolvers. The exhibition dynamo turned, and turned them from the real into the ideal and back again.

The new internationalism was based on more shifting, more slippery, more ethereal and more intangible connections: citizenship, stocks, 'rights' and identities. It needed its own modes of expression and representation. Exhibitions would change dramatically in the new century, fragmenting and narrowing to become more abstracted, more commercial, and more specialised, the latter trend being one the organisers of women's exhibitions had helped to initiate. Their paradoxical idealisation of 'competition' and 'humanity' would be harnessed together by the reinvented Olympic Games, which, like the great congresses, used exhibitions as their launching pad in the years surrounding 1900. The idea of the international gathering, given such a substantial boost by the Chicago World's Congresses, would go on to dominate the international scene for the following century in much the same way as exhibitions had dominated the previous one hundred years.

The role played by women at these forums would prove to be a significant one. Perhaps, in the new century, the power of speech, the challenge of a raised

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woman's voice, carried more feminist possibility than the physical exposure of a woman's work. In a culture of consumption, of created nations and imagined communities, the radical possibilities of exhibiting were waning. For these wider cultural reasons, the gathering of women speakers that accompanied the Chicago Fair more fully anticipated the future than the Woman's Building that had brought it into being.

The World's Congress of Representative Women was created as a 'separate, exclusive congress of women'.\textsuperscript{103} It aimed to emphasise women's own conceptions of themselves and their place in the world as women. At other congresses 'women would appear, not in the role of women, so to speak, but in that of teacher, physician, preacher, author, stenographer, insurance agent, banker, archaeologist, philanthropist etc.'\textsuperscript{104} Women needed a forum to express, in their own voices, their 'dissatisfaction with any conception of themselves, with any position which implies their natural, necessary and, therefore, perpetual subordination to men.'\textsuperscript{105} Their different experience must be expressed at 'a memorial congress in which women might read their own interpretations of their natures, their own version of their rights, responsibilities, duties and destiny.'\textsuperscript{106} The fact that it was organised by a group of suffragists made the Congress more overtly politicised than the Woman's Building.\textsuperscript{107} But, like Sydney suffragists, these women were at pains to make clear that women's separateness did not imply their selfishness. The cover of the Congress's \textit{Historical Resume} was emblazoned with the motto: 'Not for herself, but for humanity.' The book's editor, May Wright Sewall, boasted that 'this Congress dates the hour of a new march -- not for divided womanhood against a separate manhood, but a new march for united, harmonious, onstepping humanity.'\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{103} Of course, the congress was part of a tradition of women's meetings that included the Seneca Falls Convention and a gathering of women at the Paris Exposition of 1889, but never before had something on this scale been attempted. See Sewall, \textit{The World's Congress of Representative Women}, p. 2; and Weimann, \textit{The Fair Women}, pp. 523-50.
\textsuperscript{104} Sewall, \textit{The World's Congress of Representative Women}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{105} Sewall, \textit{The World's Congress of Representative Women}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{106} Sewall, \textit{The World's Congress of Representative Women}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{107} Weimann, \textit{The Fair Women}, pp. 532ff.
\textsuperscript{108} Sewall, \textit{The World's Congress of Representative Women}, p. 18.
These ideological transformations had a special significance for a colonial Australian like Margaret Windeyer. It was the way in which the Exposition allowed for the balancing of identities, coupled with her being away from home, that gave Windeyer the leverage to transform what had been a disappointing and confusing episode for colonial women into a success for colonial feminists.

Jill Roe has noted that in the twentieth century, 'Australian women have oscillated between nationalist and internationalist strategies in an ongoing struggle for enhanced status.'\(^{109}\) Both Windeyer's nationalism and her desire to 'cultivate an international outlook' were stimulated by her journey through the United States and England in 1893-4, and both were intimately tied to her feminism and her suffragism.\(^{110}\) Windeyer constructed a dynamic relationship between the two identities, foreshadowing the feminist strategies of the twentieth century. She commented at the World's Congress of Representative Women:

> It seems to me that women have lain so much stress upon their own houses and housekeeping - the happy prosperous women who are surrounded by good, wise men - that they cannot conceive what it means to be in a house where the man is not good and not wise; and I think it would be the aim of every woman of every class to see that by her vote she can free her sisters from the bondage of custom and ignorance, and that there will come that hope in the extension of franchise to women, the inculcation of patriotism and that charity that the greater will absorb the less [sic]. The state will be before the family, the great nation of all, the world, will be before the state.\(^{111}\)

Both Margaret Windeyer and her mother Mary had a dynamic view of the relationship between women and the state. They argued that women entered into national life on the grounds that it was their proper sphere, of higher thought and noble ideals, but also that they would spiritualise and transform it because of their innate refinement. At the same time they believed a national and international focus would lead women as a whole out of narrowness and ignorance, away from the inhibiting effects of closed and constraining environments.

In the younger Windeyer's words at Chicago we can hear the reverberations of class and nationalism that had previously echoed through her mother's speeches at

\(^{109}\) Roe, 'What has nationalism offered Australian women?', p. 30.

\(^{110}\) The quote is from an obituary in Woman's World, 1 October 1939, in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X.

