MELBOURNE'S WOOLLEN MILLS IN 1930
ALL WOOL AND A YARD WIDE: VICTORIA'S WOOL TEXTILE INDUSTRY,
1900 to 1930.

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ALL WOOL AND A YARD WIDE: VICTORIA'S WOOL TEXTILES INDUSTRY
1900-1930.

ABSTRACT

The years between Federation and the great depression were profoundly important ones both for Victoria and its wool textiles industry. Nationhood, war, the booming twenties and the sombre years to follow all affected people's expectations and perceptions of themselves. These expectations and perceptions were expressed in the clothes they wore and the fabrics and yarns they required for other ends, and thereby the mills which made these things were also changed.

By the end of these thirty years mill owners had combined to become a unified industry. They had successfully worked to defeat the wholesalers and gain government backing to allow them control of the Australian market. They had dominated the wages board and come to grips with arbitration. They had standardized ranges and sizes and worked out agreements on minimum pricing, a useful preliminary for the war effort, and successfully clothed and equipped the famous army of the proud new nation. The industry's leaders had experienced the censure of the Prices Commission and the approbation of the Bureau of Commerce, built dozens of new mills, branched out into new products and new technology and along the way, made a great deal of money.

In social terms, the industry had largely come to grips with the influx of young women into the mills after 1906 and had, through
wages board determinations, narrowed and refined the general prohibitions on long hours and dangerous work for women and girls laid out in Factories and Shops acts. Now dependant on continuing supplies of both skilled and unskilled cheap female labour, managers expanded on their traditional duty of care towards their "girls" and worked to attract and keep such workers. When war and post-war profits began to pour in, most mills began to return to their people some of the benefits in the form of bonuses, modern social amenities and worker welfare schemes.

Mill buildings changed too in this time as the relationships between location, layout, power systems and plant altered. Now a mill could no longer automatically be recognized for what it was by its location on a river or its boxy shape, though it continued to be at the centre of its town's economy and social life. Among those things which defined the mill and which did not profoundly change in these years was the dynastic and patriarchal family model by which mill people made sense of their private world of work. Management, Men and Girls had been the traditional components of the mill in Britain, North America and Australia in the nineteenth century and all three divisions were still clearly visible in the Victoria of 1930. What was changing by this time was the balance created by the daily enactment of the rights and duties of the three parties, the proper behaviors appropriate to the various positions in the family. As the workforce grew, managers became distanced from worker. Foremen and assistant managers assumed more managerial responsibility, the union took over many of his welfare duties and all of those associated with the workers side of industrial relations. Managers became increasingly unlikely to meet their employees face to face or to know their separate circumstances, and when tensions grew in times of financial difficulty in the mill, the traditional route to the
manager's door grew more difficult to travel for humbler workers. Only when the dispute grew critical, as it did at Warrnambool in 1926/7 was the manager now called in, but as a last resort instead of a first port-of-call as he once had been. At Warrnambool, Ballarat and finally amongst the metropolitan mills in August and September 1932 widespread strikes finally shattered the industry's tradition of consensus in dispute solving.

There would be interesting times to come in the years ahead, new products, new investors, another war, record profits in the fifties and near collapse of the old-style mills in the 1970's. However, there would be no more significant decades in the history of the industry than these thirty years in which the industry designed and adopted the modern face it still wears.
INTRODUCTION

Victoria’s wool textile industry was founded in the 1870’s and is still the largest concentration of woollen mills in the country. The industry has always regarded itself as a special one and this is an opinion with which outside observers must concur. Textile manufacture is as old as civilization and as new as the computers which control the shuttle-less looms today. A woollen mill is a unique place, distinguished from other factories by its special combination of smells and sounds - hot oil, wool grease, steamy atmosphere, overwhelming noise - and by its buildings, which are distinctive and often beautiful. In these buildings an equally distinctive society operated, a dynastic patriarchy created by owners, managers, and even the workers, for whom the mill was the centre of social life as well as daily work. Down the generations mill society had developed a three-tiered family structure and this came to Australia with the Yorkshire and Scottish managers and foremen who set up the mills here. The rule of Management, Men and Girls which defined mill culture persevered in the new country and remained almost unchanged into the 1930’s.

Mill society persisted and prospered in Victoria, and it did so with very little friction. It was a proud boast of managers and unionists alike that there had never been a serious dispute in the history of the industry. In this period, disputes were of short duration and never spread outside the mill in which they occurred. Because the family model was an acceptable one to all the mill’s people, the dispute-solving mechanisms worked well and the mill operated under a conservative consensus. For the same reasons, the Textile Workers Union was not a strong one and really only came to prominence
when the industry came under a Commonwealth award in 1927 and the
court system dictated formal parties to a dispute.

Perhaps because of its long traditions, mill society was a very
complex structure, closed and inward-looking, with volumes of
unwritten rules governing the performance of work and the conduct of
social life. These rules established and maintained correct forms of
address and other marks of status, placing particular emphasis on
proper behavior between man and manager, manager and girl, girl and
foreman and so on. Probably the men who best understood Victoria's mill
culture in these years were the second generation of mill managers,
the Australian-born men who had followed the traditional path of
entering the mill after school at 14 or 15, and working their way
up through a trade like spinner or loom tuner to leading hand,
foreman and so to manager. Men like John Ashley, the manager of the
Sunnyside mill at Ballarat, Albert "The Boss" Schofield of Returned
Soldiers in Geelong and the sons and grandsons of British-born
founders like Godfrey Hirst and John Bennett had worked in every
department in their mills before the time came for them to take
control. Moreover, being not only Victorian-born but locally born as
well, they were particularly well integrated with the mill town as
well as mill society itself.

Their lifetime depth of understanding is denied to the outside
observer almost by definition. Yet mill society is too interesting to
by-pass without a close look, and the industry itself too important to
the state's economy at this time to ignore. This thesis, which takes up
the industry nineteen years after Graeme Cope's pioneering study
of its beginnings, is intended to begin the systematic examination of

[1] Cope, G. 'The Victorian Woollen Textile Industry 1865-
1881: Entrepreneurial Attitudes and the Development of a Notable
mill life in twentieth century Australia. It was initially conceived as a comparative study of mill culture as found in Britain and the United States as well as Australia, but the lack of suitable business or social histories of the Australian industry made the project unworkable in that form. The final study as it appears here is a local one, although British and American experiences are drawn upon to illustrate a number of shared aspects of mill culture. It is an attempt to "walk around" the wool textiles industry, to investigate as many of the facets of life in a mill as possible, to try for the manager's experience in a fraction of the time. It therefore includes the basic but essential economic, political and demographic parameters of the industry, none of which had been collected before. It is, as well, a presentation of those fascinating details which never get into ordinary business histories; why the mill was the shape it was, how it fitted into the life of its town, how its inhabitants enacted the work family in which they moved, and how they maintained it through ritual or "proper" behavior. It seeks to explore the things which were important to the mill people themselves, rather than to the outside observer.

To elicit such diverse understandings and ultimately to interpret them as the constituents of a unified culture of the mill, three separate sets of questions were needed. These three approaches to the one industry over the same thirty years are labelled by the differing methodologies employed. Part one is therefore a business history and its questions seek business answers. It asks how the various parts of the industry polarized into formal unions and employers associations, how the industry gained control of its local market, how it fought the war, and prospered in the peace that followed. Part two is a work history, which examines the changes to wages and working conditions caused by the abrupt arrival of a new majority of
The General Manager of Valley Worsted Mills at His Desk, C1924. GHRC.
women into the industry in 1903. These two provide the wider national context for the third set of questions. These lie at the heart of this work, for they seek to answer the vital issues of what it meant to the people of the mills to be part of the industry, as well as what the local mill meant to the community which surrounded and supported it. Part three, aims at being an ethnographic construction of what it meant to work in a mill and to be part of mill culture. It is based on an assessment of the surviving artifacts of the mills, especially the Sunnyside mill at Ballarat. Rather than the public documents used for the business and work histories, it relies on the daily correspondence and corporate volumes of the mill; wages books, correspondence, ledgers and share registers, maps and plans of the mill buildings and the wealth of photographs of the mills and their people.

I have chosen to focus this reconstruction by using the manager’s perspective, a decision based equally on propriety and expediency. Mill society operated as a patriarchy, and its central figure was the manager/father, the chief actor in all its important events and indeed, by his participation, the definer of what constituted such a moment. Simply put, what the manager thought was important, was important to everyone in the mill. Furthermore, the documents from which I draw most of my information about the workings of mill life are the daily correspondence of the mill manager, especially that of the several Ballarat managers. Quite apart from Sunnyside’s undoubted importance in the industry – and it was Victoria’s premier mill until the new mills of the post-war years – its manager John Ashley was a continuing member of the Australian Woollen Manufacturers Association executive from 1913 to 1924, and as its president 1916 to 1920, the industry’s spokesman on tariff and profit enquiries at this time. His records thus
contain information not elsewhere available in public records.²

The manager's perspective has one supreme advantage over external theoretical models. That is, unlike the modern historian, he was present and participating in the life and events which occurred. As such his evidence must command attention, for however unsound his principles are deemed to be, he was there when it happened and his interpretations of values and events counted. His daily involvement in three important areas of activity corresponded to the three divisions of this thesis. Firstly, involvement in the public forum - politics, industry strategies and the market place. Then, activities in the semi-public interface with the workforce - his involvement in the demography of employment, the wages paid and the conditions under which which his employees worked. Lastly and most importantly, his paternal role in the private world of the mill family of which he was the head and, with his workers, the co-author.

There is no doubt at all that this makes for bias in the narrative and that the conservative consensus postulated may not please readers accustomed to neatly-polarized capitalist vs. unionist settings. Most of the work history which preceded and succeeded Harry Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capitalism³ is couched in this sort of antagonistic mode, and its supporters may perhaps be angered to find it almost absent here. Ballarat's records, however, also include a unique collection of letters from employees and their families addressed to the manager. As they were not in other mills, letters from Ballarat employees were both filed and saved from destruction. By their

² Ballarat's records include the only surviving collection of correspondence from the Wool Textile Manufacturer's Association. The WTMA executive destroyed its own correspondence files many years ago in the interests of efficiency.

survival a rare voice for an otherwise functionally inarticulate group of people has remained, and it is principally from these letters that the enormously important proper behaviors governing mill life have been recreated. As recreated, they are activities which dictate a structure of multiple meanings, none of which are stated in terms of worker/capitalist confrontation.

The presence of hundreds of these letters in the Ballarat records establishes a balance of interests. Ballarat's minutely documented dialogue between manager and worker supplies plentiful evidence that the co-operative, consensual model was one held in common between the manager and his employees, with real benefits flowing from it to all parties to the contract. That this contract was a conservative one is evident not only from the quiet industrial record of the mills to 1930, but also from the disturbances which followed when it broke down. Certainly the managers disliked communism when they first encountered it in their mills in the early thirties, but it was the Textile Worker's Union members who "counted out" communist organizers from the strike meetings held at several Melbourne mills during August 1932, the same union whose officials Dorothy Hewett pilloried as "bosses crawlers" in her account of Sydney mill life in the 1950's. In union politics, as in every aspect of mill life in these years, the mill family looked inward for its solutions, and as a result, found itself.


Sorting Wool.

Scouring the Wool.

Another view of the Worsted Carding Engines.
Human nature being what it is, few people read technical introductions and most approach a technical glossary only in a mood of true desperation. Sadly for the reader of this work, a basic understanding of mill processes and a handful of wool terms are essential equipment for following some of the arguments advanced here. Wool textile technology is so specialized that often its procedures cannot be described without reference to its indigenous vocabulary.

Necessity aside, woollen manufacturing is so venerable an industry that many of its words have become a part of the general usage of English and thus command our respect. The tenterhooks we metaphorically hang upon were designed to stretch drying blankets, the smash which occurs when a shuttle rips through the woven piece now occurs in many other situations, and the shuttle itself flies between earth and sky these days. When people teaze out a small object, they use a term finishers coined to describe brushing fabric with teasel thistles, and the gadgets invented by Lancashire weavers to pick up loose ends in a piece now describe any number of clever innovations. With some of the vocabulary of wool it is not clear whether the industry developed the jargon or merely adopted it but in any case, staple, crimp, count, sliver, roving, ply, warp, pick, mill and perch are all examples of wool words which these days have other than technical connotations. The Australian industry added to the list, and in this country the products of the mills sometimes became synonymous with their end use, thus "tweed"s for trousers, "flannels" for cricketing and tennis gear, and "blueys" for blankets and duffle coats. The draper's description of his best piecegoods as "all wool and a yard wide" became equally synonymous with quality and value in vernacular speech.

Wool textile manufacture is in essence a simple process of cleaning and aligning wool fibres, stretching and twisting them for strength and then weaving or knitting the yarns so produced into fabric. The catch lies in the exacting requirements of the processes in between, for the resilience of wool makes it difficult to tame to machine handling standards. In the years under consideration here, there were two methods of processing wool, the woollen system and the worsted system. While all of Victoria's vertical mills had woolen capacity, only three or four regularly produced the finer and more demanding worsteds.

Woollen spun yarns are made of short fibre wool and these short ends protrude from the spun fibre to make a light and fluffy yarn, ideal for weaving into warm and soft blankets and flannels and for suit fabrics like broadcloth and tweed. Worsted spun yarns are made from the long and strong fibre wools and the finer counts of these are made into the dense and fine yarns used for mens suitings and the tough but smooth yarns used for school jumpers and fine knitted woollen underwear and hosiery.
Cap, Flyer, and Ring Spinning Frames.

Drawing and Twisting-in Warps.

Weaving.
From the time of the first Australian mill was established at the Parramatta jail in 1801 until the Sunnyside mill became the commercial manufacturer of worsted in 1887, all Australian mills were woollen system operators. This was due to the simpler nature of woollen processing and the concomitant cheaper initial investment and less skilled manning requirements. Not only did the woollen system involve less processing steps, it was more versatile in the types of wool it could utilize and the finished products were those most in demand in a developing country. Men needed tough tweeds or strong woollen whipcord for work wear, women wore voluminous woollen shawls over dresses and skirts, everyone wore flannel underwear and shirting and slept between woollen blankets. Even the horses which transported the country’s goods and people wore kerseys and collar checks on their harness. Only after 1900 did the best blue worsted suit make its appearance in the wardrobe of the ordinary man, and even then, this was usually of cheap British origin rather than locally made.

WOOLLEN PROCESSING

(1) Yarn Manufacture

SORTING Greasy wool arrived at the mill in bales. It was minutely classified by wool sorters before being SCOURED to remove dirt, manure and suint, sheep sweat. The wool passed through a hot solution of soda ash and soap and was then washed and dried as it left the scour bowls. Wool with heavy vegetable contamination was then CARBONIZED by treatment with acid and heat to char out the hairs before re-scouring. WILLEYING was next. Dry wool was opened out and mixed with blending oil to prevent dry fibres breaking in later processing. CARDING continued the opening and mixing process, aligned the fibres and lay them in a transverse pattern and simultaneously removed fine rubbish remaining. The end result resembled a web of cotton wool and this SLIVER was then taken off and narrowed into ROVINGS by a CONDENSER.

SPINNING was done by self-acting MULES which drew out the rovings to the required thinness then put the right amount of twist into the yarn to give it contiguity. The mule also wound the finished yarn onto spindles called PIRNS which held the yarn in the loom shuttles. If two-ply yarn was required, single fold yarn could be doubled on a TWISTING FRAME, or the single yarn wound onto a large package called a CHEESE and used for warping.

(2) Fabric Manufacture

In weaving, the long, strong threads which run the length of the piece are WARP threads and the horizontal ones put in by the shuttle are WEFT threads, also known respectively as ENDS and PICKS. Every thread in the piece had its designated position and every end its number. In WARPING dozens of cheeses were placed on a framework or CREEL and each thread wound onto a large cylinder in turn. When all threads were in place the ends were reeled onto a loom beam and wound onto it. DRAWING-IN was the next step, every end being threaded through its individual eyelet or HEALD and then run through a metal comb called a
Noble
Combing Machines.

Dyeing and
Backwashing
Wool Tops.

Mule
Spinning.
REED  The whole HARNASS was slipped into place in the back of the loom, shuttles were loaded with pins and placed in shuttle boxes and weaving began, the finished fabric slowly winding onto a take-off beam in front of the loom.

(3) Mending

As the fabric left the loom it was examined for faults such as broken threads and repaired. This process was variously known as PERCHING, PICKING, BURLING and MENDING.

(4) Finishing

FINISHING was as varied a set of operations as the final effects required of the finished pieces, but always involved scouring, to wash out oil. The blanket as it came off the loom looked and felt like hessian sacking and had to be milled, raised, cropped, brushed, blown and pressed before it was recognizable.
MILLING shrunk and thickened the piece, which was saturated with soap and pounded to cause felting. The piece was scoured again then TENTERED, by drying the fabric under tension.
RAISING the surface was done by passing the cloth over a TEASLE GIG, a revolving drum covered with thistle heads, after which over-long fibres were CROPPED. Finer woolens and all worsteds were then BRUSHED and steamed then wound onto a BLOWER where they were dry steamed and so set. PRESSING followed, then folding and boarding ready for despatch.

WORSTED PROCESSING

Worsted carding followed the same pattern as woollen carding except that the fibres in the sliver produced were laid parallel with one another.
Sliver was BACKWASHED to further clean it before it was dried and passed through a GILL BOX to refine the parallelising process and prepare the sliver for COMBING.
There were two types of combing machines used in these years, the Noble or English comb and the Rectilinear or French comb, both of which extracted all short fibres below a stipulated length, straightened the remaining long fibres and removed all NEPS or knots. The short fibres or NOILS taken out were put back into the woollen system. Rectilinear combs were used on shorter fibre wools and have largely replaced Noble combs in modern topmaking establishments.

After combing, the tops produced could be DYED or BLENDDED with other coloured wools and then backwashed and re-combed to take out newly broken fibres. Sliver was now ready for DRAWING where the diameter of the sliver was reduced, the first twist put into it and the ROVING produced wound onto bobbins prior to spinning.
Tentering Machine.

Mending Room.

Finished Cloth.
Worsted spinning could be done on worsted mules but also on CAP, RING and FLYER FRAMES. Ring frames were most suited to the medium counts of wool commonly spun in Australia, but do not seem to have been widely used before Yarra Falls commenced worsted yarn production in late 1919 and it appears that before this time most worsted spinning was done on mules.

Warping, tying-in and weaving followed the same procedure as for woollen production, though finishing tended to be more complicated.

Sources: Australian Wool Board; Concerning Wool. Melbourne 1951.
Photographs of Yarra Falls from Yarra Falls; Modern Developments in the Australian Woollen Industry, Yarra Falls, Melbourne 1921.
MEMORANDUM

From...

WALTER GAUNT, Proprietor
Woollen Manufacturer,
ALFRED WOOLLEN MILLS.

Williamstown, 27 1 191

To...

MEMO. FROM

TELEPHONES 9240 (SIX LINES)

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE COMPANY.

FOY & GIBSON

PROPRIETARY LIMITED

130 TO 152 SMITH STREET,
COLLINGWOOD, Melbourne,
28th November 1918.

EXCELSIOR WOOLLEN AND
WORSTED MILLS NO 162

GODFREY HIRST & CO

Geelong, VICTORIA

Dec 18th 1919

Letterheads: Alfred, Foy and Gibson and Godfrey Hirst. BW.
CHAPTER 1

ORGANIZING THE INDUSTRY; 1900 to 1914.

(i) The Industry in 1900.

At the start of the new century the new state of Victoria boasted the country's largest wool textiles industry, a collection of nine mills, most located in country towns, and all vertical processors working from raw fleece to woven fabric.

All these mills were woollen system spinners and weavers, only the Ballarat mill also producing the finer and more difficult worsted fabrics. In terms of products this meant that the industry made woollen rugs, blankets and a few shawls, pure wool and wool/cotton flannels for underwear, shirts and trousers, and various kinds of outerwear fabrics. Woollen tweeds were staple products as well as plainer heavier woollens suited to men's jackets and trousers and overcoats. Special and effect yarns, silk and cotton yarns and most of the lightweight and superfine woollen and worsteds used in men's suits and women's dresses were imported, mostly from England.

Only two mills were located in the city, the Australian at Footscray and Foy & Gibson's mill at Collingwood. Gaunt's Alfred mill was at Williamstown, but for the moment the industry was a country one, with its power base at Geelong, the "Bradford of Australia". The colony's first mill, the Victoria, had been established in Geelong in
1864 and was now a part of the state’s biggest mill, Godfrey Hirst’s Excelsior. Along with the state’s oldest private mill, the Gray family’s Albion and its close rival and next-door neighbour, the Collins family’s Union mill, the Excelsior dominated Geelong’s economy and wielded considerable influence on the politics of wool textiles in the pre-war period.

Almost as big as the Excelsior and possessed of rather more glamour because of its status as the only commercial worsted weaver was the Sunnyside mill at Ballarat. Unlike Ballarat’s other mill, the Denniston family’s Doveton, Sunnyside was a public company and with the Footscray and Castlemaine mills formed a small group of three mills out of the nine not owned and run by families. This did not make them any the less the personal kingdoms of the patriarchs who managed them, for Charles Grainger of Sunnyside and Edward Williams of Castlemaine were substantial shareholders in their own right, as well as being lifetime appointees to the managership.