\(^{111}\) Sewall, The World's Congress of Representative Women, p. 438.
suffrage meetings, and comments on the EWI and the WWE. The Windeyers' shared feminism constructed a crucial national leadership role for genteel women, for women who were freed from the concerns of subsistence by financial security or independence, or new technologies. The vote would give women the tool they needed to improve themselves and the position of all women. Citizenship and a place in national life would expand all other women's horizons, and allow genteel white women to 'liberate' their oppressed or 'ignorant' sisters. In her interview with the English ladies' magazine the Queen, Margaret Windeyer touched on this theme in a discussion of domestic work, and extended it to embrace the notion of Empire. 'Australian women', she claimed, 'have far more leisure than they had even within my recollection'. This newly available time, she hoped, would be devoted to self-education and public work. But 'another result of result of this leisure' she added 'will be a stimulus, I trust, to the federation movement'.112 Her speech at the Congress was in many ways a paraphrase of her mother's at the foundation of the Womanhood Suffrage League of NSW in 1891. There Mary Windeyer had spoken of the need for women to

work out for themselves their own enfranchisement. ... I tell them that a little thought, a little unselfish consideration, will make women who possess ... all the indulgence love can suggest or wealth supply -- women whose higher sphere it is to breathe the air of freedom with the noble and the great-hearted -- they are bound to use their endeavour to redress the wrongs and disabilities women have hitherto endured, ... because it is for the public good that the franchise should be exercised, and that as citizens of a great young nation women should take part in the government, really broad based upon the people's will of the commonwealth of Australia.113

Both women sought to unite feminism with nationalism. To her mother's expression of a noble and ennobling genteel feminine leadership, and an imagined nation where women were enfranchised, Margaret Windeyer added what she had learnt and experienced at Chicago: the solidarity of an international sisterhood.

Windeyer's combination of patriotism and internationalism echoed the claims of her imperial sisters. Antoinette Burton has described how the British suffrage program was not only imperial but 'egalitarian and international as well'. Middle-class

112 Queen, The Lady's Newspaper, 23 June 1894, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
113 Daily Telegraph, 13 June 1891, p. 10.
British feminism was 'grounded in the conviction that women's oppression was universal, that it transcended national and racial boundaries, and that women the world over were united by the similarity of their condition.' Suffragists 'articulated an international feminist vision whose promise of universal sisterhood came into constant conflict with British feminists' determination to lead the world of women to freedom.' 114 Windeyer shared in this vision as a representative of a British colony, but she was even more eager to place Australian women in the vanguard of progress and change, keen to suggest their unique qualities and precocious abilities, and proud to champion the social advancement of the entire continent.

This was possible precisely because Windeyer was not in Australia. At the Exposition, Windeyer could escape the negative atmosphere of the colony and remake herself, her 'country', her woman's movement, and her nation's future within a new set of images and ideals, and a new internationalist feminist framework. In America she was free from the constraints, both personal and cultural, of being in the colony, and of being a 'colonist'. Like the colony too, she had the chance to step out of her mother's shadow. She could reinvent herself because no one there knew her, and she could re-imagine her 'home' because there was no one to contradict her. Or next to no one.

Windeyer wasn't the only Australian at Chicago, but she was the figure who engaged with and captured the imagination and mood of the event. In America she happily embraced celebrity status. She was the only official representative from the only Australian colony with a significant exhibit at the Fair. Fellow colonial feminist Catherine Helen Spence was also appointed officially but she did not have the weight of the combined NSW representation behind her, and did not attract the same interest at the Fair.115 She was the same generation as Margaret's mother, and did not entirely approve of the young woman's approach or demeanour. Although they met repeatedly in the US and the UK, sometimes speaking together on the same platform, and

although Spence had a longstanding association with Mary Windeyer, Catherine and Margaret did not seem to hit it off personally. Certainly they did not form a united 'Australian' bloc. In her diary, Spence commented 'Miss Windeyer is rather loud - it is unfortunate she has such an aggressive tone'. The comment suggested a clash of personality and style, but generational difference was also in play here. Spence was a feminist in the mould of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: dignified, matronly and white-haired. Even though Spence characterised herself as a New Woman in 1905, Margaret Windeyer nevertheless represented a different, new kind of feminism to her own. Indeed it might be said that Windeyer's feminism was in the process of being affirmed and reinvented as she and Spence interacted.

But while she expressed something of the future of feminism in America in 1893-4, Margaret Windeyer also represented much of Spence's feminism too. She had translated her mother's words into the international arena, and added the new gloss of internationalism, as well as the singular touches of her own personality. Margaret Windeyer was not a Vida Goldstein or a Miles Franklin, who would follow her over the sea. She was a unique blend of the Australian girl with the Australian woman, the Australian lady, and the nationalist and internationalist feminist. She emerged fully into being at Chicago, in a narrow window of imminence, when colonialism offered feminists the moral lever of civilising femininity, and connection with innovation and freshness, the coming nation offered feminists the possibilities both of cultural identity and political power, and a new internationalism offered feminists sisterly solidarity, and an ideal of woman-forged future.

Windeyer left the Fair at its close in October and continued her travels through the United States, Canada, and England, speaking to women's clubs and suffrage societies along the way. In July 1894 she represented Australia at a meeting in London.