In 1900 these nine mills employed 1013 people, 526 males and 487 females, and wool textiles was the biggest employer in the state’s manufacturing sector. The ranking of mills within the industry was dictated not by the numbers employed but by how many sets of carding machines each mill owned. In 1905 a witness appearing before the Royal commission on Tariffs defined the Australian industry in these terms; N.S.W. had twelve sets and Victoria eighty¹. In 1906 at the inaugural meeting of the Australian Woollen Manufacturers Association, subscriptions were levied using this benchmark. Excelsior had eighteen sets, Sunnyside fifteen, the Laycock’s Laconia mill eight, Castlemaine seven, Albion, Alfred and Union six each and Doveton three. The

Australian had closed by this time, its position in the industry taken over by Foy & Gibson's Gibsonia mill which had four sets.\textsuperscript{2}

Most of the mills had been established in the 1870s, the achievements of the first great wave of enthusiasm for wool textiles manufacture in Victoria and the concrete results of a complex collection of public and private motives. The desire to encourage a new and national manufacturing industry, to halt the post-gold flow of population to Melbourne, to find work for country town teenagers, not to mention turning a profit, all contributed to the decision to build. Even with all this enthusiasm and with the support of a government bounty in 1886, as well as a small protective tariff brought in by the Turner government in 1892, the mills steadily lost ground until 1899.\textsuperscript{3}

The market was small and competition keen. "Before Federation, with the poor prices, little or no capital was available even for such development as the restricted State market offered" wrote the proprietors of the Albion in 1920. "The Albion mills, in common with other Victorian mills, had reached the period of stagnation which, but for Federation, must have ended in the destruction of the industry."\textsuperscript{4}

The size of the Australian market was less of a problem than the competition. New South Wales was, after all, free trade and the Queensland duties on woollen piecegoods were only 10 to 15 per cent, and all but two of the Victorian mills were already selling in these markets and others. The problem was imports, and cheap British woollens outsold


\textsuperscript{3} Statistical Register of Victoria 1901, Melbourne 1901, Eleven Year Production Tables, p.78.

local produce on every level. For the mill owners, just emerging from the long depression, the prospect of a protective Commonwealth tariff, far more than interstate free trade was the real attraction of Federation. The sudden arrival of lucrative defence contracts in 1899 for khaki and worsteds to clothe Victoria's South African contingent heralded the end of the bad years for the mills, and with the golden prospect of the Federal tariff, the new century opened full of promise before the owners. As the Royal Commissioners investigating the tariff on woollens in 1907 reported "On all hands it was admitted that the woollen industry had a great future in Australia. It should be one of the finest industries on the continent." \(^5\)

(ii) Good Mills, Bad Mills: Establishing the Woollen Trade Wages Board.

The only cloud on the mill owners' azure horizons had been generated by the re-enactment of the 1897 Factories Act. The act of 1900 extended the operations of the special boards to the wool textiles industry, among others, and on September 25, 1900 parliament established the Woollen Trade Board to "determine the lowest prices or rates which may be paid to . . . persons . . . employed in the process, trade or business carried on in a woollen mill." \(^6\) Largely as a result of conditions in the tailoring and boot trades during the 1890's, successive governments had expanded the coverage of the Factories and Shops Acts to include regulations on minimum age, hours worked, overtime, ventilation, lighting, sanitation and occupational hazards. The 1883 Royal Commission into sweating had made recommendations which temporarily improved conditions in the offending trades, but the

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depression of the 1890's undid most of the good work. Sweating, especially in the clothing trades, again became endemic. Backed by the Labour Party, and with the assistance of chief secretary Alexander Peacock, the government's 1896 Factories Act set up a system of Trade Boards to regulate minimum wages in the six worst trades - bread, boot, furniture, shirt, underclothing and clothing.⁷

The prime mover behind the board concept seems to have been the remarkable Harrison Ord, chief inspector of factories in Victoria from 1890 to 1909, the year before his accidental death. Beatrice and Sydney Webb met him and his principal female inspector Margaret Cuthbertson during their visit to Melbourne in 1898 and reported that Ord's minimum wage idea was Victoria's most interesting institution "by far". "The expedient of instituting joint boards to fix a legal minimum of wages and maximum of apprentices" the Webbs wrote "seems to have been an empirical device of the Chief Inspector of Factories - an enthusiast without economic training or knowledge of other Factory Acts, who was horrified at the sweating which prevailed, especially during the depression of 1893-6."⁸

So successful were the first boards that employees in other industries began to agitate for boards of their own, and among these were most of the state's woollen mill employees.⁹ Mill hands had been represented on the "monster deputation" of the Melbourne Trades and Labour Council which waited on the Chief Secretary in October 1899 and urged the re-enactment of the 1897 Act. William Hurdsfield, secretary

[7] Report 1900, VFP p.10. See also Factories & Shops Act No. 1445, 1896, s.15.


The Sunnyside or Ballarat Mill C1899.
Ballarat Shire Engineer's Office.
of the Ballarat Trades and Labour Council had spoken on their behalf, requesting that the mills be given a board, and he repeated his request the following June when he headed a large deputation of Ballarat millhands which met with Peacock in his Lydiard street office one Saturday after work.\textsuperscript{10}

Ord and his inspectors were meanwhile collecting evidence on wages paid in 107 of the state's trades. As finally published in 1901, his report of 1900 placed woollen mills 79th on the list, with average weekly earnings of 19/6 per operative.\textsuperscript{11} While not as bad as millinery - 10/11 a week and the lowest paid of all trades surveyed - it was still a low wage and beneath the 22/6 the \textit{Age} had earlier reported that mill employees were averaging.\textsuperscript{12}

The \textit{Age}'s interest was a follow-up to the presentation of an enormous petition of mill workers in which 636 men and women out of the 659 adults employed in the industry had asked "the Hon. the Chief Secretary to take steps to bring our Trade under the Special Board Clauses of the Shops and Factories Act."\textsuperscript{13} This substantial document was delivered to Ord on August 17th 1900 by a delegation of workers, mostly from Ballarat. Judging by the transcript of this meeting, and that of the earlier deputation of 24th June, Ballarat workers' interests in the board differed somewhat from those of the Geelong men. The Geelong workers sent up their part of the petition with a five-man delegation and a covering letter setting out the six points of their case:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{10}] Deputation of 24 June 1900; handwritten transcript in Woollen Board Appointments and Other Papers, V.P.R.S. 5466, Box 210, Public Records Office of Victoria.
  \item[\textsuperscript{11}] Report 1900 pp.38-41.
  \item[\textsuperscript{12}] \textit{Age} 8/8/1900.
  \item[\textsuperscript{13}] Petition dated 2/8/1900 in WBP box 210, loose papers. A list of signatures and addresses appears in appendix 2.
\end{itemize}
1st. Married men are in some cases paid as low as £1.0.0 per week and in others skilled workmen are getting no more than £1.5.0 per week.

2nd. The statement by which the weavers are paid is so unsatisfactory that the wages vary from 10/- to 25/- per week. In many cases the statement is not adhered to but is departed from to the detriment of the weavers.

3rd. In one case there are girls fourteen to fifteen employed in the place of men, doing skilled work at from 8/- to 15/- per week.

4th. Girls (not apprentices) in some instances are paid as low as 4/- per week.

5th. The general weekly wages paid to married men that have been at the same work for years is not more than 30/- per week.

6th. We consider that the appointment of a Board with power to fix an uniform minimum rate of wages all round would be a great boon to the workers and an act of justice to such employers as may now pay a fair rate of wages."

The Ballarat delegates concentrated their remarks on the interests of females and juveniles, not married men, and followed up with calls for justice to "fair" employers, of which Sunnyside was one of the best.

Since the industry had been built up largely in the interests of females their interests should be safeguarded. . . . There was no fixed rate of wages at the mills of the colony, but it was only just to say that the scale of wages and prices at the Sunnyside mill more uniform in advance of any paid in any other mill in Victoria. They desired that these prices should not be reduced. . . . There were many juveniles - children just leaving school - who were now being introduced to the mills and since they must be employed, it was essential that a scale of prices should be fixed as had been done for the Tailoresses.

It is clear that both groups were concerned at the lack of uniformity of wage rates from mill to mill and the danger this represented to the standards of the fortunate ones as well as the lack of justice to the others. They also agreed that something had to be done about females and juveniles, whose sudden arrival into the work force was to become one of the most significant social events in the


[15] Deputation of 24 June 1900, pp.2-3. See also Deputation of 17/8/1900, WBP 210. According to its wages books, Sunnyside at this time employed 113 females including 28 under 18 years. There were also 35 boys under 18 out of a total work force of 233.
pre-war period. Nevertheless, the Ballarat attitude was one of acceptance and support, while Geelong's was one of hostility and fear for the position of the married man.\[16\]

As an aide-memoire Ord had written on the back of the transcript of the most recent delegation: "Good mill Sunnyside, Ballarat. Bad mills Gaunt's Williamstown, Excelsior Geelong".\[17\] He had already met the managers of two of the three mills, for the employers were well aware of the proposal, but lacking an industry association to organize the lobbying, had had to deliver their opinions in person. Grainger of Ballarat called on Ord on August 2. He had no objection to a board but was worried that increased wages would affect the already narrow profit margins on basic lines like undyed flannel and blankets. Godfrey Hirst knocked on the chief inspector's door the following day. He too had no serious objections, but in any case Ord had signed the official application form for a Woollen Trade Board the same day, citing low wages and uneven piece rates as reasons for the request.\[18\]

Almost immediately the employers began to have second thoughts. A meeting of mill owners and managers resolved on September 3 to ask Ord to delay the implementation of the Board until the full effects of Federation on the industry could be judged. For the first time, imports from competing New South Wales mills like Vicars and Cooerwill were a possibility and the more stringent Victorian Factory Acts could damage the local mill's cost effectiveness. They passed on their resolution to Ord the next day but the tide of affairs was against them. Parliament proclaimed six new boards that day, and on 25th September six more, one

\[16\] We will be examining this arrival in detail in Ch. 4.

\[17\] Note for file by Ord in WTB 210 loose papers.

\[18\] Form in WTB 210, loose papers.
of which was the Woollen Trades Board.\footnote{Report 1900, pp. 9–10. Boards were proclaimed in September for coopers, millet broom makers, pastrycooks, printers, stone cutters, wood-workers, brickmakers, potters, saddlers, tinsmiths, as well as woollen mill operatives. By 1926 there were 186 Boards operating in Victoria.}

The people who led the delegations and circulated the petitions signed themselves unionists but just which union they belonged to and the extent of its membership is harder to say. Throughout much of the 1900 to 1930 period there was less to the union than met the eye. Exactly how much less is almost impossible to say for union records other than those of the Australian Textile Workers’ Union after 1919 do not seem to have survived,\footnote{These are membership records only, and incomplete. Minute books for the Ballarat Division of the ATWU begin in 1926, and for the Victorian Branch as late as 1935. Australian Textile Workers’ Union Papers, Melbourne University Archives.} and information deriving from wages board correspondence is patchy. Appointments files sometimes skip whole years, and even the board’s minutes start only at 1914\footnote{Appointments in WEP 210, Minutes in V.P.R.S. 5467 Box 30, Woollen and Cotton Trades Board Minutes, 1914–1941.}. It seems safe to say that at the beginning of the century there were two mill operatives’ associations, one in Geelong and the other in Ballarat, and that by 1930 the Australian Textile Workers’ Union represented most of the trade’s workers, but in between a bewildering succession of organisations and/or name changes occurred.

According to one anonymous historian of the Australian Textile Worker’s Union, the earliest mill unions had been Woollen Mills Operatives Associations formed simultaneously at Sunnyside and Geelong in the mid-1880s and which merged in the early nineties to become the Woollen Mills Operatives Union.\footnote{Typescript, no date. ATWU Papers 8/41–50.} A more authoritative opinion comes from Manuel Pappos’s unpublished preliminary paper "The Formation of the
Australian Textile Workers Union.” Pappos’s paper is unfortunately not footnoted and has no bibliography attached, but it has been based on the Geelong Times and unspecified records at that time in the possession of the Geelong Trades Hall. He states that the Victorian United Woollen Mill Operatives Union was founded in July 1890 at South Geelong in conjunction with the granting by the mill employers of the 48-hour week, and that it operated for about three years before expiring. In 1910, the Federated Woollen Mills Operatives Union of Australasia was registered from Geelong, again lasting three years before folding, and it was succeeded by the General Textile Workers Federation of Australia established in 1913 as the new name of the W.M.O.U. According to Pappos, the Ballarat branch of the union joined the G.T.W.F. in 1915 when the W.M.O.U. was officially dissolved. The N.S.W. workers joined as a branch in 1917, the year that the union’s first log of claims was presented to the employers. The dispute arising out of the presentation was referred by J. Higgins to arbitration in September 1918, and the employers’ immediate response was to claim that the union was not properly registered, since the old F.W.M.O. had never been officially dissolved. This technicality led to the withdrawal of the log and the formation of a new union in January 1919, the Australian Textile Workers Union. It succeeded in getting its first log of claims into the Arbitration Court only in April 1926.

Supporting evidence for most of this timetable of events is to be found in the wages board documents, factory inspectors’ reports, newspaper accounts and mill papers upon which the present work relies. Evidence from the petition of 1900 suggests strongly that it was organized jointly by the operatives associations in Ballarat and Geelong. The six-point covering submission from Geelong was signed by

George W. Capstick president, E. Dane vice-president and W.H. Renton secretary of the Geelong Woollen Mills Operatives Association. Renton's was the first name on the 18-page Geelong section of the petition and is accompanied by that of Dane and committeeman F. McFarlane. On the Ballarat petition page one signatures included Ballarat Woollen Mills Operatives Association president Harrison Ainley and secretary Lewis Scott. All these men also served on the first wages board as employees' representatives, and Ainley served until 1912 in this capacity.

That the union(s) existed says nothing about its membership. It seems probable that this was small and, in the case of Geelong, decreasing rapidly. The Ballarat deputation of June 1900 claimed that the operatives there "were in a small degree organized, but in Geelong and Melbourne the mill owners refused to sanction anything resembling organization on the part of the work people." Certainly Ord found it increasingly difficult to get employee nominations for the new Board and by 1905 one of his Geelong correspondents wrote that there was now "no Union at Geelong or society of operatives in the Woollen Trade." By 1910 changes were afoot - not in Ballarat where the association remained safely within the Sunnyside establishment - but in Geelong where industrial unrest over wages at Collins Bros. caused the workers' union group to reform and threaten registration under the Commonwealth Arbitration Act. In August 1910 inspector Tipple reported that: "A society has been formed for the protection of employees and I have been asked to attend a meeting to be held on Saturday night the 13th inst. to explain the Determination." At the time of registering the new union,


[26] ARMS 18/7/1910.

the Federated Woollen Mills Operatives Union of Australasia claimed 150 members "throughout Australia" and a head office at Trades Hall Geelong. It formally registered in 1910 and thereafter provided several Wages Board representatives such as A.J.T. Butterworth, its Secretary in 1912. The union's membership rose to 200 by 1915, and some time between 1912 and this date a Melbourne branch came into existence, probably based at Foy & Gibson, but with some members at Laycocks. W. McFarlane the secretary of the Amalgamated Woollen Mills Operatives Union of Australasia was employed at Foy & Gibson in 1913, and the sympathetic mill management of John Maclellan enabled the Gibsonia mill to supply more wages board representatives than any other mill in the war and post-war years; eight between 1904 and 1923.

1913 seems to be the last reference to the A.W.M.O.A. and one of the first to the Textile Workers' Union, which increasingly spoke for mill workers. Apart from the Melbourne Woollen and Flock Employees' Union "newly formed" in 1911, there were a number of other unions with members in woollen mills: the Wool and Basil Workers, Fellers and Wool Sorters, Federated Carters and Drivers and the Engineers' Union to name a few. The mills' blacksmiths, cooperers, carpenters, lift attendants, general labourers, night watchmen, storemen and dyers would have been represented by other unions again. There is a slight possibility that the Woollen and Flock Union was either an early name for the T.W.U. or perhaps was absorbed into it, because the Flock Employees' Board nomination for 1912 was H. Street., who in 1916 was to be found on the executive committee of the T.W.U.


The names of the Australian Textile Workers' Union and the General Textile Workers' Union appear side by side in references to Victorian Textile unions from 1914 onwards. Both apparently had country and city branches at the Trades Hall, both nominated employees' representatives to the Wages Board, and both were referred to as the "Textile Workers' Union". There were AIWU branches in operation in Geelong (by 1913), Warrnambool (1919) and Ballarat (1925)\textsuperscript{31} and references to G.T.W.U. equivalents in Geelong (1914), Melbourne (1915), Castlemaine 1918 and Ballarat (1919.)\textsuperscript{32}

The AIWU seems to have been a city-based organization. In a letter to the minister, Frank Ashby, secretary to the Australian Woollen Manufacturers' Association, stated that the bulk of the industry's employees were in the country and not members of the T.W.U. and that the union could not therefore be considered as representing all mill employees, particularly since its stronghold was in the knitting divisions of the three metropolitan mills, and by implication not in the old vertical mills which had harboured the W.M.O.A.\textsuperscript{33} This proposition was illustrated by an \textit{Age} report of the T.W.U. half-yearly meeting in 1916 when the chairman of the Melbourne branch, G. Roadley, reported that with the granting of a separate wages board for the knitting industry, hosiery membership had increased by 500, bringing total numbers to 1500 for the year.\textsuperscript{34} The secretary of the meeting was D. McLaughlin who, from 1915 to around 1918 regularly, corresponded with Ord and signed himself Sec. General Textile Workers' Union.

\textsuperscript{31} Information from AIWU papers: Warrnambool Contributions Book 1919-1937, and Provincial Division Membership Book 1929. (Several retrospective entries to 1918). Melbourne University Archives.

\textsuperscript{32} Various references in Woollen Trade Wages Board correspondence, passim.

\textsuperscript{33} Letter from Ashby to Minister of Labour 13/12/1916. WBP 210.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Age} 26/8/1916.
1916 was a busy year for the T.W.U. Mrs. May Hansford who worked as a weaver at the Alfred, remembers the mill being unionized for the first time in this year. Mill manager Fredrick Dalton refused to let the organizer on to the premises, so the first and indeed subsequent meetings were held outside the mill gate with the weekly 2d subscription being collected the same way.\textsuperscript{35} Geoff Browne in his \textit{Biographical Register of the Victorian Parliament 1900–1984} attributes much of this activity to William McAdam, a Ballarat bread carter and Trades Hall official, who established the Ballarat branch of the T.W.U. in 1916 and went on to consolidate the union into a Federal body, serving as its secretary from 1917 to 1924.\textsuperscript{36}

Specific references to the G.T.W.U. disappear after 1919 with the formation of the Australian Textile Workers Union in January of that year and subsequent official appearances such as arbitration conferences and court cases became the sole prerogative of the ATWU.

The employers had requested that the board be postponed until after Federation but the board came, along with Federation, and now their opposition took on new dimensions. In general, trade boards were appointed for two years with each side nominating five representatives. The voting was by post, employers voting for their own representatives and employees likewise voting for employees. The chairman was nominally elected for an open term by vote of the board. However, since his vote was the deciding one in a deadlock, committees could rarely agree on a chairman and the government often appointed a neutral party such as a

\textsuperscript{35} Mrs Hansford began work at the Alfred as a 16-year old in 1913, first as a winder girl, then as a weaver. She subsequently worked as a weaver at Laycocks and Foy & Gibson. (Interview of June 1985).

The early years of the wool trades board were consistently unsettled ones with chronic bickering between representatives and chairmen. The opening shots of what became a sixteen-year long war were fired the day after the gazetted of nominations for the board, published on December 7, 1900. Seven applications for the employee positions had been received. Harrison Ainley, a weaver at Sunnyside and the Ballarat union leader nominated. Dan Battye was employed at the Albion, Edward Dane worked at the Albion and was vice-president of the Geelong union, and William Hood Renton also a Geelong man, was founding president of the same union. John Murray worked at the Castlemaine mill and William Hurdsfield was a former mill hand. After the election the finalists were Ainley, Battye, Dane, Renton and Hurdsfield. For the employers Marcus Collins (Union), F. Chadwick and William Gaunt (Alfred), Godfrey Hirst (Excelsior) and John Ashley (secretary of Ballarat) had agreed to stand.

The first formal notification of the employers' displeasure came to Ord in a note dated December 18, 1900. The employers' representatives refused to sit with Renton and Hurdsfield because neither was presently working in the trade. They reiterated these views in a delegation to the chief secretary on February 12, 1901. On behalf of the delegation, Ashley told Peacock that the employers had raised no opposition to the Act, but they had never dreamt that outside representatives would be brought in. They thought they had "to meet their own employees, and that this was the intention of Parliament. Had they known otherwise they would have raised objection. Seeing that the employees had decided to elect three men who are not employees, it was felt that they might be people who would make very extreme demands." In support Walter Gaunt
snapped: "one of the employees' representatives knows nothing about the trade, and another I am told is biased. We cannot amicably work together."  

Minister Peacock was by not pleased. This was the first time ever that objections had been raised against the employees' choice, even though other boards also had "non experts" as representatives, and it irritated him considerably. "It appeared to him" he wrote "that in an industry protected so highly as theirs had been, the action of the employers, which practically meant setting the decision of Parliament and the Executive at defiance, would prejudice them in the eyes of the public."  

The employers were adamant. Since the board had not met, it had also not elected a chairman. Ord and Peacock provided it with one on February 22. Sir Hartley Williams was already a board chairman and a popular public figure with a reputation for wit and commonsense. He was known as the athlete judge and was famous for his anti-sweating sentiments and his unusual religious and political views, so he seemed a good choice for what was apparently going to be a difficult job.  

The manufacturers sought a ruling from the crown solicitor that the appointment of non-trade employee representatives was "contrary to the spirit of the Act" and were dismayed by his decision that it was not. On March 8 they resigned en masse from their appointments. A meeting of the Manufacturers Sectional Committee of the Geelong Chamber of Commerce

[38] Transcript of meeting of 12/2/1901 in Appointments etc. pt.1. 1900-1901. NRS 210.  


urged other chambers to pressure the government to appoint only from the trade. "There is great danger of the spirit of the Act, which was designed to bring employer and employee together being defeated, and by permitting a foreign element to be introduced" resolved the meeting.

Ord had privately interviewed the "foreign element" two days before and had pressed Hurdsfield to resign in the interests of the trade in which he was no longer employed. Renton he did not press, having discovered that he had thirty years experience in the mills ("anyway, stated flatly he would not . . . "). Hurdsfield initially agreed to resign but later got his back up and rescinded his decision. The employers stood firm, the men stood firm, and the government stood firm. The deadlock continued into April with the board's chairman expressing his doubts about the legality of the whole thing and the Attorney-General deciding that the government had to accept the employers' resignations. The Geelong and Ballarat unions were in the meantime working toward a quiet arrangement to drop Hurdsfield and achieve "the much desired settlement". Ainley apprised Ord of the decision in a tactful note, the contents of which he requested the Chief Inspector to keep a close secret. Hurdsfield resigned on May 2.

There were in fact now two employee positions to be filled, for Dan Battye had died suddenly. The employees asked Peacock to agree to a geographical basis for representation: one employees' representative each for Ballarat, Melbourne and Castlemaine, and two for Geelong. Peacock apparently went some way towards granting this, despite promises made to the unions that Battye would be replaced by another Geelong man and Hurdsfield by a Ballarat nominee, writing; "no difficulty will be


made. Ask that matter be expedited."  

Battye's son accepted the Geelong nomination but his employer, Gray of the Albion, let it be known he would lose his job if he accepted. Since the Albion was already supplying Dane as representative, Timothy McFarlane of the Excelsior finally took the job. Similar objections were raised by Sunnyside when its foreman carder W. Murray re-nominated to join Ainley on the Board, but as Lewis Scott the secretary of the Ballarat union reported to Peacock, "as soon as Mr. Murray's nomination is made public he is told he cannot be spared from the mill . . . and quietly asked to withdraw his nomination . . . Now Sir, I am instructed to ask your advice on this matter, for if this thing is to be tolerated the Factory and Shops Act is a failure . . . we think it useless to make further nominations if this is how they are going to be treated."  

Peacock agreed and late in May the government began work on a bill to compel the employers to break the deadlock. Grainger, the manager of Ballarat and Gaunt agreed to sit if the Geelong employers would, but Hirst refused to sit with Renton and there the matter stood. E.D. Williams, chairman of the Castlemaine mill, wrote apologetically to Peacock: "I am very sorry for you, for I feel satisfied that you have done a great deal to help matters. There are reasons which have not been made known to you, why some mill owners object to meet Renton and they will close down their mills sooner than he should be an arbitrator as to what wages they should pay their employees." Whatever these reasons were, Renton's election was upheld and, under threat of the proposed bill, nominations for all positions were called. The


employers' representatives were Grainger (Ballarat), Gaunt (Alfred), Collins (Union), Hirst (Excelsior) and William Farrar the secretary of Castlemaine. The employees responded with Ainley and W. Murray (Sunnyside), Patrick Bourke (Alfred), Dane and Renton - Murray and Renton being something of a surprise.

The first meeting was set for October 23 when Judge Williams abruptly resigned, pleading personal reasons. Ord's first choice of a replacement, a Mr. Bottomley J.P. of Yarra Glen, was vetoed by the employers, so a compromise candidate in the person of Mr. John Sadlier commenced his duties on 18th October. The Board's first Determination was gazetted on 16th April 1902 and came into effect from 1st June that year. A furore broke out immediately, caused by the determination's establishment of a weavers piece rate of 22/6 per week. This was widely interpreted to be a flat or maximum rate, instead of the minimum it was intended to be. Since most weavers earned more than this their protests were immediate and loud and they had already attracted the support of the Anti-Sweating League.  

By April a sufficient number of employee representatives had been found and appointed to the next board - Renton, Ainley, Murray and Dane were back, as well as Patrick Bourke (Alfred). Dane, however, resigned in June and so triggered yet another crisis. The new board was at this time deadlocked on amendments to the piece rates for weavers, and the chairman Sadlier was voting consistently with the employers. On June 3 Renton, Ainley and Murray refused to act with Sadlier (Dane and Bourke abstaining) but also refused to resign. "There seems to be no end to the difficulties that rise in connection with the Woollen Trade Board" wrote the unhappy Ord to the minister. Dane's replacement was clearly


important and Ord had already asked George Capstick, president that year of the Geelong union, to nominate. He had declined: "being a foreman I might not be able to give satisfaction to the workers."\[^{49}\] Lewis Scott then nominated, to Ord’s considerable embarrassment. Ashley of Sunnyside objected vigorously to supporting three representatives in his mill and demanded that Dane be replaced by a Geelong man. A diplomatic visit by inspector Duff led to Scott’s withdrawal and Walter Ferguson successfully nominating for Geelong. The new board then buckled down to the piece rates problem, finally deciding that while employers should be left to fix their own rates structure the weavers working under them must earn not less than 22/6 per 48 hour week.\[^{50}\]

The "accord" achieved lasted five years before another major crisis erupted in the board, ironically, it appears, caused by a mistake of the chief inspector himself. The board of 1907 had a new chairman, police magistrate Patrick J. Dwyer, the usual assortment of employers - Collins, Gaunt, Hirst, Grainger and McGill (Albion) - and four of the employee representatives from 1906: Harrison Ainley, Miss Annie Scheggia, Fredrick Dalton (Alfred), John J. Lark a loom tuner at Foy & Gibson, plus a new Geelong man Alexander Ferguson, Snr.

The news of Ferguson’s nomination prompted a hasty protest from the Australian Woollen Manufacturers’ Association, which had been formed in 1906.\[^{51}\] Secretary Ashby said the manufacturers refused to meet Ferguson on the board. They had understood from the papers that Ferguson’s son Alexander had nominated, and since he was a \textit{bona fide} employee and a member of the last board no objection had been made. "It was a matter of great surprise both to the employees as well as the employers to find


\[^{50}\] \textit{Age & Argus} 19/7/1902.

\[^{51}\] see appendix 4 for a chronology of association executives.
that after the Board had been called together, Mr. Ferguson Snr. attended in the place of Mr. Ferguson Jnr." Ferguson Snr. had not been in the trade for about seven years "and enquiries into his reputation would, we think prove the position taken up, that he is not a suitable person to occupy a seat on a Wages Board."\textsuperscript{52}

There was no doubt that the employees had chosen Ferguson Snr: he had worked in the Geelong trade for thirty years before retiring and had been asked to stand by a delegation of workers which visited him in July. His nomination form correctly stated his seniority, but seems to have been misread by Ord when he was writing out the \textit{Gazette} notice, and Jnr. was incorrectly named.

The row also attracted Federal attention. William Webster, representing Gwyder, drew the attention of the acting prime minister to the crisis, asking whether in view of the New Protection policy the minister would consider reducing the proposed duties on woollens, thus asserting the principle underlying the policy.\textsuperscript{53} That worthy in reply said gravely that he was not aware of the trouble referred to, but it was the desire of the government to obtain authority to deal with cases where attempts were made to clog the working of wages boards or similar bodies and it was hoped that this could be done in connection with the New Protection.\textsuperscript{54} There was in the end no Federal intervention and Ord resolved the matter, as he usually did. The body stayed buried in his private papers, the chief inspector being human enough to fight on public principle rather than confess to such a slip. He told the employers firmly that the election was legal and would stand, and we

\textsuperscript{52} Letter from Ashby to Ord, 8/10/1907. WBP 210.


\textsuperscript{54} see \textit{Argus} 20/9/1907 and \textit{Age} 25/9/1907.
might speculate that their acceptance of this could have been gained on the basis of future favours. Certainly when Ferguson Snr. next nominated for the board he was summarily declared by Ord to be ineligible; he gave no reason.

The subsequent machinations of the parties to the board continued along familiar lines well into the war years. Deadlocks on rates in 1911, 1914 and 1915 continued to be resolved by chairman’s votes cast with the employers. Nominations for employees’ representatives continued to be difficult to attract, and Geelong employers continued to sack those insubordinates who tried, as happened in 1910 with two Collins Bros. weavers, Butterworth and McQueen. Employers continued to oppose non-trade nominees and to walk out of meetings when crossed, as they again did in 1916. Occasionally the employees themselves objected to one of their own; in 1910 they petitioned Ord for the removal of C.H. Halmshaw, a packer at Castlemaine and a suspected management stooge. A succession of chairmen came and went. Dwyer was replaced by Harold Morrison P.M., who was replaced by J.W. Kirton, who was in turn succeeded in 1912 by solicitor W.P. Forlonge. Employee discontent in the mills was at this time claimed to be widespread and Forlonge’s appointment was not a happy one. Late in 1915, during one of the interminable wrangles over weaver’s piece rates, he received what he felt to be a threatening letter from secretary McLaughlin of the Textile Workers Federation. McLaughlin had simply written that trouble would ensue if weaver’s piece rates were reduced in any way, but Forlonge panicked: “It is clearly a threat uttered against me ...and an attempt


[56] Letter from Wm. Hopkins, Sec., Woollen and Flock Mill Employees’ Union to Ord 9/5/1912. WBP 210.

[57] Letter from McLaughlin to Forlonge 13/10/1915, Appointments etc. pt. 3. WBP 210.
to intimidate me in the performance of my duty...”

Forlonge resigned the day after the new determination was signed, and his departure ended four years of hostility, for under its next chairman, C. Notley Moore, a new conciliatory spirit pervaded the board. Moore seems to have possessed a genuine interest in the trade as well as a shrewd ability to dominate a meeting. He seems to have been the first chairman actually to visit the state’s mills, and he did this on several occasions. His techniques for handling his board were illuminating. On occasion he and the board secretary would leave the room to facilitate no holds barred haggling between the parties. On others he would tell the employees that he would support their position if they agreed on their bottom wage offer instead of insisting on the top. He was also known to tell the employers before a vote was taken how he intended to cast it: “The Chairman informed the employers that he would give them the option of agreeing to the prices con piecework paid at the Williamstown mills.” Perhaps this lordly approach kindled a spark of recognition from a notably patriarchal industry, perhaps he was equally autocratic to manufacturers and employees. In any case both sides gave him an enthusiastic vote of thanks after the determination was signed, and the new board unanimously voted him chairman again. The Woollen Trade Board had finally come of age.

Women’s wage rates occupied a considerable proportion of the board’s deliberations in any period, but the women themselves were less frequently seen or heard in the wages board rooms. An important exception to this rule came with the appointment of Margaret Cuthbertson


as its secretary in 1904. Miss Cuthbertson was secretary to other boards by 1907, mostly those in the apparel area, and she was Ord's chief agent in any dispute involving factory women. She had entered the public service in 1888, rising from switchboard operator to the newly-created position of Female Inspector of Factories by 1894. A year later she had two assistants and in 1900 she was promoted to senior inspector.\textsuperscript{60} Her very readable contributions to the department's annual report confirm her biographer's opinion of her as both cultivated and witty, and her book \textit{Women's Work} which she co-authored with Henrietta McGowan in 1913, confirms her knowledge of working women, and of woollen mills, for weaving was one of her recommended occupations for women.\textsuperscript{61}

1904 was also the first year that females had represented employees. Maggie McEwan and Mrs. Annie Scheggia were elected in May. No information other than name and address was required of nominees in these early years, but judging from their Fitzroy and Collingwood addresses the two probably worked at Foy & Gibson and were most likely weavers. Ettie Nugent, who was an employee representative on the board in 1918, also worked at Foy & Gibson but as a gill box minder. The Laconia mill employed the other female appointment of 1918, weaver Sarah Topen. That they could be effective in the roundhouse atmosphere of a board meeting seems doubtful. The minutes after 1914 show that all the bargaining was done by the one or two senior male representatives present, and as a general principle women had not performed well on the boards. Beatrice Webb had described only one of the five female representatives on the Clothing Board as 'able', and of those on the Underclothing Board she reported: "The women representatives, inexperienced and unorganized, quarrelled amongst themselves and held

\textsuperscript{60} Hyslop, A. in ADE vol. 8, p. 186.

public meetings to denounce each other's conduct at the Board." Sixteen years later Ord's successor H.M. Murphy wrote of the boards: "Not infrequently the honours of the debate are distinctly with the men. Where the representatives of the employees are women, an exception must be made. They have in some cases been found quite unequal to the task of properly enforcing their just rights in the face of their employers." Proficiency in the public arena of the wages board was a great deal to expect of women whose previous experience had been confined to the home or the factory floor and it does not appear from the records that after 1923 any more women were elected to the position, at least to 1930.

(iii) The Warehouse War.

The eagerly-awaited Commonwealth Tariff was brought down as the Customs Tariff Act of 1902. While it gave Victorian mill owners rather less protection than they had formerly enjoyed, dropping from 25 per cent to 15 per cent, the tariff was nevertheless the harbinger of a secure Australian market protected from British competition. In the Act of 1908 there would be another rise in duties on woollens, and again in the Acts of 1914, 1920 and 1925-1926. With a guaranteed and expanding market, mill managers could swing into full production for the first time in years. Expansions could be planned, equipment ordered, and long-delayed dividends could be paid to faithful shareholders. Best of all, protection freed the mills from the grip of the wholesalers.


[63] Laughton, A.M. (ed.) Handbook to Victoria, British Association for the Advancement of Science, Melbourne, 1914, p.203.

[64] The appointments records are in no particular order and are not complete. Nevertheless, I could find only four elections of females to the board between 1901 and 1930.
Paterson, Laing & Bruce
Limited

SYDNEY

Softgoods Warehousemen
Importers and
Manufacturers

Also at—
Newcastle, N.S.W., London
and Melbourne

Warehouse and Offices of Paterson, Laing and Bruce.
*Australia Today* 11/10/1922. MUA.
With two exceptions the mills in 1900 sold their products only to wholesalers.\footnote{The exceptions were Doveton and Foy \& Gibson, which were themselves also retailers. Foy \& Gibson made only for its own huge stores and was itself an importer, while Doveton ran a sort of cut-price suiterie out the back door of the mill as well as supplying the Denniston family's slop clothing business in Flinders Lane.} These were the big softgoods importers of Flinders Lane and York Street, firms like Paterson, Laing \& Bruce, or Austin and Bailleau, who supplemented their largely imported fabric ranges with locally made woollens.

The relationship between the mills and the wholesalers was always a volatile one. In ideal market conditions the mills would supply blankets, flannels and low and medium grade dress tweeds, and the importer would bring in better end English apparel fabrics, woollens and worsteds. The wholesaler would assemble his combined winter range pattern-books in January, then sell through his commercial travellers to local and interstate drapers and clothing manufacturers, passing the orders back to the mill for making and delivery. This arrangement freed the mill from the overheads of maintaining a separate marketing organization and making up uneconomic small orders, but it did place them totally in the power of the wholesalers. Any change in the balance of local or overseas demand destroyed the equilibrium of the system. Sudden surges in home demand, as occurred in England in 1906, limited the availability of fabric for export and forced the importers to order replacements short on the already busy local mills. Climate was critical too. A long local winter meant hasty infill orders from retailers, while a long summer led to retailers refusing on a variety of pretexsts to accept orders placed months before. Favourable, i.e. low tariff rates on woollen piecegoods, coupled with a strong local demand meant a surge of imports of cheap British fabrics, often shoddy, which
undercut both the local low and medium price ranges. Blankets and flannels were usually safe, being both low value and bulky and therefore uneconomic to ship, but the better end local tweeds and broadcloths suffered badly.

The tension inherent in this unwieldy system was exacerbated by the importers' practice of downgrading Australian fabrics in order to sell comparable imports or even on occasion labelling Australian goods as British made. The mills held the wholesalers directly responsible for "the gross prejudice against Australian manufacturers" and the "opposition of the importing interests" for the closure of four mills at Geelong and the lean years of the survivors. As a result of the tariff, and for the first time, the mills now held the whip hand, for while the Australian market had radically expanded and the import competition considerably abated, the capacity of the mills remained at depression levels. Machinery had to come from England, buildings erected to house it, and workers trained to operate it before the mills could gear up to the market, and soon order shortfalls and lengthening delivery dates were endemic. Wholesalers had to take what they were given.

By 1906 the shortages had become severe and the importers and their ally the *Argus* were complaining bitterly:

> From all the great wholesale warehouses, orders are being pressed upon the mills — in such numbers that in many instances the mills have refused to take the orders, although delivery has not been asked for until a date more than six months ahead. The demand for Australian flannels and blankets has over-taken the production of the mills, and left it unable to cope with the requirements of the trade. For the past three seasons the wholesale firms have had to accept late delivery of all their orders, and very frequently go without delivery at all. "The mills just do what they like" one

[66] Shoddy goods were not necessarily badly made, the term simply meant that the wool used had been reclaimed from wool yarn waste or rags. Shoddy was a British speciality and the basis of Yorkshire's export trade in suitings.

warehousemen said yesterday. "They won’t bind themselves to make delivery, and if you ask them to do so they refuse the order altogether." 68

The immediate impetus for these lamentations was the public hearings of the Reid government’s Tariff Commission which began its prolonged enquiry in 1905, three years before the final justification of its efforts in the 1908 Customs Act. Nominally set up to hear evidence on duty anomalies, the Commission had succeeded in re-opening the free trade vs. protectionist row with a vengeance. "Its composition of four freetraders and four protectionists, with Sir John Quick as Chairman gave the latter cult the benefit of a casting vote.", said cynical H.G. Turner, and "Its proceedings which to some extent were necessarily public, evoked such torrents of admonition and advice, that reading the daily papers became a weariness of the flesh." 69

Turner might have been wearied, but all other parties seem to have enjoyed themselves mightily. The Argus led the attack for the importers citing with approval evidence presented to the Commission that British mills making similar goods to those produced locally were able to pay higher wages than Victoria and still undersell the competition. 70 The Herald followed suit with assertions that Victorian fabrics were mere imitations of British in all but quality, finish and design, and were overpriced at that. 71 The Australasian Traveller condemned the breaking of supply contracts by local mills and predicted a shortage of blankets in the forthcoming winter 72, and the Draper of Australia published


[71] Herald 14/6/1906.

Sunnyside's denial of the allegations in its July 27 edition.

The local mills, championed by the *Age*, the *Herald* and the *Bulletin* responded vigorously. U.K. mills were in fact paying substantially lower wages. An Australian weaver of either sex was paid 19/6 for work which would earn a Huddersfield man 12/9 and a woman 15 per cent less than that.\(^{73}\) The local product was of high quality said the *Bulletin* and hinted darkly of a conspiracy between U.K. owners and local warehousemen not to stock Australian fabrics. Some support for this theory was received on the return from England of Edward Williams of the Castlemaine mill, with the news that several big U.K. mills had been invited by the Melbourne warehousemen to set up plants in Victoria.\(^{74}\) Manufacturer's spokesmen corresponding with the *Argus* admitted there were shortages, but denied contract repudiations. Local demand had swelled since the A.N.A. Exhibition in 1906, and even overseas mills were having difficulty meeting demand sparked by the "Japanese War".\(^{76}\) The *Age* pointed out that Australian mills were at an active disadvantage in raw materials purchasing. British mills could buy wool all year round under liberal credit terms, but Australians could purchase only between October and January and had to pay cash in six days.\(^{77}\) When the *Argus* again claimed supply shortages in September 1907 the *Age's* reply was simply "exaggerated".\(^{78}\)

In the more private forum of the wool textiles industry itself, the

\(^{73}\) *Herald* 14/6/1906.

\(^{74}\) *Bulletin* 14/6/1906.

\(^{75}\) Australian Woollen Manufacturers Association, meeting of 13/11/1906. Minutes, vol.1, 1 April 1906 - December 1912.

\(^{76}\) *Argus* 30 & 31/7/1906.

\(^{77}\) *Age* 2/8/1906.

\(^{78}\) *Age* 25/9/1907.
battle against the warehousemen was proceeding at another level, and the mill owners moved to combine together for the first time to wage it. On the second of April 1906 mill representatives met to assess interest in forming an industry association. The meeting, held at the Chamber of Manufactures rooms at 272 Flinders Street, decided that the objects of the proposed association should be the tariff, customs duties, Factories Act, Wages Board, union label, and terms, discounts, and dates of delivery, in that order. On April 10, all the Victorian mills officially joined forces and the Australian Woollen Manufacturers Association became a going concern.

Tariff had been the prime objective listed by the new association, but the business of its first three meetings was rather more immediate: preparation of a united front for future business with the warehouses. In future deliveries up to the twentieth of any month must now be paid for by the tenth of the month following, less 3 per cent discount for prompt paying Victorian customers and 2 1/2 per cent for interstate accounts. The new terms were printed and circulated to all customers as well as to the various state warehousemen’s associations. Standardization of pecking charges came next – 3d piece for flannels anywhere in Victoria and a penny more interstate; blankets 1d a pair or 1 and a 1/2 d outside the state. Then came the difficult task of standardizing the weights and sizes of blankets and fabrics, beginning with blankets in March the following year. Standardisation was an ongoing project, with blanket weights and sizes still changing as late as 1926, but the biggest problem had been solved by 1908 when worsted and tweed piece width was standardized at 37".

[80] Minutes 8/1/1907.
[81] A "piece" of fabric was a length of 36 yards. "Piecegoods" were fabrics sold at retail cut from off the piece.
Economies of scale aside, the principal motive for standardization was to prevent members undercutting each other in order to win a sale to the warehousemen, the same reason as for standardizing prices. Price fixing seems to have been done by verbal agreement in 1907 and 1908, but in 1909 the prices agreed upon for 1910 deliveries of 28" flannel and white blankets\(^{82}\) were formally entered into the minutes: 8d a yard for flannel and 1/10 d per pound for blankets, the same price they had been last year.\(^{83}\)

The benefits flowing from the association to its members were immediate and widespread. They acquired a headquarters at 264 Flinders Street, and a secretariat in the form of F. Ashby, who was paid one hundred pounds a year for organizing meetings, delegations, and dinners, as well as monitoring import statistics, researching proposed legislation, writing the minutes, and booking the country members' train tickets and hotel rooms. The importers had accepted the new terms. The government could also now consult directly with the unified industry, an important consideration both for Defence Department tenders and for the tariff negotiations preceding the 1908 tariff. The Tariff Commission's proposals for a 30 per cent duty on imported woollen piecegoods had been assisted by the outcome of a series of select meetings organized by Ashby between the AWMA. and the Mantle & Cap Manufacturers in August 1907. A potential snag had been removed with the reaching of an agreement whereby the Mantle & Cap Manufacturers would not oppose the 30 per cent on woollens in return for AWMA. support for similar duties on manufactured articles of apparel.\(^{84}\)

\(^{82}\) These were "greige", or undyed blankets.

\(^{83}\) Minutes 9/2/1909.