116 Catherine Helen Spence, Diary 1894, private collection, entry for 8/7/1894. I am grateful to Susan Magarey for providing me with this reference.
117 Magarey, Unbridling the Tongues of Women, ch. 8.
to support the proposal for an Imperial Exhibition of Women's Work, inspired by the showing at Chicago.\textsuperscript{118}

Meanwhile, Renwick was left to dismantle the NSW exhibits and pack them ready for their return. Despite the best hopes of Committee XII, few of the women's exhibits were sold. So Ada Rohl's swansdown muff was repacked, along with Daisy Dobbin's bookcover and Sophie Steffano's bullion-work Australian coat of arms. Mrs Carl Fisher's framed memorial to the EWI returned to Australia shores, but her husband, NSW Commissioner Dr Carl Fischer, did not. He died in Chicago and was buried there, in the Oakwood Cemetery, which allowed Renwick to add some observations about American burial practices to his final report.\textsuperscript{119}

In a farcical finale to what had been a triumphant appearance at Chicago, the NSW exhibits too nearly remained in the United States. They were seized by legal officers three days after the Exposition closed. Sells Brothers Circus was claiming $50,000 damages against the colony for injuries sustained to show horses in NSW four years earlier. Renwick faced the bizarre prospect of a court battle, which the colony eventually won, freeing the exhibits to be shipped back to Sydney.\textsuperscript{120}

Windeyer returned home a year after her mute charges. When she left NSW the image of the 'Australian girl' was in the ascendant. When she came back the 'New Woman' had preceded her across the sea. On her departure, unmarried at age 26 she still qualified to be called a 'girl', on her return, still unmarried at 28, she entered more difficult territory.

Windeyer immediately set about founding the National Council of Women of NSW in order to maintain the international feminist ties she had established while overseas. The Council represented a 'federation' of local and Australian women's groups, a feminist alternative to the proposed national Federation that in 1896 was

\textsuperscript{118} Proposed Imperial Exhibition of Women's Work, Report of a Meeting Held on July 10 1894 at the Society of Arts, [n.p.d.].

\textsuperscript{119} Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 301-2; see also Report of the President, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{120} Report of the Executive Commissioner, p. 300-301. The exhibits of women's work returned to NSW that had been 'purchased at a cost to the Commission' were sold at a public auction, see Report of the President, p. 23.
waverering on the issue of the women’s vote, and a link to a greater world of womanhood.\textsuperscript{121} She presented lantern slide shows on the Exposition in country towns and at the Loan Exhibition she helped to organise in aid of the Women’s College, dissolving images of Russian jewels into photographs of the giant redwoods of California.\textsuperscript{122}

In Chicago Windeyer had been at the centre of a series of metamorphoses. Following her experiences at the Fair, her personal journey too turned in an entirely new direction. At Chicago she had met and befriended Melvil Dewey, inventor of the Dewey decimal system and head of the New York State Library School. In 1903 he and Mrs Dewey wrote to her, recalling that time: 'we will remember you, dear heart, for 1000 years.'\textsuperscript{123} The effects of the meeting would be long-lasting for them both. Dewey was an advocate of women librarians. Library work was an occupation ideally suited to Margaret Windeyer’s wide-ranging interests, love of reading, and passion for communication.

In 1893 the idea of librarianship as a possible career was planted in her mind. In 1897 she was again in England planning to attend the International Council of Women’s triennial meeting when her father died unexpectedly in Italy. Not long before, he had given her his blessing (after a long period of resistance) to her plan to become a librarian. In 1898 she arrived in New York State and began her library training. After graduating in August 1899, she gained further experience at a number of East coast American libraries including the Library of Congress [Figure 7.10]. Dewey’s letter of reference expressed his ‘unusual pleasure’ at being able to commend Windeyer to any employer ‘seeking to add a strong, enthusiastic personality to the staff’.\textsuperscript{124}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{121} National Council of Women of NSW, \textit{Report of a Meeting Held 26 June 1896}, [National Council of Women of NSW], Sydney, 1896.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} See programme and newspaper cuttings in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X, and \textit{Sydney Morning Herals}, 1 June 1895, p. 10.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} Melvil Dewey to Margaret Windeyer, [1903], in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Letter of Introduction from Melvil Dewey, 23 August 1899, in Windeyer Family Scrapbook, ML *D159.
\end{itemize}
Australian Federation was accomplished while she was in another hemisphere. In 1901 her family telegraphed to say that positions were available at the State Library of NSW. Desperate to return home and sit for the special Public Service entrance examination, she hired (at a cost of $397.30) a private train to catch the last steamer for Sydney. Telegrams flew between New York State and San Francisco, where the Sierra was moored in the bay. Could the ship be held if double the fare was paid? Could another boat be hired to catch it after it had sailed? Pasted in her scrapbook is the ticket for the train ride where she was the only passenger.\textsuperscript{125}

In July of 1901 she was appointed as a cataloguer, part of the first intake of women staff-members to the Library, with special responsibility to introduce the Dewey decimal system. In 1910 she took up the position of assistant cataloguer to the Mitchell Library collection, but was repeatedly passed over for further promotion.\textsuperscript{126} She retired in 1926 after 25 years of employment. Over that time she continued her involvement in feminist activities as an active member of both the National Council of Women and the Professional Women Workers Association. She also helped establish the Kindergarten Union, and the first children's libraries in NSW.\textsuperscript{127}