\(^{84}\) Minutes 20/8/1907.
Apart from a 15 per cent duty on textile machinery, vigorously opposed by the ANMA., the industry looked upon the new tariff rates with considerable elation. The triumph of Alfred Deakin’s New Protection was the manufacturers’ triumph too, though it would be fair to say they were considerably more interested in Deakin’s promise of the expansion of their protected industry than in the converse side of the arrangement, that is, to pay fair and reasonable wages to their workers in return. It was sufficient for them that the importers had been cast down. Not until the slump of the mid-1920s would they be able to present anything like their old threat to the local industry.

In the remaining few years before the outbreak of war, the only changes to the industry occurred for the better. Production of flannel and blankets leaped to unprecedented levels and the market for tweeds continued to improve. Big Commonwealth defence tenders were let to Victorian mills in 1910 and 1911, in the wake of the Kitchener report, and everyone made money. The employers new-found political unity and co-ordinated marketing strategy against the warehousemen was paying off handsomely.

The workers too had organized, at least sufficiently to support the bringing of the unregulated mills under the control of a wages board. It would be incorrect to credit the workers and the two Woollen Mills Operatives Associations with the initiation and implementation of the Woollen Trades Board, for government policy and the personal efforts of Peacock and Ord were too palpable for that to be the case, but the achievement of the 1900 petition, a near-unanimous expression of the desires of the mill folk, was considerable. The Ballarat and Geelong


unions had made something of a comeback after the depression, and if at times the Geelong union seemed to consist of no more members than those on its executive committee, the associations maintained sufficient cohesiveness to field a considerable proportion of the employees' representatives on the board, and for these representatives to conduct successful wages negotiations in the face of considerable employer hostility.

The ferocity of employer opposition to non-trade board representatives is the most arresting feature of the board's early years, although the predominance of Geelong interests and the presence of women representatives are both important. There is no doubt that the existence of the board was itself at first a considerable affront to the mill fathers. Before 1900 the mill was the personal property of the family who ran it and the private kingdom of the autocrat who managed it. Before the board he paid whatever he chose to pay, and even after he had lost this power he continued to hire and fire as he thought fit. For those owners and managers who had learned their trade in the "dark satanic mills" back Home - Godfrey Hirst for example - the imposition was even greater. It must have been an unsettling experience for both sides to meet across a table as equals where on any other day of the week their relationship would have been undeniably employer/worker.

The sense of outrage that runs through the employers' correspondence and official conversations in these early years was not, however, directed against the board itself. Employers had certainly asked for a delay in its introduction and in 1918 tried for a reduction in the number of its representatives from five to three, yet at no stage did they move to have it abolished. Indeed by 1908 at least one of them was actively supporting it: E.D. Williams of Castlemaine told the mill's annual general meeting that it was "a great boon as it fixed the rates,
and saved the directors a lot of worry as to rises."

The realities of negotiating binding decisions on wages and conditions with their own employees were undoubtedly a shock to employers, but one that could be coped with. What was far worse and something that could not be tolerated was to allow "outside influences" to be party to such negotiations. Over and over the employers complained about foreign elements and non-trade representatives, and time and again they opposed nominations of people like Renton and Hursfield. Clearly, they were not afraid of the union or the principle of unionism, for union representatives were probably in the majority of employee representatives and, in any case, it had so few members. Those violently anti-union mills like Alfred, Excelsior, Collins and Laycock could and did simply refuse to allow unionization on their premises, and we have seen that sacking the insubordinates who dared to nominate was a favoured means of control in the Geelong mills. The career of employees' representative Harrison Ainley provides the direction. Ainley represented Ballarat on the board from 1900 to 1912, and seems to have headed the employees negotiating team during these years. His re-nominations were not challenged until he left Sunnyside in 1910 to become a farmer, and this year's nomination was instantly challenged by the employers. Ord was short of a nomination so Ainley stayed, but as far as I can tell thereafter there were no more employee representatives who were not actively working in the trade.

The employers had told Ord that they thought they would be meeting their own employees on the board, and their expectations finally seemed to have prevailed on the Woollen Trade Board though not on the others. Why was it so important to them? Why should it have taken the threat of an Act of Parliament to compel them to sit with Renton and Hursfield in

1901? Because these men were outsiders, not family. Renton was a real estate agent and Hurdsfield was unemployed. People who were outside the family of persons employed in a mill were people who were outside the control of the head of the mill, people who could not be pressured, fined or fired should the need arise. If the employers were to run the board as they ran their mills - and they certainly tried - they could not afford to allow non-trade representatives to sit.

For a while it appeared that the employers had succeeded in controlling the board as well as they had the warehousemen. Their ability to veto unsuitable chairmen, attract the votes of several others and deadlock proceedings at will meant that wage rises were several years apart and by no means generous, and we have seen how unsettled conditions in the industry became after 1912. The arrival of E. Notley Moore saved the board and took the strain off industrial relations. By always being reasonable and moderate himself, he seems to have instilled in the board members the ability to do likewise, and under his chairmanship the difficult war years were met with co-operation and confidence.
CHAPTER 2
PROFIT AND PATRIOTISM.

With the declaration of war on August 5, 1914 wool sales stopped, the Melbourne Stock Exchange closed, overseas trade fell away and British investment ceased. The fall-off in import and export transactions had serious implications for both the country’s biggest export earner, greasy wool, and for Australia’s young and import-dependent manufacturing sector. Britain was overwhelmingly Australia’s biggest trading partner, with imports and exports balanced at around £37 million, but Germany was the country’s second most important foreign trading partner after the United States, as well as being the third largest customer for wool. It was also a significant owner of merchant shipping. War ended access to German markets and shipping and severely restricted Australian access to those of Britain. The British manufacturing sector was committed to supplying Britain’s own huge and immediate requirements, and British shipowners were reluctant to risk their craft to German submarines patrolling the sea lanes to the south. For the moment Australia was on its own.

The unprecedented wave of patriotism and pro-war feeling that erupted with the announcement was shared to the full by Victoria’s Chamber of Manufactures and its associates, including the Victorian Woollen Manufacturers’ Association. The Chamber was briefed five days after the announcement by Senator Edward Millen, Minister for Defence

until George Pearce took over in September, and when he had finished, it passed two important resolutions:

That all members of this Chamber pledge themselves to keep their factories open and at work to the best of their ability and to the utmost of their resources, and to prevent unemployment in their industries so far as lies within their power. And:

That all manufacturers undertake that in regard to those of their employees who go to the front, their positions shall be secured to them.  

To enable the employees properly to respond to this gesture, the members subsequently recommended to the government that wages boards be suspended for the duration. This suggestion was generally treated with the contempt employees felt it deserved, although the woollen board did meet at longer intervals than had been the case.

The difficulties associated with wool sales, shipping and German trade were considerable and were already the subject of negotiations between the British and Australian governments. On the home front the Australian government quickly passed the Trading with the Enemy Act, making trading with German concerns a statutory misdemeanour, and backed it up with the Statutory Blacklist, on which 2500 enemy firms were gazetted. One offender under this act may have been the Melbourne firm of W.M. McLean and Co., which was asked to resign from the Chamber in May 1915, and was also at this time refused shares in the Chamber’s new insurance company. The War Precautions Act was the most potent piece of legislation passed to date by the Commonwealth and it gave the Federal government total power to regulate anything it decided was

[2] Chamber of Manufactures Minutes, meeting of 10/8/1914. VCM.


necessary to win the war — anything from censorship to land holding. ("Would it" asked N.S.W. Premier Thomas Bavin, "be an offence under the War Precautions Regulations... ?" "Yes" said Commonwealth Solicitor-General Garran, without waiting for him to finish).\(^5\)

Regulations made under this act were passed in 1916 to prevent hostile nationals holding shares in Australian companies. The War Precautions (Enemy Shareholders) Regulations required the public mills and, of course, all other firms listed, to obtain from every shareholder evidence of nationality in the form of a statutory declaration. Shares belonging to German or Austrian nationals were either transferred to the Public Trustees' agent, the Collector of Customs, or sold and any dividends held in trust. Ashley of Ballarat had no difficulty in transferring the small parcel of forty shares owned by the estate of Jacob Bernstein\(^7\) but, in the matter of the shareholders' declarations, he ran into trouble. Shareholder Miss Ruby Gronholdt replied with hauteur begging to state she was not of enemy origin: "my father being born at Helsingor, Denmark of Danish parents & naturalized many years ago, my mother born in Ireland of Irish parents, so I do not see I have any need to fill in the form sent."\(^8\) Far worse came a note from Ashley's friend and fellow-Mason, Ballarat's Shire Officer E.J. Muntz: "I am enclosing necessary declaration, sorry it was necessary, it is wonderful what a difference the Z makes in my name, Dr. Womaski assured me that there was nothing Polish or German about it, I don't know. The father and mother of both my wife & myself came from the North of Ireland, and as far as we have any records there is nothing but this blood in us, the finest strain in the world (so we say). Kind regard ... "\(^9\) "My Dear

\(^{[6]}\) Scott: 1936: 54.

\(^{[7]}\) Transfer form dated 5/5/1916. BWW.

\(^{[8]}\) Letter from Ruby Gronholdt to Ashley, 24/4/1916. BWW.

\(^{[9]}\) Letter from Muntz to Ashley, 14/4/1916. BWW.
Muntz, " replied the embarrassed Ashley, "Don't worry about the Z. Makes no difference at all. I sent a Declaration Form to every shareholder on our register. What about Wednesday. I am going down to the Grand Chapter Installation and will be glad to have your company if you can manage it. Kindest regards."  

The equipping of the 20,000 men of the Expeditionary Force being recruited was the Department of Defence's first priority and also that of the manufacturers who would make most of the items required, particularly the clothing. The Chamber's secretary reported at the meeting of August 24 that considerable confusion surrounded the supply of this clothing. 21,000 jumpers, 21,000 pairs of socks, and an even bigger supply of silver-grey flannel for undershirting were required for delivery in two or three weeks, and it had been found that duplicate tenders had been let by the Defence Department and the Chamber. Out of this confusion came the establishment of a Defence Contract and Supply Board in November 1915, and its later successor of February 1918, the Business Administration Board, whose job it was to co-ordinate ordering, conduct purchasing and store and dispense military equipment and clothing.

(i) Doing Business with the Government.

The job of the mills was to make fabric for the army and navy. The Commonwealth government had decided that as far as possible Australian defence personnel should be clothed and equipped with articles of Australian manufacture, and to that end it was prepared to allot between

[10] Letter from Ashley to Muntz, 15/4/1916. BWW.

L40 and L50 to equip each soldier. The principal item required was the distinctive army uniform of pure wool khaki twill. The loose jacket had been specially designed for comfort and hard wear, having a breezy collar, a sun-stopping double layer back yolk and a central pleat for letting out if shrinkage occurred, as well as plenty of pockets. Australian soldiers were subsequently held to be more comfortably clad than any others on either side of the hostilities.

As well as twill for jackets, the mills made heavy woollen overcoatings, cap cloths, flannels for shirt and underclothing, scarlet woolens for mess jackets, blue serges and flannels for the navy, bedford cord and whipcord for riding breeches, puttee fabric, army and hospital blankets, and heavier woolens for horse collars, rugs and saddle blankets. What the industry could not supply in any quantity were knitting yarns, and knitted garments of all types had to be machine made from British yarn, or supplied by the army of volunteer handknitters around the country using both local and imported yarns.

The mill owners were not new to defence work, having outfitted the South African Contingent during 1899-1902, and defence contracts had been sought after work since that time. It was not that the work paid well - it often barely covered costs - but the size of the orders and the generous delivery schedules made it worthwhile in terms of economies of scale and production scheduling. Large volumes of a standard fabric in one colour meant simplified yarn production and warping and significantly reduced downtime on the looms. More machinery was kept productive for longer periods and the work could be done in the slow months. Apart from the work's low margins, some mill operators felt defence standards were unreasonably high and complaints about


inspection procedures were voiced in the *Argus* of 7/2/1904. Most disputes were ended when the Department of Defence invited a manufacturers' representative to sit on its Contracts Board, and successful tenderers in later years were issued with fabric testing machines.\(^{14}\)

As part of the new Commonwealth's defence plans, Lord Kitchener was invited to visit Australia in 1909 to inspect existing arrangements and to give his recommendations. His 1910 report, embodied in successive Defence Acts in 1910, 1911 and 1912, included an endorsement of the government's decision to establish its own defence factories, as well as suggesting compulsory military training.\(^{15}\) Boys would train in junior and senior cadet corps in years twelve to eighteen, move on to citizen forces from eighteen to twenty-five, and thence into the reserves for three more years. Naturally, uniforms would be required for each stage.

The Victorian mills dominated this defence work and, until a grave miscalculation in 1909, had been the sole suppliers to the army. As a preliminary to calling up the first of Kitchener's compulsory trainees in 1910, the Fisher government called tenders for supply of fabric to clothe them. The government was already in the process of establishing its small arms, cordite, saddlery and clothing factories and now announced plans for the Commonwealth Woollen Cloth Factory. According to the anonymous historian of New South Wales' Vicars mill, the Victorian mills boycotted the 1909 tenders in retaliation for the Commonwealth mill announcement, and for a time it appeared the government would have to import its requirements.\(^{16}\) Vicars seized the

\(^{14}\) *Argus* 28/3/1907.

\(^{15}\) Scott: 1935: 194.

opportunity and tendered for all the department’s requirements, subject to readjustment of the timing. The bid was successful and with the cooperation of the small mills at Paramatta and Bowenfels, Vicars over the next three years filled the biggest order the industry had ever received.

Victorian mills had no hesitations about defence tendering in 1914. Patriotism and profit both demanded that every effort be made in this time of crisis, and the mills rushed to get defence work out on time, giving it precedence over all civilian orders. The department ratified this precedence in April 1915 when it requisitioned the total output of the mills. Under Statutory Rules 1914 No. 125 of the Defence Act 1903-12, all orders to private customers past September were cancelled. Henceforth twenty-two of Australia’s mills worked for one customer only.\textsuperscript{17}

Doing business with one national customer was an unprecedented situation for the mills and one which threw up a whole series of new and difficult problems from the start. How were requirements to be ordered, with whom? How would prices be set and sizes standardized to defence requirements? Indeed, who would work in the mills if army recruitment needs were given priority? How would the market be re-allocated when defence released its grip on the mills? Some of these difficulties were resolved by better defence administration arrangements over the next few years, but the immediate requirement was for a single and centralized voice to speak for what was traditionally a most individualistic collection of Australian mills.

Nineteen Australian mills met in Melbourne on September 26 and 27, 1916. There were the ten Victorian mills, plus Vicars, Australian,

\textsuperscript{17} AMMA Minutes, 13/4/1915.
The Associated Woollen & Worsted Textile Manufacturers of Australia.

FIRST ANNUAL MEETING.

Melbourne, 21st February, 1917.
Bull and Cooerwill from New South Wales, Torrenside and South Australian, and the three Tasmanian mills, Hogarth, Aitken and Johnstone Bros. Ipswich and Queensland Mills sent apologies. John Ashley was elected to the chair and over the next two days the industry agreed on standard prices, sizes and weights for blankets and prices for seven categories of khakis, flannels and whipcords. The final resolution of the conference was to form a Federal Association of Woollen Manufacturers, chaired by Ashley and with Victorian secretary Frank Ashby as its permanent secretary also. On February 20 and 21, the following year the new Associated Woollen and Worsted Textile Manufacturers of Australia met for the first time to confer on depreciation, ticketing and standardization of prices for flannel and tweeds.

The newly organized industry soon found that business with defence had several sizeable drawbacks to offset its other undoubted gains. Foremost among these was the insertion into the standard tender papers of a clause embodying the decision of the Federal Labour Government to give preference to unionists. Under sub-clause 31(a) any person authorized by a trade union could enter work premises at meal times and interview workers without a foreman being present, an innovation "strongly resented and protested against..." by the Chamber of Manufactures. Such an innovation, said the Chamber resolution "establishes the objectionable 'Walking Delegate' principle, with the object of enforcing in due time the pernicious system of 'preference to unionists', and this at a time of war when all party questions should be waived and all classes should be working in the one interest to assist

[18] Conference Report with Constitution, Objects and Rules, of the Associated Woollen Manufacturers of Australia attached in MMA correspondence file, BW.

the Empire."\(^{20}\) All manufacturers were urged to refuse to sign any contract containing 31(a), but judging from the minutes, these trumpetings were mere rhetoric, for the clause stayed and the matter was not raised again. The AWMA, particularly its Geelong members, who hinted at the possibility of serious dislocation to the equipping of the forces, continued negotiations with defence until February, but to no avail. The clause could not be removed and members were advised to sign or not as they saw fit.\(^{21}\) Being businessmen and pragmatists, they all signed and got around the difficulty by ignoring it. The Textile Workers' Union had already complained to the Minister for Defence and the Acting Prime Minister that the Geelong mills were ignoring both the union and the clause,\(^{22}\) and in March the government moved. 31(a) was enforced on the Albion, Union and Excelsior mills. For a month or two until sentiment died down, these most authoritarian and autocratic of mills became closed shops.

Apart from union preference there were other drawbacks to defence work. The mills' sole customer was a slow payer with no sympathy for its suppliers' difficulties in obtaining raw materials and producing on time regardless of shortages of labour and fuel. Furthermore, as owner/operator of the Commonwealth mills, on-stream as of December 1915, it ran the most modern, most efficient mill in the country, a mill whose prices were a constant reproach to its private competitors, being consistently and considerably below their list prices.\(^ {23}\)

\(^{20}\) WO 1 Minutes, 18/1/1915.

\(^{21}\) AWMA Minutes, 16/2/1915.


\(^{23}\) Jensen, J.K. "Defence Production in Australia" typescript draft, nd. Department of Defence Papers Australian Archives. MP98/30 Box 4 Item 7, p.249.
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<tr>
<th>Price Comparison</th>
<th>Commonwealth Mills</th>
<th>Commercial Mills</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cost per Yard</td>
<td>Cost per Yard</td>
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<tr>
<td>18- oz. Khaki cloth</td>
<td>5/2</td>
<td>6/-</td>
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<td>24- oz. Khaki whipcord</td>
<td>6/8</td>
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<tr>
<td>18- oz. Serge, drab.</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>6/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally - and to free enterprise businessmen most peculiar of all - the sole customer was also the ultimate authority on the prices the mills could charge for their output. The AWA had asked for price rises only in 1918, having decided in January 1916 that rises were "inopportune". Rises were first proposed by the three Tasmanian mills and mooted again in July at the request of the two Queensland mills. At this time the department had actually allowed a slight increase in prices for 18-oz. khaki, but had almost immediately rescinded its decision and thereafter resolutely refused to permit any rises at all.

The obverse of the government’s requisition of all of Victoria’s output was that none was going into the domestic market. This situation, plus the lack of imported fabrics, garments and finishings made certain classes of civilian clothing almost unobtainable. The government went some way to redressing the situation by permitting the South Australian Woollen mills to sell on the domestic market. This seems to have been a slightly underhanded arrangement and when another South Australian mill was discovered to be selling to the public also, the loud objections of the mills left doing lower-paying defence work was sufficient for the defence department to abruptly curtail the South Australian privileges.

The temptation of the mills to sell privately was severe, shortages


being so acute the warehouses were prepared to pay outrageous prices for even a few pieces. "Absolutely starving flannel must have something. Sending Tregaskil Ballarat Wednesday" wired one desperate wholesaler. "No earthly use. Quite impossible." replied Ashley. Sub rosa sales to old and valued customers were a different case altogether and seem to have continued in a small way throughout the war. "There always has been I understand a few pieces of flannel leaking out and I understand that one of the mills in Queensland never really stopped supplying the trade... of course I did not take much notice of this as the matter was not for me to enquire into," said Ashley virtuously in 1916. To Treadways, a valued pre-war client, he promised six pieces of grey sergerette. "Please do not say anything about these... it is only through having these sergerettes made months ago, nearly a year ago that I expect to be able to finish them off next month." Naturally the warehouses aided and abetted: "Dear Jack", wrote Nolan of Sargoods, "Could you let me have one piece of mid grey serge on order at once, drop me a line, this is wanted most urgently & consequently informed my client I am getting same from Sydney. I know the trouble but let me know when to expect...".

Towards the end of 1916 the government's requirements abated somewhat and it permitted some mills to use part of their output for domestic production. For an initial twenty weeks from October, the Ballarat mill had all its blanket plant and half of its flannel plant released. This was actually not a great proportion of the mill's capacity - one twentieth part of its plant only - and even this

[26] Telegram from J Jeffery to Ashley, 8/4/1916, BW.

[27] Letter from Ashley to O.J.Bell, Ballarat's Sydney agent, 20/9/1916. BW.

[28] Letter from Ashley to Treadways, 1/9/1916. BW.

[29] Letter from Nolan to Ashley, 31/3/1916. BW.
fraction was subject to army requirements. Defence still took 65,000 yards of flannel from Sunnyside during the release period. Collins Bros. was caught by the release announcement with 10,000 Navy Transport Union blankets no longer required by the customer, and a week after its inception the Australian industry association proved its worth by organizing the safe dispersion of this glut. Collins Bros. undertook to dispose of the blankets "with discretion" and to forward to secretary Ashby a confidential list of buyers and ordered by each.\textsuperscript{30}

The mills were not released completely until 10th December 1918, when the department abruptly ordered an end to khaki production.\textsuperscript{31} Still, defence work continued in the form of fabric for the civilian suits issued to the returning forces. The move caught the mills unprepared, and Ashley wrote to one customer apologizing for his inability to deliver on time. "The trouble arose through the Department of Defence commandeering the whole output of the mills in November for khaki and when we got the Mill choaked \textsuperscript{sic} up with that from end to end they stopped us suddenly insisting we should then make Tweeds for Civilian Suits for the Returned Soldiers. We have got any number of Looms on khaki yet and can't get rid of it. Our bins and bobbins are full of it and so are our machines and I am sick of the very sight of khaki."\textsuperscript{32}

(ii) Running a Mill in the War.

The day-to-day activities of most of Victoria's manufacturing industry had been affected by the trade embargo and the shipping

\textsuperscript{30} Letter from AWMA to all members, 4/10/1916. Australian Woollen Manufacturers' Association correspondence, RMW.

\textsuperscript{31} Letter from AWMA to all members, 10/12/1918. AWMA in RMW.

\textsuperscript{32} Letter from Ashley to Holls Bros., 14/3/1919. RMW.
restrictions and the mills were no exception. Insurance had been one of the earliest casualties in the war, since all legal claims between belligerent nations became automatically void until the end of the war. Marine insurance was the most important category from the mill's perspective and German submarine attacks on allied shipping would quickly have made sea trade uninsurable without the direct intervention of the Imperial government to supplement policy payments. Several mills also had domestic insurance with German firms. Foy & Gibson’s brokers for example, belatedly advised a transfer of its fire policies from the Aachen and Munich Insurance Co. to the local Employers’ Liability Assoc. Corp. when news of the outbreak of war was made public.\[33\]

For the mills at large the restrictions had immediate implications for supplies of new machines and spare parts, for cotton yarn and some types of carbonized wool used in cheap blankets and most of all for soaps, dyestuffs and chemicals of all descriptions. Normally the industry was self sufficient in merino and crossbred wools. It could rely on the new textile machine shops of Geelong and Footscray for engines, boilers and all types of wool preparation machinery up to carding stage, as well as much dyeing and finishing equipment.\[34\] Those mills with their own fellmongeries - Ballarat’s employed about twelve men - could make their own soap for scouring and milling, and most made their own woollen roller lapping. Australia produced brushwear, some batching oils, one or two acids and fuller’s earth, and several Victorian and Tasmanian firms were making good quality wooden bobbins. Leather for card clothing and pulley belting was obtainable but increasingly in short supply as defence requirements for boots and


\[34\] A full list of machinery which "is or should be made in Australia" was sent to the Comptroller- General of Customs by the ANA Minutes, 14/9/1915.
harness grew in 1916.

It said much for the fortunes of the industry that it was self-sufficient even to this degree given its slow start before 1900, but the annual shopping list of a mill ran to hundreds of items and most of these still had to be imported. The heart and soul of the woollen mill, the cards and the looms, came from England, as did almost all the other machinery and parts. Cotton yarns, essential for union flannel warp, came from India and China usually via the same British agents who handled fancy and effect wool yarns for Australasian customers. Even the hessian in which the finished pieces were wrapped for despatch was imported from India, and it too quickly became in short supply. Soda ash, obtained from the United States, was in constant short supply even though licences for its import were readily available.

At the start of the war, machinery presented little problem. Many mills, Excelsior, Sunnyside, Union, Alfred and Foy & Gibson among them, had installed new plant in the prosperous post-Federation years, and this plant had been worked consistently but not hard. Several of the mills had gone to two shifts during busy times like 1908 but even during the war when two and even three shifts were common, additional overtime was granted to only four mills in the busiest year of 1918.35 Even so by 1916 a good deal of plant was starting to show the strain. "We have been running our machines hard in order to meet the requirements of the Government" Ashley wrote in 1916, "and we find that we are run right down with Cards, and should anything happen we will be in rather an awkward position, as there are no stocks here, and I do not suppose there would be much chance of borrowing any Cards from the other Mills, [35] Under the Factories & Shops Acts, the chief inspector of factories had to authorise all applications for a mill to work overtime. Authorizations Listed in Chief Inspectors' Annual Reports 1900-1930. VPR.
as they have all been running as hard as they can go for the same reason as ourselves." 36 Mills borrowed parts from each other when they could, but in the later years of the war there was nothing to borrow. Even the British suppliers ran short. The metal nails - the little eyelets through which each warp thread passed in the loom harness - became an international scarcity, and the British suppliers, Baron and Hogarth, wrote to: "all our friends in New Zealand and Australia" asking them as a special favour to cut the old nails out of their looms and sell them back to the firm for rebuilding.37 The machines could not be permitted to stop, but the long-term disabilities their over-use placed on their owners could be partially assuaged by tax relief. The new association arranged with the Income Tax Commissioner in September 1916 that depreciation would be allowed on woollen machinery for eight hours running, with a proportionate allowance for mills working extra shifts, and repairs, and in February 1917, this rate was raised to seven and a half percent.38

The many chemicals, oils and dyestuffs used were mostly imported and mills carried up to six months' stockpile as a matter of course. Oleine and neatsfoot oil were unobtainable by 1916, and soda ash was so scarce the mills appealed to the Director of Munitions for supply in December 1917,39 but it was the scarcity of dyestuffs that the industry most consistently and loudly bewailed. English firms controlled most of the old-style vegetable and mineral dyestuffs. Logwood and fustic for black and yellow came from Carribean trees, and indigo, which made blue, came from India. English and Scottish dye companies imported the logs


[37] Letter of 23/2/1916: "We have orders at the present time on our books from almost every mill in the two Dominions..." B&W.

[38] ANMA Minutes, 6/2/1917.

and plants and extracted the essences which were concentrated and shipped out in casks to their Australian customers, but this double shipping requirement made many dyestuffs particularly vulnerable to submarine attacks and shipping delays. In 1916 Ballarat ordered twelve casks of logwood extract, eight of fustic and whatever brown paste British Dyes had in stock and was told to expect long delays in delivery.\(^{40}\) Even the most essential war-time dye, khaki green paste, was hard to get. Ballarat had secured several hundredweight on spec from the defence department and when McGill of the Albion wrote in a panic asking to borrow such a shortfall in deliveries of his own British order, it was sent by next rail. "You can let us have some when you get yours."\(^{41}\)

Most dyestuffs came via Britain, a trade worth £140,506 by 1918/19,\(^{42}\) but in the pre-war years dyes sourced in Germany made up about one quarter of this figure. These were, in the main, the modern aniline or coal tar dyes, brighter and more stable than the vegetable dyes and a specialty of the German chemicals industry. The embargo on German trade forced mill owners to deal exclusively with the newly formed British dyers conglomerate, British Dyers Ltd., which later became part of I.C.I.. British Dyers cemented its new monopoly by offering its customers shares in the new venture. "We may say that the company’s appeal for support is confined to users of Dyes, and that priority in the supply of the Company’s products is reserved to subscribers who are themselves users of Dyes."\(^{43}\) According to this letter several Australasian customers had already subscribed, and others

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\(^{40}\) Letter from Ashley to The British Dyewood Co., 2/3/1916. BW.

\(^{41}\) Letter from Ashley to McGill, 25/3/1916. BW. Khaki with green tints for camouflage was introduced for the first time in World War I; Boer war khaki was a dusty brown, reflecting its Indian Army origins.

\(^{42}\) Trade and Customs Returns of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1920-1921, p.497.

\(^{43}\) Letter from B. D. L. to Ashley, 29/8/1916. BW.
wasted no time. The Commonwealth mill purchased L4,000 worth immediately,\textsuperscript{44} and Ballarat had 590 of the one pound shares by 1921.

These British dyes had always been the second choice of the mills' dyers, and the reasons became apparent under front-line conditions. "The Australian cloth and hats were dyed a peculiar pea-soup shade, but the dye of some consignments (which, rightly or wrongly, were supposed by the troops to have been manufactured in Europe) was defective and quickly faded to grey and even to a faint pink."\textsuperscript{45} Would the diggers have been surprised to find that British dyehouses were responsible? Probably not, given their opinion of the British uniform.\textsuperscript{46}

That most basic of all the mills' requirements, a steady supply of the right types of wool, was handled during the war years and up to 1925 in an entirely new fashion. Wool exports, especially of the cross-bred wools suitable for uniforms, had been prohibited to destinations other than the U.K. as early as October 1914, and export licences thereafter were issued according to the needs of the English market. Seventy per cent of the Australian clip was merino, not cross-bred, but the strong U.S. market for merino wool was also closed to Australia by 1916 at British request. Since South African wool continued to be sold there Britain agreed to take all classes of Australasian wool in recompense and at prices 55 per cent above pre-war values.\textsuperscript{47}

A Central Wool Committee to administer the War Precautions (Wool) Regulations was set up on November 21, 1916. It co-ordinated these large sales and ran all Australia's wool business until June 1921, when

\textsuperscript{44} Jensen: nd: 251.
\textsuperscript{45} Scott: 1936: 255
\textsuperscript{46} Scott: 1936: 254.
\textsuperscript{47} Scott: 1936: 526-529.
the British Australian Wool Realization Association took over. "Wool" included greasy wool, sheeprskins and wool tops, and the eight man Central and State Committees of the C.W.C. reflected the interests of all aspects of the industry - growers, brokers, scourers and top makers as well as manufacturers. Burdett Laycock worked long and hard for the Australian manufacturers on the Central Committee chaired by J.M. Higgins, and on the Victorian committee chaired by J. Ritchie, C.E. Denniston of Doveton represented the mills. The unions were not represented, and an application by the Federal Wool and Basil Workers for a seat on the committee was summarily rejected.\[^{48}\]

Under the new system Victoria's entire clip was appraised in four centres established at Ballarat, Geelong, Melbourne and Albury by selected local wool brokers, then valued for the C.W.C. accordingly. The State Committee stockpiled the wool and issued catalogues of lot and type from which manufacturers, who had been given first pick of the scouring wools, selected their year's requirements. Manufacturers paid the appraisionment cost, plus 5 per cent,\[^{49}\] plus delivery charges, a total figure estimated by the Defence Department to average 11d per lb.\[^{50}\] This was more than favourable compared with the flat rate Britain was paying of 15 1/2d per lb., F.O.B. Australian port.\[^{51}\] The first appraisionment was done in January 1917 and Godfrey Hirst was the first applicant, requesting 4,000 bales that month. Commonwealth mills requested 2,000 bales the next month and the other mills soon followed.

Much has been written about the Central Wool Committee and its

\[^{48}\] Central Wool Committee Minutes November 1916- October 1918, MP377/14 Australian Archives.

\[^{49}\] C.W.C. Minutes, 19/1/1917.

\[^{50}\] Jensen: nd: 251.

activities between November 1916 and June 1920. Senator Guthrie claimed its handling and disposal of seven million bales constituted "The largest individual commercial transaction in history",\textsuperscript{52} and much made of its impressive turnover of L207 million: "a big order to place in the way of a country with only six millions of population" as H. Sims said admiringly.\textsuperscript{53} To the mill operators the new system was acceptable but rather slow, more important as the source of wool at cheaper prices than as the saviour of the woolgrowers. In any case they had other more pressing considerations. Getting sufficient labour to produce defence requirements and adequate fuel to run the mills were severe and continuing problems.

Skilled labour was usually in short supply around the mills, and enlistments in the first flush of enthusiasm in 1914 threatened to deplete the already small reserves. The association had written to the Minister for Defence "re hands enlisting in the war" asking that the defence department decide which hands should be considered indispensable.\textsuperscript{54} In October 1916 it applied for and apparently got (the minutes do not say so specifically) general exemption from military service for mill workers. It seems that some enlistments were permitted, for forty-three of Godfrey Hirst’s men enlisted in 1917, but these were mostly the unskilled, younger men. Commonwealth mills recorded the enlistment of a temporary clerk in November 1917, and of three more men in April 1918, a cutting machine attendant and two

\textsuperscript{52} Guthrie, J.F. Australia's Greatest Industry, Sheep and Wool. A Brief History, Geelong 1937, p.15. WNA.

\textsuperscript{53} Sims, H. A Message from B.A.W.R.A. Sydney, nd. MP136/23 Australian Archives, p.3.

\textsuperscript{54} AMWA Minutes, 20/7/1915.
pieces. The rate of enlistment was therefore low, but it added to an already increasing demand for labour which grew as defence demands increased. Such demands reached critical proportions with the decision to reinforce the Expeditionary Force with a further 50,000 announced in January 1916.

The immediate requirement was for weavers, and the association now launched a campaign to entice women into the mills. Advertisements for operatives were placed in the Age, Argus and Herald, and the dailies in Ballarat, Castlemaine, Geelong and Warrnambool on January 14, 15, and 16. The response was poor and the ads were run again on January 22, this time specifically asking for women to contact the association.

It was thought that amongst the hundreds of woman weavers who have left the trade during past years on account of marriage there might be a fair proportion who would be willing to assist, if only temporarily, to increase the output. Whether they have not viewed it in this light, or have not noticed the announcement, is not known, but it is particularly desired to bring to their notice that women who have at any time been in the weaving department of a woollen mill, but who are not so engaged at present, should send in their names, addresses, age and experience to the Secretary, Austin. Woollen Mfrs. Assoc., Empire Arcade 264-268 Flinders Street, Melbourne.

The Age followed up on January 26 with pointed commentary on the position in the British industry, which was considering conscripting weavers, and urging Australian weavers "(even the married women!) to lend a hand at this time of stress."

The total response was disappointing and no further appeals were undertaken. There was some increase in the numbers of women employed in

[55] Munitions Supply Board, Annual Reports of Commonwealth Government Factories 1911-1921, Commonwealth Mill 1917/18, M891/3, AA. Piecers were youths hired to tie broken threads and clean up during mule spinning.

[56] Age 26/1/1916.

[57] Age 22/1/1916
the mills and, as we will see in chapter four, female employment of 52 per cent during 1917 and 1918 was the highest proportion achieved in the industry during 1900 to 1930, even though it was still only 2 per cent higher than it had been in 1913.\footnote{58}

As vital to the mill as any raw material was the fuel necessary to run the huge steam boilers, engines and turbines which powered the plant. The country mills usually fired their boilers with locally cut timber, supplemented with coal, but the Geelong and city mills more often used coal shipped in from the New South Wales collieries or sent up by rail from Gippsland. The high grade Hunter coal was preferred to the local product but it was not always available and it was as insurance against loss of New South Wales supply which prompted the Victorian government to open the Wonthaggi mine after the strike of 1909.\footnote{59} This foresight was rewarded when more strikes in 1916 and 1917 at the collieries and on the ships again cut New South Wales supplies. The state mine during these two years supplied over a million tons of coal to Victorian industry. The mills weathered the 1916 shortages without a great deal of trouble, but the more protracted unrest of August 1917 and the seamen’s strike of May 1919 caused considerable concern. The restrictions imposed by the newly created Victorian Coal Board were tight enough to impel a woollen manufacturers’ delegation to call on the board in August to protest some of the Coal Regulations,\footnote{60} and for all industry to be under rationing of coal by September. Despite being able to use coal on specified days only, the sole mill to close was Laycocks and that only briefly. Laycock’s carters had refused to carry coal as a gesture of sympathy toward the

\footnote{58} See appendix 9.


\footnote{60} AMMA Minutes, 24/8/1917.
strikers, and the mill closed briefly while the shop steward of the Woollen Trade Union dissuaded them.\textsuperscript{61} 1919's strike was probably the most severe ever to hit the mills. Even though each had plenty of coal stockpiled in the mill yards by June, the Coal Board steadfastly refused to let them use it. Yet another industry delegation called on the board to point out the injustice of the situation as well as to protest fiercely against the Commonwealth mill being permitted to operate,\textsuperscript{62} but the effort was in vain and the commercial mills had to close, many for up to a month.

(iii) \textit{Voluntary War Work.}

The wool textile industry's voluntary work operated on two levels, that of the semi-official public activities of the association, and of the more localized efforts of the mill and its workers in the town. The \textit{AWMA} co-ordinated relief work with bodies such as the Australian Red Cross and local repatriation committees, and organized major donations to causes such as the French Cross (1917) and Australian Soldiers in England (1918) appeals. It also arranged the donation of an ultra-modern motor ambulance in April 1915, the gift encompassing a vehicle with five spare wire wheels (L175) and the services of driver Mr. J. Alcorn.\textsuperscript{63}

Red Cross work was undeniably the association's greatest effort for the war years, for the Red Cross itself was the greatest single organization of volunteer war workers in the country. Before the war it had consisted of a solitary New South Wales branch which taught first

\textsuperscript{[61]} \textit{AWMA} Minutes, 11/9/1917.

\textsuperscript{[62]} \textit{AWMA} Minutes, 10/6/1919.

\textsuperscript{[63]} \textit{AWMA} Minutes, 13/4/1915.
aid, but with the declaration of war in August, the wife of the Governor-General, Lady Monroe-Ferguson, had taken control and had launched the organization in all states, each state branch being headed by the wife of the state governor. The Victorian committee included Premier Peacock, the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, the mayors of Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo and a host of Melbourne socialites. Headquartered in Government House Melbourne, the movement spread rapidly: a men’s division was formed in November 1915, and a host of other branches mobilized in 1916 particularly after the Somme casualties in the winter of that year. By 1917 Victoria alone had 900 branches providing comforts for Australian sick, wounded and prisoners of war.

The mills received department of defence permission to supply the Red Cross with cut-price pure wool and wool/cotton union flannel for underclothing and shirts. The association price to the Red Cross was very fine; 1/1d for 28 inch fabric, 5d below a price set for projected private sales the previous year, and close to the making cost of the item, so close in fact that it had to be lifted to 1/4 halfpenny the next month to cover manufacturing costs. The Victorian Division wanted more flannel than the mills were prepared to supply, so the chairman of the association that year, John Ashley of Ballarat, was invited to inspect the central Red Cross depot in the ballroom of Government House. He was sufficiently impressed to recommend that all mills assist and by the end of the year Red Cross flannel deliveries were being made at a rate of 8800 yards a week, at prices yielding an estimated saving to the

[64] Robertson, Philadelphia. Red Cross Yesterdays, Red Cross, Melbourne, 1950, p.25.


### VICTORIAN RED CROSS FLANNEL PRODUCTION, 1915/16 - 1918/19.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>YARDAGE</th>
<th>VALUE in POUNDS.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1915/16</td>
<td>968, 997 (est)</td>
<td>43, 444/11/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916/17</td>
<td>572, 059</td>
<td>38, 042/ 0/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917/18</td>
<td>387, 227</td>
<td>29, 042/ 1/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918/19</td>
<td>290, 497 1/2</td>
<td>23, 583/14/8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL:** 2, 218, 780 1/2  134, 112/ 8/1

*Source: Red Cross Annual Reports.*

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### Red Cross Society.

**BALLARAT AND DISTRICT BRANCH.**

*Central Workroom and Depot.*

City Hall.

Ballarat, 25th October 1916.
Red Cross of L3,200 a year. By the end of the war, as the table shows, total flannel deliveries exceeded 2,218,780 yards, or as the Red Cross liked to put it, 1260 miles of flannel.

Foy & Gibson left the AWMA just before the war and was therefore not a party to the flannel scheme, but it too was heavily involved in Red Cross work at the next stage of production. Through its associated company, Maclellan's Big Store in Prahran, it cut out 89,000 garments in 1915/16 for the Red Cross and other societies assisting the troops and continued to provide this service each year to the end of the war. After cutting and bundling the pieces were carried free of charge by the railways to hundreds of country halls and institutes where Red Cross sewing guilds assembled the garments and packed them for return to the Government House depot. Here they were inspected, repaired if necessary, folded, pressed, packed and despatched by a team of twenty brutally efficient volunteers.

An important proportion of the depot's work consisted of handknitted items, and here again Victoria's mills assisted. From September 1915 the three member mills best suited to producing handknitting or fingering yarn - a much coarser and loftier product than the counts of yarn normally used in woollen weaving - provided free of charge 2500 lbs. of yarn each week to the legions of Red Cross handknitters. Warmambool made most of this yarn, 2000 lb. a week, and Albion and Excelsior split the remainder. The Commonwealth mills, although not members of the AWMA, also supplied Red Cross knitting wool - L3,212/10/0 worth in 1918 - as well as donating "scribbling" wool.

[67] AWMA Minutes, 19/3/1918.

(carded sliver) for Red Cross handspinners and used packing cases.\textsuperscript{69} The price of local handknitting yarns was not a problem but the quantity was, and the mills could come nowhere near supplying the demand. The Australian Red Cross joined with the Australian Comforts Fund in 1917 to petition the department of defence for permission to import into Victoria four tons a month of fingering yarn to be used for socks. The petition was granted and Britain supplied the requirements at 6/- a pound, although it was not stated whether this price was F.O.B. or ex-factory.\textsuperscript{70}

Armed with the famous \textit{Red Cross Knitting Books} (some of the 118,000 instruction books issued by the Red Cross by mid-1916) and an adequate supply of pure wool yarn, legions of volunteer knitters turned out hundreds of dozens of items for the men in hospital, at home or overseas. When needles became scarce, many improvised with bicycle spokes. There were heelless bed socks to be made and four other types of hosiery, cap scarves, cap cardigans, helmets, rugs, gloves (two sorts), mittens (three sorts), pullovers light and heavy, scarves, waistcoats and cotton washers.\textsuperscript{71}

Within the mills themselves, workers supported dozens of local projects. Under the Geneva Convention the Red Cross could only assist sick, wounded and imprisoned soldiers. Comforts for the rest of the forces were the object of the work of the Patriotic Funds, such as the Victorian War Chest, the ANZAC Club, the Overseas Club, the Y.M.C.A.,

\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Red Cross Annual Reports}, 1915/16, 1916/17, 1917/18, 1918/19.

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Inter State Commission of Australia Prices Investigation No. 11 Report, Clothing} p.11; \textit{CIP 1917/19}, vol. 5, p.401.

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Australian Red Cross Society Red Cross Knitting Book}, 3rd ed. n.d. Printed and donated by Lincoln Mills (Aust.)Ltd. Melbourne.
and the Australian Comforts Fund. Like the Red Cross, many of these bodies were organized by regions, which meant that the individual mills could be involved in projects run by their state, their town, or by volunteer groups within the mill itself, and indeed they seem to have been active at all levels. Being in control of the company funds, mill owners and managers were able to make more dramatic gestures of support for the war effort than employees. In this regard Ballarat set the pace in August 1916 when the company invested L10,000 in the current War Loan. It boosted this in October when the rest of the company's reserve funds were put into bonds, bringing the total to L11,515/6/3. Most other mills seem to have invested in these loans; Maclellan of Foy & Gibson proposed to his English directors that the company invest L50,000 in the War Loan of 1917, pointing out that it was free from Wealth Tax and paying 6 1/2 per cent reducing to 4 1/2 per cent, while Godfrey Hirst also put in L10,000 in December of the same year.