Those who worked with Margaret Windeyer in the 1920s recall her as a slightly terrifying figure with a booming voice [Figure 7.11]. She had once taken singing lessons, she told a reporter in her later years, but gave them up after her teacher described her voice 'as something akin to a mighty typhoon being squeezed through a keyhole'.\textsuperscript{128} Windeyer herself always resisted having her own great energy

\textsuperscript{125} The San Francisco Chronicle takes up the story of the 'Wild Flight of a Special': 'Two minutes before ten o'clock yesterday morning, the hour at which the steamer Sierra was scheduled to sail for Australia, a carriage dashed down to the Oceanic dock, and a young lady ... hurried up the gang plank of the steamer and threw herself tired and panting, into a seat on the deck. All night she had raced against time in a special train over the sage brush plains of Nevada, up the slope of the Sierra and down the other, and then down the Sacramento Valley at breakneck speed, in the hope of getting aboard the Sierra before it steamed away on the long trip to the antipodes.' San Francisco Chronicle, 10 May 1901, in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X.


\textsuperscript{128} See unattributed clipping in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X.
compressed through one narrow channel. Throughout her life she exhibited a zeal for the universal: for the great questions of national government, for a World's Fair and an international parliament of women, and finally for the all-encompassing breadth of library work.

Windeyer's special contribution to the Australian women's movement was to bring together federalism and feminism, and to help connect the national and the international personally and politically. Her legacy to feminist history was both a practical and a visionary one. Working for a quarter of a century at one of the central repositories for Australian historical material, Margaret Windeyer ensured that a large number of women's history sources were preserved for future historians. She donated or encouraged the donation of her own (as well as her family and feminist friends') papers and collections to the library where many of us use and consult them for our own work. Our appreciation of feminist history would not be so rich had Windeyer not visited the great World's Fair held in Chicago in 1893, fully determined to 'assert her independence'.

Margaret Windeyer embodied, created and benefited from the ideas about women and women's work promoted at women's exhibitions. She was living proof of how the messages and ideologies they promoted could apply to a real person. In her own life Windeyer combined the ideals of independence, work and gentility seen at the EWI, with the feminism and 'Australianness' of the representation to the Chicago Fair. The transformative powers of exhibitions acted on her life as well as on the larger national and international lives she herself hoped to influence.

But while she represented so perfectly much of what makes exhibitions so significant to the history of Australian women, Windeyer was also unique. When she died in 1939, the obituary in her church paper noted:

She will be greatly missed in the large circle of her friends ... not only for her fine intellect, but much more for her large and generous heart, eager spirit of service, and the staunch faithfulness that was one of her leading characteristics. Her original outlook, quaint expression of thought, and keen sense of humour were all most
endearing. There was only one Margaret Windeyer and she has gone, but she has left an inspiring memory which will not readily fade. 129

Her youthfulness in an aging feminist community, her individualistic outlook and approach, her singularity and her independence: all of these things made her special. That Chicago was the moment that crystallised her identity can be clearly seen in her scrapbook, loving prepared for her by her sister Jane from the photographs, cards and mementos she kept from her journey, small exhibits to materialise an enlarged life. 130

For her, the World’s Columbian Exposition was more than a material or an ideological triumph. It was a moment of vision and clarity, a moment of self-creation and self-consolidation.

At the Fair, Margaret Windeyer embraced and represented both the old world and the new. She was a sign of the socially advanced and highly personalised nature of feminism in NSW. She was at once a confident colonial and a youthful citizen of an imagined nation. As well as proving she had fully absorbed her cultural inheritance, she was a portent of things to come. She perfectly symbolised the colony itself, and its relationship to the ‘mother country’, becoming in a moment of self-realisation less a daughter than a sister, or possibly both at once. Like colonialism when it is figured in relation to the apparent inevitability of nationalism, she exists in a curious historical limbo. Like the exhibitions she created she appears idiosyncratic and forgotten. In feminist history she is invisible because she has slipped between feminist moments.

Windeyer’s role at the meeting held in 1902 to celebrate the enfranchisement of women in NSW was emblematic of her place in the history of feminism. Our main account of the meeting comes from Gertrude O’Connor, daughter of Louisa Lawson. As O’Connor tells it, Rose Scott and others had monopolised the platform and the credit for the victory, and ignored Lawson, who sat in the audience.

Mother was quietly leaving the hall to go home and stopped for a few moments to chat to Mrs Windeyer at the door when the audience called for her. She took stage fright and was going to bolt but Miss Windeyer had the presence of mind to deprive

129 St John’s Darlinghurst The Monthly Paper, September 1939, in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X.
130 See Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X.
her of her bag and cloak and persuaded her to face the music. She was cheered from
door to stage ... as the Mother of Womanhood Suffrage in NSW.131

Scott herself had asked the meeting to be gracious and unified in victory:
The price of Freedom is always sacrifice. Hope deferred hath often made the heart
sick. There have been days of despair, and hours of heartache, and worse still, a
knowledge of human nature one would rather have been without ... let us realise how
wonderful is the Flower of Freedom which has blossomed for the women of
Australia this year! Are we to rush around like so many puny children, crying out,
one 'it is mine, I saw it first!', another, 'it is mine, I touched it first'. Oh foolish and
blind! a thousand unseen influences have gone to sustain those hidden roots.132