The size and incidence of special donations in the name of the mill was also at the discretion of the manager. Ballarat offered cheap blankets to the New South Wales organizers of the Belgian Relief Fund in November 1914, and donated L200 closer to home when it was asked by the Y.M.C.A. to build a recreation hut at Ballarat Military Camp. The hut was built and the pride of the donor publically displayed in the fine brass plate on the door bearing the name of the Sunnyside mill.

As a community leader, the mill manager, particularly in the

[72] For a full list of the state’s Patriotic Funds see Scott, 1936. Appendix 12, p.883.


[75] Letter from Y.W.C.A. Ballarat to Ashley, April 1917. B&W.
"FOR GOD, FOR KING AND FOR COUNTRY"

Y.M.C.A.
With the Australian Imperial Forces
WRITE HOME FIRST

Address reply to
The Rev. War. 22
No. 11. S. F. Hospital
Military Camp at Bacchus Marsh.

"War is a time of sacrifice and of service. Some can render one service, some another. Some here, and some there. Some can render great assistance others but little. There is but one who cannot help or some manner."

BALLARAT DISTRICT
QUEEN CARNIVAL

Under the Distinctive Patronage of
His Excellency Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson,
Governor General
The Right Hon. William Hughes,
Prime Minister.
Hon. Joseph Cook,
Sir Alexander Peacock,
Premier of Victoria.
Hon. Alfred Deakin.
Hon. W. A. Walk.

His Worship the Mayor of the City
C. W. D. Hill

Vice-President—
His Worship the Mayor of Ballarat East
C. A. Levy

C. W. J. Hoare

Ballarat, October 16th 1916

Letterheads; Y.M.C.A. and Ballarat Queen Carnival 1916. B.W.
country town, was heavily involved in the fund-raising activities of his district. Ballarat City decided on a Queen of the South competition in 1916 to raise funds for the upgrading of Ballarat Hospital. Mrs. Ashley consented to be nominated as one of the Queens and immediately all the mill’s efforts were directed toward her support. Unsubtle letters went out from the manager’s office, advising clients and suppliers of the signal honour accorded Mrs. A, and by return mail generous donations came pouring in: a guinea from yarn agent Bryce, L10 from British Dyers, L50 from Sargoods. Impressive as these results were, Ashley’s next plan transcended them. He purchased from an army major recently returned from the East a gigantic Japanese doll’s house. This marvel was 5’ long by 5’ high and electrically lit from within, and Ashley decided to raise money by raffling it. To give ticket sales the widest possible scope he had it railed to Melbourne and put on display for a week in the front window of Suttons’ piano store.\(^7\) For reasons not set down in mill correspondence Mrs. Ashley retired from the competition soon after, but the battle continued as participant organizations held concerts, displays, band performances and assorted tournaments and raffled numerous pianos. An offer of tickets to a Masonic concert in support of the Red Cross queen was declined by Ashley as being unfair; the Masons were supporting only one queen in a competitive competition.\(^7\) He had obviously lost heart in the whole affair.

The manager could exercise one other prerogative if he chose, to arrange letters of introduction to London contacts on behalf of friends and employees who had enlisted. Mills with British offices like Poy & Gibson and Laycocks were best able to do this and Maclellan in particular wrote scores of them, asking that the London office show "all

\(^7\) Note for file 23/9/1916. BW.

\(^7\) Letter from Ashley to Sec. St John’s Lodge, 23/9/1916. BW.
A Request

Most of these post cards will naturally be returned to the folks at home who are sending the tobacco and cigarettes.

And if the message on this post card is of more than personal interest, then the friend who receives this post card would greatly help the good work by sending it to the Organizer of the Tobacco Fund.

It would probably help the Organizer to stimulate further subscriptions, and a lot more money is required to keep up supplies to the brave men.

Southern Cross Tobacco Fund organized by The Over-Sea's Club General Buildings Aldwych, London, W.C. 2

POST CARD

The Ballarat Woollen & Worsted Coy.
Ballarat, Victoria, AUSTRALIA.

Postcard, Southern Cross Tobacco Fund, 1917. BWW.
courtesy" to the visiting Australians.\textsuperscript{78}

The war work of mill employees was less spectacular and generally much less documented than that of management, but seems to have been considerable, none the less. Mills had an existing tradition of employee-organized charity work, collecting for injured workmates or the local hospital, or for national disasters like the Mt. Lyell tragedy of 1912, and these networks shifted effortlessly into work for the Patriotic Funds. The men and boys collected scarce materials for recycling by the Australian Comforts Fund. The mill provided the collection boxes for all the old tins, scrap metal, used golf balls, rubber tyres, bottles, and empty toothpaste tubes the fund amassed.\textsuperscript{79} The girls cooked and made clothing. Most of the work took place after a full day at work. The weaving room girls at the Alfred formed an ANZAC Club and met on Wednesdays after work to fold and pack clothing they had made or collected for despatch to France. On Saturday nights they combined patriotism with having a good time at the local fund-raising dance, and like women in all the mills they knitted, sewed and baked for countless other stalls, bazaars and raffles in their spare time.\textsuperscript{80}

Ballarat employees collected L3660 and subscribed as a group to the same 1916 War Loan which was accommodating the Sunnyside reserve fund.\textsuperscript{81} They also collected smaller amounts on behalf of the Overseas Club Southern Cross Tobacco Fund, an organization largely supported by British citizens in the dominions, and must have been delighted to receive postcards like the one opposite from the cheerful recipient of


\textsuperscript{79} Letter from J Keith to Ashley, 7/12/1917. BMW.

\textsuperscript{80} Evidence of Mrs. May Hansford. Interview of 7/6/1983.

\textsuperscript{81} Geelong Advertiser 4/8/1916.
one of their parcels.\textsuperscript{82}

As well as Patriotic Funds, mill workers and their families also supported the special groups which worked for each infantry battalion, sending personalized comforts to its troops. The 2nd Infantry Brigade had its depot in Ballarat and it seems possible that it was in this connection that Mrs. Gribble approached Mr. Ashley in April 1916.

Dear Mr. Ashley, The bearer is my lad & he has a scarf, which my little girl made for her soldier uncle, who is leaving Sydney at the end of the week. We tried the dye shops & could not get it done... so we tried ourselves, with a poor result & I thought you might do me the favour of giving it another dip, as it is no colour at all at present. I would not ask you, only it is a question of time for him to get it...\textsuperscript{83}

Soft-hearted John Ashley may even have done it.

The amount and value of the voluntary war work done is not easy to gauge. An attempt by the Bureau of Census and Statistics in 1921 to estimate the amount raised arrived at a figure of £12,121,872, but as one analyst points out\textsuperscript{84} this did not include funds raised by small societies or gifts in kind or from individuals. On his estimate the real figure would have been closer to £14 million. Using the Red Cross figures alone, clothing was an important percentage and in some years a majority percentage of the goods exported, and of this clothing, knitted goods were particularly significant.

The Australian textile industry could not supply the required volumes of socks, knitted under and outerwear, caps, gloves and scarves. Only Foy & Gibson was spinning hosiery and machine knitting counts of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{82} Scott: 1936: 720. This fund distributed 55 million cigarettes and 62,000 lbs. of tobacco during the war.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Letter from Mrs A Gribble to Ashley, 25/4/1916. BWW.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Scott: 1936: 737.
\end{itemize}
yarn for its own use (it had 17,000 spindles in operation) and only Foy & Gibson, Australian Knitting mills and Lincoln were producing knitted apparel in any quantity. The near monopoly on imports of knitting yarns was held by the Australian agents of John Paton and Son Ltd. and J.J. Baldwin and Partners, British spinners. By November 1917 the supply situation had become desperate; the importers were out of stock. By April 1918 A.K.M. had given notice to its two hundred-odd employees that the mill would be closing if yarn was not made available soon. At the same time, the *Industrial Australian and Mining Standard* was in the middle of a bitter campaign against the Director of Munitions, predicting the collapse of the infant knitting industry because of government ineptitude. Stung by the paper's accusations, the director responded that the government was indeed interested in assisting the industry and that he had "just now" received a cable from the High Commissioner in London advising that England had made a special ration of woollen and worsted yarns available to be issued every two months.

This woollen yarn was mostly handknitting or fingering yarn, a line which in 1918 occupied only 20 per cent of Foy & Gibson's yarn output, but which was particularly important to the domestic output of the thousands of soldiers' wives, mothers and sisters who knitted. While it has not proved possible to quantify their total output, the Red Cross alone despatched 811,143 items of handmade clothing, mostly knitted, during the war. If, by way of example, Red Cross clothing exports represented the same proportion of the total Patriotic Funds' output in kind as they did in cash, which is to say about one quarter of the


60 - or 63 - Buys One of These Beautiful All-Wool Brown Suits.

TWO BIG SPECIALS IN FAWN SERGES

NOW that the war is over, men's Australian-made clothing mills, through the year, have been making beautiful Serge Cloth for the military, is in a able to reduce some of their beautiful cloth.

About the first lot received was shipped up by Beirne's.
- We just couldn't get such a beautiful cloth with wonderful colors - we put these down as being a good match.
- We are anxious that the faithful smart costumes and shirts could not be worn down by it.

The wonderful match that you'll never see it again.

Hold them up, turn them out, and feel the cloth against your hand. They are beautiful, and look at them as a whole and try it on while they're smoking hot. They stand up to the worst of it.

They're the best Suit Values yet. They are very good, and you can think of them.

Made in Two Styles

60/- 63/-

T. C. BEIRNE & CO.,

The House of the Best

T. C. BEIRNE & CO.,
The Valley, Brisbane

£4/4/0

T.C. Beirne & Co. Catalogue 1919. BW.
total, it is possible that the entire Australian domestic output of soldiers’ clothing ran as high as 21,008,603 items. If the truth is anywhere near these figures, the home knitters and needlewomen may have been responsible not only for the provision of loving gifts, but for an essential part of the defence supply chain, particularly after the forces moved from the Middle East to wintry France.

(iv) The Aftermath of War: Repatriation and Profiteering

The war ended suddenly for the mills, with an abrupt lettergram from Ashby at the association: "Owing to cessation of hostilities Defence Department desires the manufacture of all material to cease at earliest possible, therefore do not put any further material into work and divert to civilian use all you possibly can". Defence’s sudden decision caught the mills unaware. In a great stroke of luck Ballarat succeeded in selling a large quantity of army serges and woolens to T.C. Beirne’s store in Brisbane - fortunately the war had sparked a fashion for military styles and construction in clothing - but it was clear that only a market starved of fabric and clothing could have absorbed all the drab fabric that the mills needed to shift. Tenders for civilian suiting for returned soldiers, announced at the same time as the cessation order, got off to a slow start, not entirely because looms and bobbins were choked up with khaki. Samples and price guidelines for the first 100,000 yards had been prepared for the government by the Bete noir of the commercial mills, the Commonwealth

[88] See figures for cash collected by Victorian Patriotic Funds 1914-18 in Scott: 1936: 863, i.e. Total Funds = £3,294,273 of which Red Cross = £854,283 or 25.9 per cent.

[89] AWMA lettergram to all members, 11/12/1918. BWM.
Repatriation Suitings. Swatches from Commonwealth Mills, 1918. BWW.
Mills. The Commonwealth suitings were fine quality woollens priced according to the mills standard formula for Federal contracts: nett cost of production. Fortunately for the commercial mills Commonwealth's output was far below requirements but even so the tender price was only marginally feasible and it seems that only patriotism of a sort drew any commercial tenderers. When the idea had first been floated at the AWMA, Collins Bros. — who played for keeps in business — flatly refused to supply unless all the mills "did their part." Production of civilian suitings in yarns and colourways not all that far removed from materials already in stock took the industry into late 1920, but for the Commonwealth mills the association was extended further by its landing good contracts from the Returned Soldiers' and Sailors' Imperial League that year for the supply of 480,000 yards of "defence tweed" for ex-soldiers' suits. Fabric "in nice styles of serviceable tweed" was supplied to Returned Soldier's League branches at 50 per cent of current market value and resold to members, giving profit to the league and value to the ex-soldiers, as the mill put it.

As well as suitings there were other links between the wool textiles industry and the new service industry of repatriation. The Department of Repatriation as such was formed in April 1918, but its rehabilitation functions beforehand had been administered by state and local government and the Red Cross in familiar ways. For textiles the involvement was dual - occupational therapy and vocational training, based on hand spinning and weaving. There is a splendid photo in the Red Cross Annual Report of 1916/17 of a group of invalid soldiers at Highton Rest Home learning hand spinning on equipment cleverly


[91] AWMA Minutes 13/5/1919. Defence’s original request had been for 50,000 yards only.

AN OCCUPATION FULL OF PROMISE FOR
RETURNED SOLDIERS.

Under the supervision of Sergeant A. W. Sinclair, who has had over 30 years' practical experience— as Tailor, Weaver, and Manufacturer— Australian Returned Soldiers are being trained as hand-weavers of high-class all-wool tweeds. The machinery in these Illustrations has been constructed, under the Sergeant's superintendence, by returned men themselves, who, after a few months' training, become expert craftsmen. Victorian enterprises have been established at Melbourne and Geelong, and considerable progress has been made, the schools not only supporting themselves in the sale of the work produced, but also exporting goods to the tramways, showing a credit balance. The details of manufacture are briefly: The yarn is obtained from the woollen mills, wound on "cheesens" (spools); from these it is transferred to the Warping Machine (No. 1). One hundred and twenty spools are used, and each spool is wrapped twelve times round the spool. The resulting 2,880 threads are passed on to the beam showing in front of the Warping machine. This beam, when carrying about 66 yards of yarn, is moved to the back of the Weaving Loom (No. 2), and each thread is passed through an eyelet and a reel, being finally fastened to a similar beam at the front of the loom. A stitch is made by sliding a holder of ten frames (No. 3) between rows of threads alternately raised and depressed by four levers. When a length of thread has been woven, the entire piece in the loom, Shirred, shrunk, and prepared ready for the market.

Hand Weaving Australian Tweeds, 1917. AT, 11/11/1917. MUA.
improvised from bicycle wheels, and they were probably using the wool scribbled by the Commonwealth mills for the Red Cross. Hand weaving, the next stage, was taught to ex-soldiers by the State War Council until Repatriation took over and from 1917 both the Commonwealth and the commercial mills supplied yarn for this purpose.

The AWMA had been supplying repatriation instructor Sergeant Sinclair with 200 pounds of yarn a month since March of 1917, but after Repatriation assumed control, demand jumped abruptly. Commonwealth’s supplies rose from L76.15.6 worth in 1916/17 to L3212.10.19. in 1918/19. The new department seemed to have inherited an enthusiasm for hand weaving from its local predecessors and decided to include its teaching in the vocational training program it was establishing in June 1918. It asked the AWMA if hand weaving was a viable trade and was told that "Hand Weaving has been out-of-date in England and Australia for twenty years... and it would be absolutely impossible for returned soldiers to earn a livelihood in normal times at hand weaving." Ignoring the expert advice it had solicited, the department established hand weaving schools in Geelong and Melbourne with results as predicted. Some graduates of Sergeant Sinclair’s course pooled their war gratuity bonds in 1915 in a cooperative hand weaving venture they named the ANZAC Tweed Trust. The little information remaining on this ill-fated venture suggests that even though it got its yarn at bedrock prices from the Commonwealth mill and was accommodated rent-free in

[93] AWMA Minutes, 13/3/1917. The yarns required were 2/6 singles and 2/8 twist, that is, two strands of size 6 single and size 8 twisted Yorkshire count yarns.


[95] AWMA Minutes, 20/2/1918.
the basement of R.S.L. House in Collins Street, it was out of business
by 1925, entirely the victim of the very department which was meant to
assist its proprietors.\(^{96}\)

It seems likely that hand weaving had the sort of cozy cottage-
industry feel complementary with aspects of the government's great
Soldier Settlement Scheme, and for that reason it was proceeded with in
the face of all informed opposition. There was also the fact that wool
textiles was rapidly becoming the state's glamour industry, both in the
eyes of government and shareholders. It was economic, efficient,
expanding, prosperous and apparently the perfect source of employment
prospects. Wool was the country's foremost export earner and as
Repatriation was already running wool sorting classes, what could be
more natural than training for other facets of such an industry? The
government's mistake was in not appreciating that modern wool textiles
was a high technology industry, and that only the hand weaver in the
mill was the design artist on the pattern loom. For every pattern
weaver, the mill might employ two hundred power loom weavers, and even
if Repatriation had trained ex-soldiers as power loom weavers, no mill
could have employed many of them because they would have to be paid
twice the wage of the present girl operators.

A second group of ex-soldiers formed a woollen co-operative with
their gratuity bond money in 1920 and succeeded beyond all expectations.
The Returned Soldiers' and Sailors' Woollen and Worsted Co-operative
Manufacturing Co. was an all-Geelong affair, the idea of Brigadier-
General R. Smith, in civilian life a Geelong wool broker. It was
financed by the bond money of 1,400 returned men and, with the
assistance of a £60,000 Commonwealth loan in 1924, the co-op. built an

\(^{96}\) See Commonwealth mill Annual Report 1919/20 and Ballarat Courier
14/4/1924.
Aerial View of the Newly-Completed Soldier's Mill. GHRC, n.d.

Geelong R.S.&S Woollen and Worsted Co-operative Manufacturing Coy. Ltd.

Incorporated under Companies Act 1915

Pakington St, Geelong, Victoria

Letterhead, Returned Soldier's Mill. Author's Collection.
ultra modern mill in Pakington Street, Geelong. Under the inspired management of Albert Schofield it became one of Victoria's great mills.\textsuperscript{97} The different fates of the two ventures depended on the different perceptions of the nature of the industry. The idyllic Repatriation perception of cottage industry using novice male hand weavers as against the heavy industrial realities of modern mills with their trained female power loom operators. Returned Soldiers' mill also had the advantage of access to a trained labour pool. Some of Geelong's returned men must also have been ex-employees of that city's largest industry and interested in seeking work at the new mill.

Sudden price rises in late 1915, the products of drought as well as wartime inflation, led Federal and state governments at this time to look closely at business profits, both as a source of needed revenue as well as the result of unfair activities in wartime. Price fixing was the first avenue explored and a Commonwealth Prices Adjustment Board sat for five months investigating the situation until a takeover in August 1916 by the Inter State Necessary Commodities Commission. This body published official price lists for essentials like foodstuffs,\textsuperscript{98} and by October 1917 was working toward fixing prices for flannels and blankets.\textsuperscript{99} In August the government had revived the Inter State Commission, charging its commissioners with the task of investigating the price rises and establishing their cause, particularly the possibility of profiteering by suppliers. While the Commission did not begin hearing evidence on clothing in Melbourne until 6th May 1918, the government was already remediying its large deficit by boosting income


\textsuperscript{98} Scott; 1936: 636- 640.

\textsuperscript{99} AMMA Minutes 9/10/1917.
and entertainment tax receipts and introducing a War Time Profits Bill in May 1916. The Chamber of Manufactures had serious objections to any such legislation and presented them by waiting on the Acting Prime Minister in December 1918.\textsuperscript{100} Protests notwithstanding, the tax became law that year and was levied on the amount by which profit in the war years exceeded either the average profits of stated years or 10 per cent.\textsuperscript{101} The tax rate for 1915/16 was 50 per cent on this difference and 75 per cent thereafter, payments being retrospective from 1915. The heaviest payments fell on the mills during 1919 when previous years' holdovers fell due. Ballarat, for example, earned nett profits of L23,087 in 1918 and L23,456 the following year, on which it paid combined income and War Time Profits Tax of L4659 for 1918 and a substantial L19,977 for 1919.

To have the Inter State Commission further prying into the mills' private business was bad enough, the figures the mills were required to put into the hands of the commission being their most closely-guarded secrets. To have that same commission report that, while no profiteering was to be found outside the N.S.W. meat trade, the increased cost of clothing was partly caused by "increased prices charged and excessive profits made by Australian manufacturers of woollen piece goods" was to add insult to injury. Scott suggests in his discussion of the report that denunciations of profiteering may have had a political basis, the Opposition cashing in on strong feelings about unpatriotic exploitation by traders of their countrymen, but he has no doubts that the base cause of rising prices was the depreciation of the purchasing power of the Australian currency.\textsuperscript{102} Whatever the cause, the mills had been singled out as having made high profits out of the war in which 60,000 Australians had died, and because of it were to be the subject of

\textsuperscript{100} VCM Minutes 9/12/1918.

\textsuperscript{101} Scott: 1936: 482 & footnote.
another enquiry in 1920, this one being the Victorian Fair Profits Commission of 1919–20.

The public opprobrium generated by the Inter State Commission’s report came as a severe shock to mill owners who were proud of their war efforts and accustomed to hearing them spoken of as worthy and patriotic endeavours. Certainly they had made money out of defence work, the low margins and supply difficulties being amply recompensed by the huge volume, the limited colourways, the two and three shifts worked and the simplified marketing arrangements, but what was wrong with that? Profits were what businesses were meant to make, and with them the mills had begun a surge of re-investment and expansion in new and better replacements for the machines run down by war production. "Commercial mills are providing for their future by establishing reserve funds (on which interest is not payable) or purchasing plant and machinery out of profits" wrote James Smail, manager of the Commonwealth mill, in a vain request to the Board of Factory Administration to be allowed to do the same.\[103\] Commonwealth had been specifically created to make non-profit "Socialistic khaki"\[104\] for the armed forces and other government employees, but even it had made substantial wartime profits. It was not, however, called upon to testify along with the other mills before Major General Sir James McCay’s Fair Profits Commission in Melbourne on the 11th May 1920.