Mary and Margaret Windeyer were not on the stage that day, although they had both
made significant contributions to the suffrage struggle. Neither seems to have
clamoured for recognition. Instead, Margaret conveyed Lawson - who she had known
for twenty years, with whom she had been a member of the Dawn Club, and whose
Dawn exhibit she had taken to America - to the stage and general acclaim. Such an
action was entirely in keeping with her role as chaperone to the exhibits of the women
of NSW sent to the World's Columbian Exposition. Windeyer was there to bring to
light an obscured woman's contribution, on hand to usher in a new stage of feminist
history in a bold but ultimately self-deprecating way. In much the same way, the
women's exhibitions she had helped to create represent one of the 'thousand unseen
influences' that nourished and sustained the 'hidden roots' of Australian feminism, a
movement that would bloom continually into the new century and beyond.

132 Rose Scott letter about the public demonstration held to show gratitude to Sir John See and Sir
William Lyne for the enfranchisement of women, Rose Scott papers, ML MSS 38/38. Quoted in
Figure 7.1

*Margaret Windeyer in Boston, 1893.*
Mitchell Library Small Picture File - Portraits.
(a) Aerial illustration of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893.
From *Chicago and World's Columbian Exposition*, album of views in collection of Martha Sear.

(b) World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893. Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, viewed across the Grand Basin.
Exterior of the NSW Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893.
NSW exhibit in the Agriculture Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893.
NSW exhibit in the Fisheries Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893.
Figure 7.7 (a) and (b)

(a) Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893.

(b) Plan of the ground floor of the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893, showing NSW Court.
Figure 7.8

NSW Court, Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893.
Figure 7.9

*The opening of the World's Congress of Representative Women, Chicago 1893.*
Margaret Windeyer at work in a United States library, c. 1900.
Photograph in Margaret Windeyer Scrapbook, ML 4653X.
Figure 7.11

*Margaret Windeyer c. 1920, by Sydney photographer May Moore.*
Mitchell Library Small Picture File - Portraits.
Conclusion

Finally, portraits of women who have left their mark on the world remind us of many efforts for the progress of Society, which can neither be engraved nor embroidered, in stone or tissue, but in the fabrics of Society and the memories of history.¹

From the introduction of the Catalogue of the Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries, Bristol 1885.

Hanging in the wood-panelled vestibule of the Women's College at the University of Sydney is a painting of a woman knitting [Figure C.1]. She is an old woman, in widow's black. A jet mourning brooch at her throat clasps together two great swathes of white lace. Her head is turned away, she looks good-humoured, but tired. Her expression suggests her thoughts are elsewhere, freed by the familiar rhythm of fingers nudging needles.

On first impression it seems the painting is intended as a reminder to young undergraduates about the dignity of old age, and of ages past. Closer inspection reveals another story.

This is a portrait of Mary Windeyer. It was commissioned by her family around 1900 from the artist Ethel Stephens. It hung in the family home until 1961 when it was bequeathed to the college by Richard Windeyer QC, in memory of both his father's and mother's contributions to its foundation.

In a discussion of the portrait in Heritage: The National Women's Art Book, Joan Kerr and Angela Philp argue that the 'disjunction between the painting's original and present location makes it appear oddly insensitive.' The 'proper' place for the painting, the place for which it was created, was 'materialising tradition and security'

¹ Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries Bristol, 1885, Catalogue, p. 8.
in the middle-class drawing room. The elderly woman knitting is 'unrecognisable as
the dedicated worker for women's suffrage, education and welfare that history knows
as Lady Windeyer', a woman who had asserted that women's work 'went beyond the
product of the needle', a woman who was 'known precisely for not knitting'.

In this thesis I have sought to make this image 'recognisable' to our modern
gaze, to reconcile the feminist with the woman knitting.

At the women's exhibitions of 1888 and 1892-3 Mary Windeyer was both an
exhibitor and an organiser. The exhibitions offered her and many other women a space
to reveal the range, merit and value of women's work, to make the invisible visible
and the intangible material. Exhibitions allowed the ideals and the ideologies of
femininity, colonialism, federalism and feminism a real, if ephemeral, existence.
Individual objects embodied fragile and imagined identities, collections of objects
represented ideals of collectivity, and comparisons between objects opened the
possibility for both distinction and discrimination.

The movement of women's work from the 'private' spheres of the home and
the factory into the glare of public display, like the relocation of Windeyer's portrait,
was not a simple progression. The women's exhibition as a form had to negotiate the
denigration, sexualisation and trivialisation attached to the bazaar, and the paradox of
displaying gentility. It sought to connect the transcendent power of the exhibition,
rooted in capitalist imperialism, to the transformative moral authority of genteel
femininity, located outside the marketplace. This was a marriage as full of possibility
as it was fraught with problems. Exhibitions did not prove to be the 'common neutral
ground' of M. L. Manning's description; instead their masculine machinery had to be
modified and adapted to fit women's activities and interests, and colonial conditions.

Exhibitions run by women in the nineteenth century foregrounded the creativity
of women. Their development was in itself a creative act. Fair women, white-skinned
genteel women, crafted fair women's worlds: exclusively feminine spaces where
women's work, claims to independence and visions for the future took centre stage.