McCay and his fellow commissioners Brigadier-General Robert Williams and Captain Richard Wills were appointed on August 12, 1919 to

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[103] Letter from Smail to the secretary, Board of Factory Administration, 3/2/1921. Woolen Cloth Factory Papers, MP 421/2, file 474-14-68.

investigate "general complaints" that certain persons and bodies had charged excessive and unfair prices for essentials such as food, clothing and rents since the start of the war, and they began their investigations with the reports and ancillary materials collected by the Inter-State Commission the year before.\textsuperscript{105} Six months later they turned their attention to the mills and in February John Ashley received his summons to appear at 10 o'clock on March 17, 1920. As manager of Ballarat and chairman of the industry association,\textsuperscript{106} Ashley received the brunt of the commission's attention. His was not a pleasant task since the commissioners and mill owners were at odds from the very beginning of the hearings. McCay and his fellows had announced in their first report their agreement with the findings of the Inter State Commission as to the mills' excessive prices and after the first round of hearings wrote to Ashley advising that they intended to fix profits at between 15 and 22 1/2 per cent on manufacturing cost.\textsuperscript{107}

No agreement had been reached on what would constitute this cost and another conference between industry and commission had to be called on the 19th May to debate the definition. Armed with a clutch of definitions from recognized trade authorities, supplied by Willie Hirst, Ashley put the industry's case, only to be told by the commission that manufacturing cost would henceforth include only cost of raw materials, wages, fuel, water, power and light, not depreciation or discounts, and that the new maximum profit allowed on it would be 33 1/3 per cent. Strenuous protests from the mills did nothing to lower the flat rate, but the commission a fortnight later did allow an extra 10 per cent amortisation provision on buildings and plant erected after December

\textsuperscript{105} State Royal Commission on High Prices, Report Number 1, The reports of the Inter-State Commission VPP 1919, p.373.

\textsuperscript{106} See appendix 4; AMMA Executives 1906- 1930.

\textsuperscript{107} Letter from secretary, Fair Profits Commission to Ashley, 28/4/1920. Fair Profits Box, BWM.
1916, and in this form the official report was presented as Report No. 13, 16th June 1920, released on the 22nd.

The report was apparently not included in Victorian Parliamentary Papers but the Ace gave it ample coverage in its June 23 edition. The mills had been making on average over the past three years around 25 per cent return on capital, and two of them, Ballarat and an unnamed private mill, (probably Hirsts) had made 45 and 50 per cent. Again citing the report, the Ace went on to say that throughout the commission the mills had strongly opposed any form of control and had at one stage refused to discuss details of those proposed, stating that only a minority of mills could be shown to be hugely profitable, that Australian woollens were selling at less than half the prevailing world price and that the need for Australia to develop the industry was so great that the proposed controls should be abandoned entirely. The industry, said the report, had expressed such strong hostility to any control that the commission had explicitly stated that in its opinion the controls were essential "Otherwise, it was emphatically declared, the investigation of the committee would become almost nugatory in its results." 108

Sympathy for Ballarat came from all over the industry, along with outrage at the suggested controls. Robert Vicars wrote from New South Wales, reporting that price fixers were also at work in Sydney, asking for details and suggesting "dumping this imported agitator beyond the three mile limit." 109 Hughes of the Colonial Combing Company, Sydney's leading topmaker and a seasoned and successful agitator against interfering governments, also owned an interest in Melbourne Punch which he used extensively to promote his opinions on such evils as communism and prohibition. "Desire to publish leader in my paper Melbourne Punch

[109] Letter from Vicars to Ashley, 23/6/1920. BWW.
showing utter fatuity of McCay’s recommendation” he telegraphed Ashley.

Would like you telegraph analytic summary of profits and capital of the companies charged with crime of being too prosperous... Are not larger profits partly due to more efficient organization stop

Punch is Out to fight My and your side of all business questions.\[10\]

Ashley responded with a detailed company history and his explanation of the bookkeeping error which had unnaturally inflated the company’s paper profits. Ballarat had reconstructed in 1889 with a thirty thousand pound loss to preference shareholders, a loss made good in the company’s next re-shaping in 1916. “Company decided write up plant which had been written down ridiculously low by L30,000 thus balancing sheet capital issued September last L90,000.”, he replied.

Our companies capital values low because we brought several plants that had been failures in Melbourne and elsewhere and brought them to Ballarat put in our books at purchase price... Profits certainly due to more efficient organization as turnout now top limit. Prices lowest in Australia I think for similar goods. Any amount proof of this can be had any Flinders Lane house. If McCays proposals adopted no chance industry progressing. Manufacturers full up government interference. Proposal profit on manufacturing costs means greater costs, greater profits consequently dearer stuff to consumers... Sorry dont know what other companies name.\[11\]

Closer to home came a note from a customer, clothing manufacturer H.B. Denniston of Flinders Lane.

I was very sorry to see the remarks... in which your mill was the only one singled out for comment. In my opinion your cloths are equal, or better value, to anything which is being produced in the World today, and it shows the utter absurdity of a man who understands nothing about the business trying to decide what is a fair margin on capital. No allowance is made for managerial skill or overtime working, and many other things that a careful trader will save in, whilst another will squander money, the pity is that when you made your last capital alteration you did not replace all the value that you had written off your buildings and plant.\[12\]

Hughes was as good as his word and the editorial of the July 8 issue of Punch came roaring off the page:

Nothing could be more stupid than the suggestions for the control of profits in this industry put forward by the Commission... Everyone with a grain of sense knows that it is absolutely vital

[10] Hughes to Ashley, telegram 24/6/1920. BW.


[12] Letter from Denniston to Ashley, 26/6/1920. BW.
to the present prosperity and the future development of the Commonwealth that this industry should be fostered and encouraged in every possible way. Yet the Fair Profits Commission comes along with the suggestion that the profits of the industry should be controlled - and moreover, controlled in such a manner that it would be impossible to make up in the good years for the losses made in the years when things were bad... Can it be expected that anyone outside of a lunatic asylum will put money into such a precarious undertaking?

The Age had remarked bitterly on June 24 that governments had exhibited little real interest in reducing the high cost of living which was causing so much industrial unrest. "The Federal Government has done, and apparently intends to do nothing at all... The State Government has salved its conscience by passing the whole problem on to the Fair Prices Commission, and is apparently blindly indifferent as to whether or not anything practical is likely to result from that Commission's investigations and findings." The Age's belief that nothing would be done was amply borne out by the eventual failure of the state government to adopt the recommendations made by its Royal Commissioners. Despite Opposition leader Prendergast's motion "that the House disapproves of the Government's action in not adopting the recommendation of the Fair Profits Commission regulating the profits of the Victorian Woollen Mills... " etc., the matter came to rest here, and the mills proceeded serenely on, unregulated and prosperous.

Neither the Inter State Commission nor the Fair Profits Commission found evidence of profiteering in the wool textiles industry and neither queried the propriety of a reasonable level of profit from war work. Given that the government itself had not only set the prices of the goods it requisitioned from the mills but had paid its bills with the inflated currency for which it was responsible, it is not surprising that it was slow to endorse the commission's findings. The apparently arbitrary establishment of 25 per cent as a reasonable profit singled

out only two defaulters of the state's ten mills, one anonymous, one all too public and the victim of poor accounting practises rather than a model of capacity. Acceptance of the recommendations was not justified by the facts and would certainly have impacted the industry's ability to generate its own investment capital as it had traditionally done out of profits, as well as to hinder the new capital which was starting to flow into the industry out of Britain. For once, commonsense and sentiment were in agreement; the mills would not be controlled.

However trying the difficulties of running a mill during the war - the shortages of raw materials, spare parts and labour, the difficulties of dealing with central authorities as customers and suppliers - the end result was a signal success for the industry. On a domestic level the industry had benefited from the enforced co-operation and this had strengthened the unity and therefore the efficiency of the AWMA for lobbying to come. Local textile service industries had received something of a boost in the enforced isolation of local customers, and were to expand greatly in the years to come. Wool prices had stabilized under the C.W.C. facilitating long-term purchasing planning, and perhaps sweetest of all, the wholesale houses had had a forcible taste of total dependence on local mills.

In the public arena, apart from the passing opprobrium of the Inter State and Fair Profits Commission's observations, the mills had come through the war trailing clouds of glory. They had seen the troops "magnificently clothed in woollen garments"\footnote{Guthrie 1937: 14.} in the now distinctive national uniform of the ANZACS. Through their representation on the Federal and State Wool Committees, they had been part of the largest commercial transaction in the country's history. They had given generously to a host of Federal, state, municipal and industry voluntary
war efforts, and they had run their people and their machines eighteen
hours a day to meet their commitments.

Aware of their status as leaders of their industry and their towns,
it must have given the mill managers and owners enormous satisfaction to
find their war efforts both conspicuously patriotic as well as
profitable, and Hughes' and Ashley's remarks about profit indicate both
resentment and surprise that anyone could think such profit was
undeserved. In any case, profit there was and an eager market waiting to
take whatever the mills might choose to make. The mills put their
profits into new plant as fast as it could be made and delivered, many
expanding their woollen capacity as well as replacing the industrial
casualties of the war years, and many more moving into the newly
fashionable fine worsteds. As fast as it could, the industry plunged
into the twenties and the record earnings ahead.
CHAPTER 3

PER VELLERA AUREA AD AUREAM AEVAEUM

(Through Golden Fleeces to the Golden Age)

As it was for many other Australian industries, the post-war decade was a time of great expansion and profit for wool textiles. Using wartime profits and outside investment capital, the industry doubled its size to meet the overwhelming consumer demand for textile products. Increased capacity, new ranges, and innovations in marketing, management and technology modernized the mills, while government sponsorship at unprecedented levels allowed the industry to capture its home market and secure its future.

(i) War Themes.

Problems with the supply of fuel and raw materials carried over from wartime into the 1920's, exacerbating trading conditions kept tense by intermittent trade slumps and bouts of British imports. 1920 opened with severe shortages of flannel and tweeds as the mills wrestled with coal shortages and fluctuating wool prices.

The uncertainty prevalent in the industry was very apparent in a letter from Ashley to Burgess of the Leviathan Stores. "I am afraid Contracts are out of the question at the present time", he wrote. "We have got a fortnight or 3 weeks supply of coal and after that I do not know what is going to happen. Close down I suppose. Wool supplies are stopped and all Permits to purchase are cancelled and new arrangements are to be entered into . . . It might mean that we will have to pay
London parity. If that is the case then it is good-bye to moderate prices for Australian Tweeds."¹

Coal supplies were short because of renewed industrial action by the seamen and marine engineers, and the mills in fact did have to close. Foy & Gibson had lost almost all its woollen mill output for the ten weeks to May 1920 and was working four nights a week overtime to catch up when the engine drivers and firemen also struck, closing the mills yet again. To keep faith with its retail customers, the firm cancelled all deliveries to wholesalers, stopped advertising on all Gibsonia lines except underwear, and to curtail the depredations of smaller clothing manufacturers, desperate for supply, refused to quote for small quantities of apparel piece goods. As Maclellan explained to the manager of the Perth branch, "quite a lot of small trading manufacturers are buying these goods in dress and coat lengths at our counters, making them up very smartly and doing quite a thriving business in competition - with our own mantle and costume departments."²

Even when coal was available the uncertainty of wool prices hobbled forward planning. Since wool was not only the biggest single item of expenditure in the mill's annual accounting (more expensive even than wages),³ but was also available only during the spring and summer sales, a bad estimate of price trends could ruin the mill's profitability for the whole year. The Central Wool Committee's control of wool prices, and therefore of the subsidised rate paid by Australian mills for

¹ Ashley to Burgess, letter 6/2/1920. BMW.
³ e.g. see Stawell Mills Income Tax Return 30th June 1924. North Western Woollen Mills Papers, NWP.
scouring wool had lapsed on June 30, 1920. Under protest, the mills submitted lists of their wool stocks as of midnight that day and paid the difference between cost price and prevailing market price. Thereafter they were indeed to pay London parity prices. Foy and Gibson foreshadowed the expected price rises in a series of full page advertisements in the Herald explaining to its customers that "for the month of July every Woollen Mill in Australia will be working on the unprecedented basis of not knowing what the wool will cost; therefore, no one will know what the cost price of finished goods will be till the end of July. But enough is known of wool prices to say that they are so much higher than the basic price that woollen goods may be two, or even three times higher than the present prices."  

The price rises came as expected but in rather bizarre circumstances. Wool auctions resumed on October 1, 1920 and in the normal course of events the clip would have been sold by the following March. As it happened, the very success of the wartime wool purchases by the British government now threatened to destroy sales of the current clip. After sales opened, the discovery of a huge British stockpile of 1,800,000 bales put prices through the floor and threatened a disastrous glut worldwide. As it was, at least one mill actually made money by not buying wool at the usual time and in the usual quantities, but as suppliers of consumer products to a predominantly wool-based economy, the industry could not afford to be complacent about the national slump the glut could produce. The graziers and scourers suffered particularly and in May 1921, the main scourers' union, the Wool and Basil Workers, claimed that half of its members were out of work.  

unions and scourers were all lobbying heavily for government assistance.

The mills had a suggestion to make towards solving the glut and took double page ads in the *Industrial Australian* to ask that the "Victorian Pioneers of the Woollen Industry" be allowed to turn the wool surplus into Australian woollen goods. "There will be no mistakes. No loss of Capital through Inefficient management," they promised. Instead, the government chose to establish BAWRA. The British Australian Wool Realization Association, under the leadership of ex C.W.C. head, Sir John Higgins, was set up on February 14, 1921, and set about fixing reserve prices on both stockpiled and new season's wools allocated for auction. The organization was a great success, and in the opinion of its supporters should have become Australia's sole wool selling authority, but the unremitting hostility of the wool brokers ended its career in May 1925.\(^7\)

The vexed question of German dyes carried over into the late 1920s. The simple desire of mill managers to obtain these necessities was complicated by overlays of Empire loyalty, German reparations, the Australian import licencing system, and the growth of British Dyestuffs Ltd. After the Armistice, the Australian government had prohibited the importation of any dyes except British, requiring all "foreign" dyestuff imports to be licensed. When Britain was found to be importing Swiss and American dyes, the British and Australian governments agreed that such dyes could be re-exported to Australia to assist severe local shortages, but almost immediately, in August 1920, Australia banned all foreign dyes except those which could not be substituted with British equivalents. The Australian agents of the "foreign" dyehouses were quick to point out to the mill owners that German dyes were freely being

\(^7\) *e.g.* in *Industrial Australian and Mining Standard* 30/6/1921.

\(^8\) Sims: nd.: 25.
sold in England and that as a consequence, British users exporting piece goods to Australia had a considerable competitive advantage over Australian goods dyed with inferior British colours. Agent Robert Bryce reminded the association of the service record of the British houses, "In this connection they can record how they have been treated in the past by British Dye manufacturers, whether supplies have been reasonable in quantity, whether they have been delivered timelessly and whether the quantity of the dye stuff supplied has been such as to ensure credit to their manufactures." "We are all in sympathy with the proposition that the dye manufacturing industry should ultimately be firmly established in Great Britain, but that will take years to accomplish." Bryce reminded his readers, and certainly the many Australian mill shareholders of British Dyes must have wondered at the lack of ready supply as promised in that first confiding prospectus of 1916.

Up to a point, the Victorian mills were prepared to sacrifice their own requirements to the joint cause of establishing the British dye industry and Making Germany Pay. At the start of the year the association had resolved to never again use German dyes, delivering in passing the retort direct to the Badische Company's agent; "the Association has no desire to trade with Germany." So adamant was the feeling that it took the particular request of the Customs Minister that the association buy a parcel of German dyes, obtained as part payment of the "indemnity" connected with the peace treaty, to alter it and even then feelings had to be assuaged by a further resolution not to buy direct or through German agents for twelve months. By the end of the year, however, the extreme pressure for quality dyes and the growing

[9] Letter from Bryce to Ashley 9/9/1920, (in his capacity as ACHPA President), SWW.


suspicion that the Australian industry was being discriminated against by British dye and textile cartels had cooled the one-eyed patriotism of the start of the year. In July, Customs reported that only a very small percentage of the German dyes requested by Australia could be supplied because of a shortage in Germany itself, and the association was treating with reserve the claim by British Dyes' agent that Britain could supply any type or quantity except rhodamine and victoria blue.\textsuperscript{12} Senator Keating, protectionist and A.N.A. man was primed with a list of searching questions for the Minister for Trade and Customs.\textsuperscript{13}

As a result of all this activity, Trade and Customs set up Committees of Enquiry into the dyestuffs question in May 1921 and again in June 1925, but perhaps because of British pressure, the system remained unchanged until early 1927, at which time things became worse. All Australian requests for non-British dyes were now referred to the Australian High Commission in London where licences were issued or not on the advice of the British Board of Trade. The Board's adviser was, of course, British Dyes Ltd. and licences were issued only when that company declared itself unable to supply. It rarely did that, and Australian mills continued to scramble for supplies as best they could. As the Textile Journal of Australia pointed out in 1927, Australia was now the only Dominion excluding foreign dyes, Canada, India and New Zealand having lifted their embargoes shortly after the war.\textsuperscript{14} The dyes question was not solved before 1930.

The last of the war measures carried over into the 1920's was the institution of boys' drill. Even to speed up defence contract work, the Defence Department had steadfastly refused to exempt mill boys from

\textsuperscript{12} Minutes, 13/7/1920.

\textsuperscript{13} Listed in Bryce's letter of 9/9/1920.

\textsuperscript{14} TTA 5/9/1927.
drill, and every week all boys would down tools and leave work for half a day’s drill at the local oval. The enormous pressure to produce, generated by the fabric shortages of 1920/21, made the sight of the stopped machinery on drill days an almost unbearable one to the manager. Members received with sympathetic silence John Bennett’s report that the boys at his Warrnambool mill were "not returning till after lunch hour after being dismissed at 9.30 for what was supposed to be a half day’s drill."\(^{15}\) Interestingly, this is the last mention of drill in the association Minutes, so it seems possible that the desired exemption was eventually granted, but it is also the first mention of a minor phenomenon of the 1920’s and subsequent years also - that of employee absenteeism. The Geelong mills noted with disapproval the practice of men: "absenting themselves from work to attend football matches,"\(^ {16}\) and girls arriving fifteen minutes after the 7.30 A.M whistle, or returning late from lunch were reported at Ballarat in 1929. In part such lack of motivation could be attributed to rising wages and more disposable income - national income peaked in the mid- 1920’s\(^ {17}\) and it is this radical change in the fortunes of the Australian economy and of the changes in the textiles sector which concern us for the remainder of this chapter.

(ii) The Post-War Industry.

The war had not caused significant changes in the structure of the Australian economy. Nevertheless, its effect of isolating the country from British manufactures had brought home to the government the

\[^{15}\] Minutes, 8/3/1921.

\[^{16}\] Minutes, 12/7/1927.

necessity of being self-sufficient in strategic commodities like iron and steel and textiles, and this produced a new government policy of protecting and enhancing import replacement industries. The policy was made possible by the strong growth of the Australian economy for much of the 1919-1928 period, particularly in the early 1920's when considerable investment in manufacturing occurred. The world depression of 1921/22 had little effect on Australia's manufacturing employment and in the seven years to 1920-27 factory labour increased by one quarter.\textsuperscript{18} Population was growing at just under 2 per cent a year, rising to 6,414,000 by late 1929, and real income had stabilized at a high level between 1922/23 and 1926/27, after considerable rises in 1920. By the mid-1920's Australian wages were estimated to be between 50 and 100 per cent higher than comparable English rates.\textsuperscript{19} The greatest growth in employment amongst all this ferment occurred in consumer and producer durable goods, and expansion in woollen and knitted goods and rubber tyres was the main basis for such growth in the semi-durables area.\textsuperscript{20} Apparel, motor vehicles and electrical appliances had become the three pillars of a new mass market, accessed by rising wages, the spread of the 44-hour week and the growth of new types of finance like hire purchase and co-operative buying.

For the Victorian mills, still the greatest concentration of wool textiles activity in the country, the 1920's meant unprecedented demand, new products, enormous capital investment financed by both local and overseas sources and profits greater than any previously achieved, but the growth was by no means a steady climb, for amongst the good times there were very bad ones, particularly the depression of 1924/25, and


\textsuperscript{19} Forster: 1964: 8, 15.

\textsuperscript{20} Forster: 1964: 14.
marked fluctuations in demand for some lines at the expense of others. Still, summarized in terms of the value of its output, the industry’s performance between 1908 and 1931 was remarkable. Even allowing for wartime inflation, the expansion between 1918/19 and 1920/21 shown opposite was enormous, the curve being almost vertical. The graph puts 1926/27 as the high point, with a slight fall-off in 1927/28, and a sharp down-turn thereafter, as the industry followed the general manufacturing slide into depression.

To emphasize the variable nature of the fortunes of the individual Victorian mills during the 1920’s, it is necessary to separate out production figures for the three major categories - tweed and other cloth (i.e. worsteds), flannels and blankets, but immediately one sets out to do this, definitional problems appear. The figures plotted are derived from Victorian Statistical Registries and State and Commonwealth Year Books, but as Forster points out in his analysis of Australian production figures, after 1927/28 Victorian production of tweed, cloth and flannel was recorded in square yards instead of the old linear yard measurements. The change went unnoticed by the Commonwealth Statistician, and Victorian figures were included unchanged in the linear total for all states. Working on the premise that a linear yard in the 1920s was about one and a half square yards - roughly what it is today, i.e. 1.5 metres - Forster adjusted the Australian figures to show that an apparent rise in production during 1927/28 was actually a decline, and the start of the down trend to 1931. Since Victorian figures made up a majority of the country’s total output, we would expect to find the Australian trend reflected in the state movements, and using Forster’s algorithm such would indeed be the case. It is however possible that his basic premise, the size of the linear yard is

[21] see appendix 3 for figures.
VICTORIAN WOOL PIECEGOODS PRODUCTION 1900-1930/31.

Tweeds and Worsted (adjusted figures)
Flannels, Union and Pure Wool (unadjusted figures)

Millions of Linear Yards

Years

1900 1910 1920/1 1930/1

Sources: Victorian Statistical Register, Victorian and Commonwealth Yearbooks.
incorrect.