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Out of a show of universal femininity, they believed, would flow sisterly solidarity. But while a study of women's exhibitions might be able reconcile the feminist and her fancywork, it proved harder for women like Windeyer to span the gap between the lady and the laundress, the suffragist and seamstress. Women's exhibitions brought women of all classes into contact with one another in a new way, one that extended and transgressed the more traditional relations of giver and recipient of charity, or mistress and servant. But wider realities tarnished exhibition ideals. Aboriginal women appeared as exhibitors whose work symbolised a productive feminine past, and as exhibits themselves simply by virtue of their attendance. Working women, sensitive to the sometimes patronising messages of the exhibition organisers, were involved both as active participants and as victims of the ignorance and bias of their richer 'sisters'. Their champions, the colonial press, took advantage of the displays to mock and diminish the colonial elite's feminine representatives, and eventually, too, the feminist movement which emerged from its elevated ranks.

Women's exhibitions were intended as portraits of womanhood in the colonies. They also contributed to the image of feminists and feminism. By drawing a picture of the colonial woman as industrious, creative, and civilising, colonial feminists hoped to paint themselves as competent, socially responsible, and dedicated to the 'greater good'. Framing this canvas with the appointment of a woman Commissioner, and hanging it in the Women's Building at the Chicago World's Fair, brought unexpected recognition and acclaim, and revealed new colours and meanings muted in the original work. It also helped highlight and unify the different faces of the old woman and the New Woman, the lady and the Australian girl, whilst presaging a new world, where Australia was a nation, feminism was reconceived in the wake of suffrage success, and the power of the exhibition dynamo waned.

Women's exhibitions did not disappear in the wake of these changes, they were adapted and transformed by a new generation of women. The career of the woman who painted Windeyer's likeness, Ethel Stephens, embraced aspects of that transition. As a genteel amateur, and student of Julian Ashton, she had exhibited
works at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886 and at the EWI. By the time of the
Columbian Exposition she had become a professional painter, and shunned the idea of
displaying her work in the Woman’s Building. But despite her professionalism and
connections with major art institutions and societies, she was forced to confront the
expectations loaded onto a ‘woman painter’. Her flower paintings, examples of a
properly feminine genre, were much admired, while in the more masculine field of
portraiture her work was coolly received. A growing recognition of the influence of
gender on the reception of art led her to initiate new alliances and modes of display. In
the following years she continued painting, but also took on the role of organising
exhibits of the work of women artists. She became the director of the NSW fine art
section of the First Australian Exhibition of Women’s Work held in Melbourne in
1907.4

The First Australian Exhibition of Women’s Work was really the third
women’s exhibition in Australia, but it was the first held following the creation of
Australia as a nation. The emphasis was significant. The Exhibition was organised by
a committee of prominent men with the support of the new Commonwealth
government. It was overwhelmingly intended as an expression of Federalist sentiment.
The women of Australia were asked to materialise national unity. The prize-winning
Exhibition poster depicted the States as young maidens dancing all in a row [Figure
C.2]. In truth the display exposed the depth and persistence of colonial loyalties.
Women were asked to incorporate native flowers into their work. When the results
were gathered together it became abundantly clear that women had deliberately chosen
to represent the emblem of their State.

The Exhibition saw the appropriation of feminist rhetoric into the language of
state and nation, but the simultaneous narrowing and devaluing of women’s work
[Figure C.3]. The self-consciousness of earlier displays was externalised and recast

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3 Stephens exhibited a portrait and a painting of peonies, see World’s Columbian Exposition Chicago
433.
4 See Kerr, Heritage, pp. 40, 455.
into the stated object of the event: to 'raise the standard ... of efficiency of women in
Australia'.5 Maternalism dominated the Exhibition in a way it never had before, and a
new strain of commercialism, along with a growing separation between amateur and
professional work, entered into the exhibit. The Exhibition ode was a very different
hymn to that sung at the opening of the EWI:

Great is the glory of your heritage,
Greater the SIN if ye misuse such power,
Be yours to clothe fair dreams in fairer deeds,
To follow on where lowliest duty leads,
To spend for God, home, country every power.6

Of course, many of these emphases were shared by the contemporary women's
movement. Indeed they had been presaged by the Windeyers at Chicago in 1892. But
in the new Exhibition context they were stripped of their feminist meaning. The
display was declared 'non-political' and space was refused to women's groups and
suffragist organisations, then agitating for the extension of the franchise to women in
Victoria.7

By the early twentieth century the woman 'question' had resoundingly become
the woman 'problem'. From 1909 a series of 'What To Do With Our Girls' exhibitions were held in Sydney by the newly-formed Girl's Realm Guild, proposing
a range of respectable occupations for young women, from stenography, nursing and
teaching, to production of cold cream.8 The exhibitions were also fund-raising events,
and in display style closely resembled bazaars. In 1916 their organisers took up a new
theme, and the 'What To Do With Our Girls' exhibition became the 'Women's Work
in Wartime Exhibition', embracing sock-knitting drives and other charitable relief for
the troops.9

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6 Sydney Morning Herald, 23 October 1907, p. 9.
7 Sear, Raising the Standard, ch. 3.
8 What To Do With Our Girls Exhibitions were held in Sydney in 1909, 1911 and 1913 see What To
Do With Our Girls, Town Hall Sydney April 21st to 28th 1909, G. B. Phillip & Son, Sydney, 1909; What To
Do With Our Girls, Town Hall Sydney April 26th to May 6th 1911, [n.p.d.], Sydney, 1911; What To
Do With Our Girls The Third Unique Demonstrational Exhibition and Bazaar of
Employments and Hobbies for Girls, Official Catalogue, [n.p.d.], 1913; Guild Gazette, 16 June 1908,
123-7; 16 October 1913, pp. 4-9; and Daily Telegraph, 28 April 1911, p. 4, 23 April 1909, p. 4.
9 See Women's Work in Wartime Daily News, ML; Guild Gazette, 9 October 1916, pp. 3-11; and
Farran, Emily' in Kerr, Heritage, pp. 246-7, 348.
The First World War blew apart the Victorian exhibition as a form, fragmenting and redistributing its ideology and its technologies of display. The women's exhibition too was rocked and rearranged by the shockwaves from the blast. After the war ended, displays that had previously been about finding women paid work outside the domestic sphere finally metamorphosed completely into the motherhood, baby and home exhibitions of the 1920s.\textsuperscript{10}

Change continued throughout the following eighty years. Exhibitions of women's art emerged at regular intervals, each claiming to be the 'first' ever held.\textsuperscript{11} In the 1970s and 80s, feminist reshaping of exhibiting spaces in museums and art galleries saw the creation of exhibitions about women’s work in both a social history and decorative arts context.\textsuperscript{12} Through it all the agricultural show has endured as the pre-eminent space for the competitive display of 'traditional' women's work.

But the women's exhibition is still very much with us. Renewed and reinvented it continues to reflect women's interests and aspirations, as well as their social performance. In 1998, the Olympic City played host to the women's exhibition's newest incarnation, the Sydney Women's Expo, a commercial enterprise that filled the Exhibition Centre at Darling Harbour with display booths, lectures, and demonstrations promoting women's health, careers, financial management, fashion, and cosmetic surgery [Figure C.4].\textsuperscript{13}

Now imagine yourself looking at a display of women's work. In front of you is a woman standing beside a sewing machine. To your right is an exhibit of washing and ironing, to your left a display of seeds and a child's schoolbook. Over your right shoulder is a showcase of gloves and hat decorations. Further along is a shelf of knitted tea cosies, a whitework table cloth, a sampler dated 1847. Behind you is a

\textsuperscript{10} The Ideal Home Exhibition was held in Sydney in 1915, 1917 and 1919 saw the city host National Economy Exhibitions. The Mothercraft and Child Welfare Exhibition was held in 1920, and the Household Management Exhibition in 1921. See Sear, Raising the Standard, ch. 3, conclusion.

\textsuperscript{11} Kerr, 'National women's art exhibitions: Three firsts', pp. 5-9.

\textsuperscript{12} Anderson, 'Engendering public culture', pp. 1-18.

\textsuperscript{13} See Sunday Telegraph, 2 August 1998, pp. 20-1.
well-stocked kitchen bench, where an absent cook has left a pile of chopped suet. Beside you is a case of hand-sewn shirts, hanging clean and crisp in each pleat.

Are you at the EWI in Sydney in 1888? Or at the Woman's Work Exhibition of 1892? No, you are in the Powerhouse Museum in 1999. The exhibition is 'Never done: Women's work in the home', one of the museum's permanent galleries, and a late twentieth-century feminist-inspired statement about the value and hidden history of women's work.14

Today, it is the lost heritage of women's labour, and the invisible contribution women have made to Australian history, that we seek to expose by exhibition. It is the unworded proclamation that the quilt, the collar and the tea cosy have to make about the past that we now revere and display.

In the famed feminist 'forgetting' there is a temptation perhaps to think that we are the first generation to have valued women's craft beyond personal meaning or association, to have reclaimed women's creativity from anonymity, neglect, disregard and disdain, and to have legitimised women's work through public display. We are not the first. What we do, in museums, in archaeology and history, itself has a history. We have antecedents, foremothers, who have engaged in 'politics by exhibition' before us.15

The ephemerality of women's exhibitions, and the temporality of women's work, may be two of the reasons for our forgetfulness. But could their impermanence also hold the key to their significance? In her assessment of the National Women's Art Exhibition held throughout Australia in 1995, Heather Johnston suggests that it may be the transient nature of women's work that makes its display a feminist act, and asks if the 'cyclical exhibition and neglect of women's art serve to undermine male ideologies in more subtle but also more effective ways than the public equilibrating of women's and men's art?' The significance of the exhibitions of women's art, she

14 See Stephen, Never Done.
15 The expression comes from Votes for Women: Women's Social and Political Union, The Stall at Earl's Court, undated flyer at the Fawcett Library advertising the WSPU stall at the Earl's Court Exhibition, [p. 1].
suggests, rests not only in the re-exposure of the objects to public view, but in the
'documentation, discussion, argument and memory' of the displays.¹⁶

One might ask the same question about exhibitions of women's work in
colonial Australia. They were fleeting and ephemeral. Much of what was put on show
was fragile, perishable. It has not survived in material form today. But it was the very
intangibility of the exhibitions and the work they exposed that made them both
influential and invisible. Although statements in things, above all they were moments
of realisation and illumination of a kind only possible through the exhibition form. It
was the exhibition's ideological dynamic, its ability to give the insubstantial substance
that made it a space for women to represent and reinvent themselves. By documenting,
discussing, arguing about and remembering women's exhibitions, we create a new
space where we can do the same. It will be our continued historical engagement with
exhibitions of women's work and the women who created them that will allow their
feminism and ours to be not merely evanescent, but incandescent.

In her 1892 photographic portrait Mary Windeyer looks straight ahead, into the
camera's barrel. The flash of Laura Praeger's lamp illuminates a woman in direct
engagement with the woman question, president of both the Womanhood Suffrage
League and the NSW Woman's Work Committee to the Chicago Fair, and a prime-
mover in numerous other schemes for the advancement of women. The heavier
brushstrokes of the later painting mass together to depict a more distant gaze.

While we are used to the bold, unblinking, vision of feminism of the first
portrait, we are less familiar with the wordless, imaginative and creative reverie of the
second. We have forgotten the politics of the perfectly-peeled potato, the penny pen-
wiper, and the possum-fur glove. Gathered together in women's exhibitions, their
'unworded proclamation' was for the urgent realisation of female potential. As
Windeyer's far away look suggests, women's traditional work offered a 'thinking

¹⁶ Heather Johnston, 'A matter of time', in Kerr and Holder, Past Present, p. 45. See also Sally
Alexander, Feminism: History: Repetition - Some notes and queries', in her Becoming a Woman, pp.
243-8; and Catriona Moore, Dissonance: Feminism and the Arts 1970-90, Allen & Unwin in
association with Artspace, Sydney, 1994, introduction.
space' for feminism, a space to recollect the past, consider the present, and imagine the future. Exhibitions of women's work gave both substance and form to these unspoken thoughts, invisible threads and hidden dreams.
Figure C.1

*Portrait of Mary Windeyer c. 1900, by Ethel Stephens.*
Collection of the Women’s College, University of Sydney. Reproduced from Joan Kerr (ed.),
*Heritage: The National Women’s Art Book*. Art & Australia/Craftsman House, Roseville East, 1995,
plate 61.
Helen L. Atkinson, poster for the First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work, Melbourne 1907.

'Sudden dwindle in the importance of man in Melbourne this week!' From the Bulletin, 31 October 1907, p. 16.
EXHIBITORS WANTED FOR

THE SYDNEY WOMEN'S EXPO

Supporting Breast Cancer Research

AN INTERACTIVE EXHIBITION COVERING ALL AREAS RELATING TO WOMEN.

Topics will include health, fitness, sports, financial advice, careers, support groups, art, craft, beauty, haircare, fashion, jewellery, psychics, photography, travel and much more.

JOIN LEADING PERSONALITIES
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BOOK NOW FOR YOUR EXHIBITION SPACE ON (02) 9362 0278.

Advertisement for the Sydney Women's Expo.
From the Sydney Morning Herald, 1998.
Appendix
Exhibitions of Women's Work 1860-1999

International exhibitions with women's work buildings or sections

1876 Philadelphia - Centennial International Exhibition
1879 Sydney - Sydney International Exhibition
1880 Melbourne - Melbourne International Exhibition
1884-5 New Orleans - World's Industrial and Cotton Exhibition
1886 Manchester - Manchester Exhibition
1886 Edinburgh - International Exhibition of Industry, Science and Art
1888 Melbourne - Centennial International Exhibition
1888 Glasgow - Glasgow International Exhibition
1888 London - Irish Exhibition
1893 Chicago - World's Columbian Exposition
1897 London - Victorian Era Exhibition
1904 St Louis - Louisiana Purchase Exhibition
1908 London - Franco-British Exhibition
1924 London - British Empire Exhibition
1938 Glasgow - Empire Exhibition

Women's work exhibitions

1860s [Vienna]
1885 Bristol - Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries
1887 Brighton - Exhibition of Women's Arts and Industries
1888 Sydney - Exhibition of Women's Industries
1889 Brighton - Exhibition of Women's Arts and Industries
1892 Sydney - Woman's Work Exhibition
1895 Copenhagen - Danish Exhibition of Women's Industries
1895 Boston - Independent Woman Voters' Fair
1896 [Berlin]
1898 Gravenhage [Gravenzande, Netherlands] - Nationale Tentoonstelling van Vrouwenarbeid
1900 London - The Woman's Exhibition
1900 Vienna - Women's Industrial Exhibition
1902 New York - New York Woman's Exhibition
1904 Berlin [?] [1905?]
1900s Paris - 'Gaulois' Exhibition
1907 Sydney, Hobart, Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane, culminating in Melbourne - First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work
1909 London - Votes for Women Exhibition or The Woman's Exhibition
1912 Berlin - [Women's Work Exhibition]
1912 Chelsea - International Suffragette Fair
1914 London - Woman's Kingdom Exhibition
1925 Chicago - Woman's World's Fair
1927 Chicago - Woman's World's Fair
1981 Brighton - World of Women '81
1998 Sydney and Melbourne - Women's Expos
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