Standard sizing of piece widths was first established by the Victorian woollen manufacturers in 1908 when association members agreed that the yard for tweeds and worsteds should be 37 inches wide by 36 inches long. The Australian association complied in 1927, and further decided to standardize flannel at 28" although permitting a 21" or 22" piece for special categories. There is no change to these standards noted in subsequent minutes of the Victorian association, though other standards, especially of blankets, changed often and were officially recorded. If we conclude that a 1920s linear yard was therefore 37" wide x 36" long there would be not one and a half square yards to one linear yard but 1.03, and an even lower figure (although not a calculable one because of the several standard widths permitted) for flannels.

Adjustment of the Victorian figures for worsteds and tweeds, i.e. "tweeds and cloth" produces the following figures in linear yards:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>YARDAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926/27</td>
<td>4,854,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927/28</td>
<td>6,049,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928/29</td>
<td>5,800,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929/30</td>
<td>5,894,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930/31</td>
<td>5,268,752</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This indicates that, for Victoria at least, 1927/28 did show a considerable rise in production of tweeds and worsteds, and that for this category the general depression did not become a problem until the following year. For flannel production the deficiencies of the definitions of widths means that while it is not possible to calculate with certainty any adjusted figures, the difference between adjusted and official figures would be very small indeed, and therefore 1927/28 remains the high point of Victorian production for both categories of
VICTORIAN BLANKET PRODUCTION 1900-1930/1

(Figures include Rugs and Shawls.)

SOURCE: VICTORIAN STATISTICAL REGISTER
VICTORIAN AND COMMONWEALTH YEARBOOKS
piece goods.

An overview of the fluctuations in Victorian production of tweeds and worsteds, flannels and blankets over the thirty years in which we are interested serves to underline the importance of the 1920’s to the industry. Peaceful and steady growth from Federation to the end of the war was followed by the heights and depths of the unstable 1920’s: the best times and amongst the worst the industry had yet experienced. To some extent production trends in these three categories ran counterpoint to one another as woollen system mills followed the market, switching from basic blankets and flannels to dress tweeds and back. Thus declining blanket and flannel production in 1918/19 and 1919/20 was offset by rising tweed and worsted output in those years, and the flannel oversupply of 1922/23 was matched by a relative fall in tweed and worsted output in the same year. Much of the problem of 1923 was due not to local difficulties but to those of the ailing English wool textiles industry and competition from British woollens rose steadily from 1923/24 before it was halted in 1925 and ended by 1928/29.

English export industries, the mills included, had suffered badly during the 1920/21 depression. The first major fall in wool prices had occurred in April 1920 and by 1921 depression was general in the trade. Mid 1923 brought competition from French dress woollens undercutting British weavers of dress goods in fine counts, and the refusal of the traditionally Free Trade British government to grant the industry tariff protection. Employers cancelled wage agreements as conditions continued to deteriorate and hundreds of mills were working short time or were closed by 1928.\(^{23}\) Undercut by the French at home the English mills concentrated on their traditional outlets in the colonies and poured

medium and low-priced woollens into the Australian market.

The Australian mills noticed their flannel stocks rising and observed the arrival of British woollens at 3/- yard F.O.B. into the warehouses and made the connection. Sir William Vicars mobilized the N.S.W. mills and enlisted Ambrose Pratt, the editor of the Industrial Australian, who in his turn contacted Ashley to solicit the help of the Victorian mills. By 1924 factory inspectors were reporting that conditions in the mills were bad and by 1925 they had deteriorated further, in the blanket mills especially. The association had dropped prices for woollens but flannels had gone from being almost unprocurable in 1920 to glut conditions in 1924, and the alternative products for the woollen system mills, the cheaper woollens and tweeds were uncompetitive with British piece goods. Castlemaine Woollen Mill's staff voluntarily reduced their salaries by 20 per cent in July 1925. Staff did not get back to full parity until March 1927, but their action, coupled with the closure of the mill for two days a week, enabled retrenchments to be kept very low and the company survived to make other profits. Undercutting became prevalent amongst association members, in defiance of price setting and wholesaler Sargoods, owner of the Williamstown mill, left the AWMA entirely. Forster claims that at this time import competition hit "in some cases mortally, the small woollen mills launched on the tide of post-war optimism," but while there were plenty of bad times in Victoria, there were in fact no fatalities.

Tariff Board hearings were held in Melbourne in February and April 1925 with Edward Williams of Castlemaine and Walter Thompson of the new

[24] Letter from Pratt to Ashley, 13/6/1923. BAW.


## NUMBER OF VICTORIAN WOOLEN and WORSTED MILLS, 1919/20 - 1930/31.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official Mills*</th>
<th>&quot;Real&quot; Mills</th>
<th>&quot;Other&quot; Mills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919/20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>21/22</td>
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<td>22/23</td>
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<td>23/24</td>
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<td>24/25</td>
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<td>28/29</td>
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<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/31</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Victorian Year Books.*
Tweedside mill giving evidence for the AWMA Independent investigation by the Board's accountant confirmed that while "manufacturers producing solely high quality tweeds were generally in a good position, those producing lower qualities were struggling against the competition of imported low-grade materials." On the board's recommendation, tariff protection of an additional 1/- yard on British made shoddy and cotton tweeds subsequently became effective from September 1925.

Returning for a moment to the production graph, the enormous leap in volumes of tweed and other cloth produced between 1924/25 and 1927/28 demands an explanation, and it is all the more a pity that such an explanation has to be put in generalist terms, since it lacks hard statistical backing. Victorian statistics for the 1920s included knitting mills in figures collected for "Woollen and Tweed Mills", and it seems likely that the products of the new top making plants of Yarra Falls, Lincoln, Valley and Port Phillip mills were also included under this heading, as well as those large knitting mills with spinning capacity. Since we know the number of "real" wool spinning and weaving mills from industry sources, it is possible to separate out from the official statistics the number of "other" woollen mills in the table opposite. Taking into account the time between the official establishment date of a mill company and the time its factory came on stream - between one and three years - the figures indicate a rising number of new knitting plants, with a stable number of vertical woollen and worsted mills in operation after 1923/24.

Examination of existing mill records and trade journals as well as official figures on the value of land, plant and machinery in Victorian mills uncovers a pattern of considerable investment in plant in the

### Victorian Mills' Investment in Worsted Plant, 1900-1930

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All Victorian Mills: Value of Land, Plant, Buildings</th>
<th>Worsted Plant Installations. New Plant and Expansions in &quot;Real&quot; Mills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1  Ballarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>376, 070</td>
<td>1  Albion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>380, 928</td>
<td>3  Foy and Gibson, Ballarat, Excelsior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917/18</td>
<td>433, 160</td>
<td>1  Lincoln</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918/19</td>
<td>581, 235</td>
<td>2  Yarra Falls, Laycock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919/20</td>
<td>1, 119, 665</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920/21</td>
<td>1, 313, 630</td>
<td>3  Myer, Commonwealth, Tweedside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921/22</td>
<td>1, 864, 940</td>
<td>4  Yarra Falls, Castlemaine, Daylesford, Warrnambool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922/23</td>
<td>2, 496, 995</td>
<td>2  Wangaratta, Winterfold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923/24</td>
<td>2, 878, 350</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924/25</td>
<td>3, 246, 745</td>
<td>1  Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925/26</td>
<td>3, 090, 905</td>
<td>2  Returned Soldiers, Wangaratta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926/27</td>
<td>3, 302, 890</td>
<td>2  Daylesford, Foy and Gibson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927/28</td>
<td>3, 015, 320</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928/29</td>
<td>2, 920, 690</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929/30</td>
<td>2, 971, 850</td>
<td>1  Ballarat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1902-08, Victorian Statistical Registers
1917/18-1929/30 Victorian Year Books
mills. For the "real" mills as for the "others", much if not most of this investment was in worsted machinery, plant to comb the tops, spin the yarn and weave and knit the fabrics for the new range of fashion fabrics and garments which appeared after the war. Eight mills installed their first (usually small) worsted plants in the 1920-23 period, and five more, including the giant Valley Worsted mills in the 1924 to 1927 years, either installed or greatly expanded existing plant. Some of this new plant made tops and yarns for weaving into the lightweight fine count worsted suitings which were replacing the bulkier tweeds in men's apparel, but for the specialist worsted spinners and the bigger dual system mills with spare worsted capacity, the explosive development of the knitting industry after 1922/23 provided an insatiable market for all the knitting yarn they cared to make.

In summary we can say that the meteoric rise in value of production by the Victorian mills in the 1920's was the net result of the intense demands for both worsted yarns and fabrics. Untouched by the erratic performance of blankets and flannels during these years and barely halted by British competition and the 1924/25 depression, outerwear fabrics, particularly the finer and more expensive worsteds, dominated the piece goods market after 1924/25. Coupled with the even greater demand for knitting yarns for both hand and machine constructed goods, many of the larger dual system and specialist worsted mills of the late 1920's made substantial profits and in the chart opposite page 93, Yarra Falls, Federal and Foy & Gibson illustrate the point.

(iii) Apparel and the Knitting Industry.

Underscoring all the investment, new ranges and profit-making was the basic proposition that more people were earning more money and were
MILL PROFITABILITY IN THE NINETEEN TWENTIES.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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Notes:  
+ : profit  
x : loss  
- : mill not founded  
: no data

Sources: company minutes, tax returns, scrapbooks, Jobson’s *Investment Digest*. 

spending a considerable proportion of it on clothes. Rising wages, paid holidays and the spread of the 44-hour week meant that people had both the means and the opportunity to have the good times and new clothes the war had denied them. They took up tennis, cycling and boating, went mad on motoring and golf, danced past midnight, crowded into the races and the football and rushed the cinema. These crazes naturally demanded special outfits, so the mills made sporty flannels in white and stripes for cricket, rowing and tennis, and in colours for club blazers. Motoring dictated tweed trousers, jackets and dust coats all round, with a smart tartan travelling rug on the back seat; golfing required knickerbockers, argyle socks and sweaters and, for both men and women, the popularity of sea bathing encouraged local production of knitted wool bathing costumes. This activity was not confined to the traditional moneyed classes and even though unemployment in these years varied between 5 and 9 per cent, according to Heather Ral’s examination\textsuperscript{28} of the advertising pages of the Labor Daily, working class interest in pure silk hosiery and the most elegant of current women’s fashion was just as strong as any other sector in the community.

Four years of nothing but khaki had left the post-war population panting for change and colour, and the radical switches in the fabric and construction of women’s apparel particularly reflected this thirst in the most emphatic way. At the start of the war, the daily outfit for the younger woman tended to be an ankle-length skirt of woven fabric, topped with a structured woven blouse featuring a bust line somewhat less spectacular than it had recently been, and a flowery hat roosting on a great cushion of pinned-up hair. After the war the hats turned progressively smaller and tidier, surmounting bobbed hair and worn over knitted frocks of calf length or shorter, draped closely over (ideally)

a bread-board bust. In summer in Australia D.H. Lawrence saw lasses "mingling in or strolling past in white stockinette frocks or pink crepe de Chine, or muslin," while in winter there were wonderful sweaters, cardigans, dresses and knitted coats.

Changes in menswear were less emphatic but more important to the weaving mills, for after all, apart from underwear and hosiery, women wore wool mostly in winter but the man's wool suit was a year round affair as were tweed trousers of appropriate weight, while for summer outdoors, pure wool or union flannels were required. Before the war the important city man wore to work a coat of best black broadcloth (the supreme woollen spun cloth) and topped it with a silk hat. After the war he appeared in a fine tweed or worsted three-piece suit worn with a sober black felt with bound brim. His social subordinate by this time had given up the bowler - though it was still the mark of the foreman in the mill - in favour of a grey felt with black ribbon, and this was matched either by the three-piece tweed or what Lawrence called the "tired-out looking navy-blue serge suit." Clothes for hard work changed very little and Alan Marshall's timber cutter dressed much like the average mill hand in grey flannel shirt, ragged waist coat and denim trousers.

Viewed as a market, the changes in apparel in the early 1920's were abrupt, widespread, on an unprecedented scale and also productive of unprecedented consequential changes both in the industries which


[31] Lawrence: 1923: 301.

[32] Marshall, A. 1926. This is the Grass, Longman Cheshire. This ed. Penguin, Ringwood 1962, p.64. Denim could be either woven wool or cotton.
supplied it and the way in which its products were sold. Specialization and modernization reshaped the mills as they changed and grew in their efforts to meet the new demand. They affected the mill's ownership, products and distribution, and altered the industry's relations not only with its customers but with the government, at a speed and to an extent never before encountered.

It should be clear from the earlier coverage of investment and profits in the 1920's that most of the industry's expansion was into worsteds. In traditional usage, worsted spinning produced the sort of yarns used to weave men's suits - fine, strong and smooth yarns used for serges, twills and broadcloths. Such yarns could only be produced from the more expensive long staple wools carded and combed into wool tops, and the fineness of the yarns required slower spinning and weaving, with more expensive breakages, errors and wastage. Because worsteds were both difficult and expensive to make, production remained a specialty of the Yorkshire mills with very few Victorian competitors. In 1900 only Ballarat was weaving worsteds commercially; by 1908 Albion, Excelsior and Foy & Gibson were putting out small quantities, but between 1919/20 and 1926/27 ten more mills went into production and of these Daylesford, Wangaratta, Yarra Falls and Valley were worsted specialists, the last two with huge outputs. The expansion was mostly the result of non-traditional usage of worsteds, that is, as machine-grade knitting yarns.

The many more production steps required in the worsted system led most vertical mills either to set up a separate worsted department in the mill as Ballarat did, or, with increasing frequency, to contract out parts of the process to specialist top makers, spinners and weavers, just as many had always done with their scouring. In response to the skyrocketing demand for knits, scourers diversified into top making,
"Golden Fleece" Underwear is made in all sizes for Men, Women and Children.

TJA 15/9/1928. SLV.
(Michells, Hughes), knitters diversified into spinning, (Lincoln, A.K.M.) and top making (Lincoln, Port Phillip Mills) and top makers into spinning and weaving, (Yarra Falls, Valley). Investors set up several new specialist ventures like Wangaratta Woollen mills (1920) which was purely a worsted spinner, Winterfold (1922) which made hand-knitting yarns on the worsted system, and Daylesford Woollen mills (1921), a worsted weaver. For the first time, the established vertical dual-system mills, like Ballarat and Poy & Gibson made worsted yarns for direct sale to other knitters and weavers, and Yarra Falls, RetsoIl and Valley in the mid-1920's made tops and yarn to customers' specifications. Yarra Falls even made cashmere and silk yarns as early as 1920.

Before the war, Victoria's knitting industry consisted of Australian Knitting Mills in Richmond, Lincoln Mills in Brunswick, Poy & Gibson in Collingwood, and a handful of semi-mechanized back-yarders. Their staple lines were woollen underwear and hosiery. Of the three, only Poy & Gibson was vertical in the wool yarn used for hosiery half hose and knitted underwear, other fibres such as cotton, silk, cashmere and blends being spun in Scotland and imported via agents by all three mills. The war and its destruction of regular supplies of British knitting yarn quickly led A.K.M. and Lincoln to the conclusion that they needed their own spinning capacity, but their decision to order the requisite machinery from the famous Platt Company\textsuperscript{33} was frustrated by the refusal of the British government to permit either the manufacture or the export of worsted plant on defence grounds. The Industrial Australian published a series of articles on the problem couched in terms of a British mill conspiracy against the young Australian industry. Britain had already exported textile machinery worth £637,500

\textsuperscript{33} Poy & Gibson and Godfrey Hirst also ordered Platt worsted spinning plant at this time.
to Japan and China and as editor Ambrose Pratt carefully pointed out; "It is generally agreed amongst the best informed circles in London that Japan is out to capture the Australian woollen trade." Furthermore, Britain could scarcely plead defence requirements when the giant Vicars' munitions corporation was now turning out sewing machines. "Sinister influences have been operating in Britain to hamper and hinder the development of the Australian woollen industry," wrote Pratt, hinting that the British manufacturers were "not at all anxious that a greater percentage of Australian wool should be manufactured in the country of its origin." What was the government doing about it? The Industrial Australian wanted to know. In a hasty reply the director of munitions cited a constant stream of official Australian requests over recent months for both yarn and machinery, then produced with a flourish the U.K. Ministry of Defence's priority certificate to permit the manufacture and export to Australia of the spinning plant on order.

A.K.M's plant, imported by its subsidiary Yarra Falls, arrived in early 1919 and filled its first order in October of that year. By 1926 (the first year in which yarn statistics were separated out from production figures) there were five major suppliers of worsted yarn in Victoria. Lincoln's plant had come on stream in 1918 and Yarra Falls in 1919 with Foy & Gibson's not far behind. Lincoln had by 1921 expanded out to Kyneton where a small factory employed twenty-seven women, and Wangaratta and Winterfold were both in production by 1923. In 1927 the giant U.K. hosiery maker, Morley, set up a mill next to Myer's mill in Doveton Street, Ballarat.

[34] Industrial Australian 23/5/1918. Japan was a customer for N.S.W. combed tops and in 1918 purchased the first output of Yarra Falls' top-making plant.


Woollen system mills almost by default also became specialists. Warmnambool, Stawell, Collins and Excelsior expanded their markets by developing blankets in new colours instead of grey or white and into check patterns instead of plain or striped, and expanding flannel ranges into pastels for women's wear and bold stripes for blazers. Along with Ballarat, Collins and Excelsior, they also developed wool velours for women's coats in the mid-1920's. Several of the mills had interests in cotton spinning as well, getting in early on the new industry set up by George A. Bond and Co. in Wentworthville, N.S.W. in 1923. Under the impetus of the Cotton Bounty Act of 1926, investment in cotton processing jumped sharply in 1927 as Tweedside moved into cotton tweeds and both the Federal weaving mills and Austral Silk and Cotton mills began production. Austral Silk and Cotton was one third owned by A.K.M., one third by Yarra Falls and one third by English Shareholders.

(iv) Modern Themes: Marketing, Management and Machines.

Well before the knitting boom astute observers had begun to notice new forces at work in the apparel market, first visible at retail level. At the heart of the changes already outlined lay newly assertive public demand for a greater variety of styles, especially in women's costumes (dresses) and blouses. As well as this, buying patterns were changing, the leisurely purchasing of the pre-war years giving way in Smith and Chapel Streets to very busy week-day afternoon and Friday night trading.

For John Maclellan, writing his weekly letter to his London uncle in 1917, the major changes in Foy & Gibson's business were a great increase in local buying of fabric and a loss of the control over


fashion trends once dictated by the store.39 Fashion, he felt, was now under the control of the local apparel manufacturers who combined to release the new styles simultaneously, and their style decisions now dictated the local fashion irrespective, said Maclellan, of overseas trends. For the retailer, this meant the end of large scale overseas purchasing of made-up apparel and piece goods. Six months or a year and a half’s forward ordering was required by English suppliers, whereas local suppliers could offer a six-week turn-around for apparel. Control of the market slipped further out of the big stores’ grasp with the changes in shopping time. The superior sales ladies, skilled at shifting slow lines, were unable now to spare the time for real selling as they hurried to process the requirements of the Friday night crowds, and the responsibility of the manager to select the right goods a season ahead became greater than it had ever been.

For the supplier of local fabric situated at the far end of the supply chain, the retail shifts were enormously important, particularly as regards planning and scheduling. Retailers were slow in ordering new season’s styles from the clothing manufacturers because they were waiting for firm trends to develop before committing themselves, but once the decision to order had been made, the delivery deadlines were very close indeed because of the shortened season. Furthermore, their orders were for more styles but less units per style. The mills were therefore called upon to sample a greater variety of weaves and colours, to make and deliver in shorter periods than before, and maintain more stock. In negative terms, the new system forced higher overheads on the mills by increasing downtime and therefore decreasing production per machine as the plant was reset after each small order was made, as well as raising the value of inventories of wools, dyestuffs and finished

goods. In a more positive light, the changes into what is still current market practice were not only inevitable but came at a time when strong demand was able to cushion the mills from what could have been a very difficult transition. The success of the mills in coping with it and in so doing capturing the local market is evidenced by Maclellan’s remark to his Perth store in 1926 that "The development of fine cloths is so good that the amount to be ordered from the United Kingdom will be less than in former years."  

The location and the structure of the market was also changing as wholesalers and manufacturers moved away from "The Lane" and the department store was challenged by the chain store. Under pressure from new small retail business the Houses moved into bigger and more modern premises in the inner suburbs. The Argus reported in 1929 that  

In Carlton many areas have been obtained by mercantile and manufacturing firms which intend to build combined stores and factories there as soon as the prevailing trade depression is dispelled. As much of the raw material for the manufacture of clothing is imported in bulk, it is convenient to store large quantities in the building where the manufacturing process is completed. It is also desirable that this class of business shall be carried on in close proximity to the city, and Carlton and North Melbourne, with their many broad roads converging on the centre of the city, are regarded as very suitable for the purpose. From this centre, van deliveries can be made to customers in all parts of the State, and raw materials can be brought in from the ships at Port Melbourne and from the mills at Ballarat and elsewhere without passing through the congested city traffic.

In the same edition the Argus reported record purchases of land in Footscray and Camberwell for chain store sites. "The chain store," it explained,  

is a modern development which tends to transfer some of the demand for city blocks to suburban sites in defined business streets. The use of motor cars by families for shopping expeditions has caused . . . a transfer of some of the shopping trade to well developed


INCE BROS.
Tailors
AND Outfitters.

174 Swanson Street,
Next Bourke Street.
Melbourne.

INCE BROS.

169 171 173 Swanson Street
271 273 275 277 Bourke Street

Telephone 4944
Central 1940

Lincoln Stuart & Co. Ltd.

Wholesale Outfitters to the Public.
Specialists in Outfitting by Mail.

244-254 Flinders Street, Melbourne. (Opposite Railway Str.)

8th January 1925

Letterheads of Melbourne Manufacturers, 1916 to 1925. BWW.
suburban centres, where it is still possible to park a car conveniently at the kerb.42

The rise of the chain store was one of the important factors in the huge growth of ready-to-wear clothing and the concomitant decline of the bespoke tailoring trade, firstly in menswear then in women's and girls' apparel. The growth in off-the-peg wear was equally obvious to the big department stores as to the chains. As Maclellan put it: "if we can carry the cloth a step further and make it up into garments we secure the benefits of our mill for our own legitimate customers, besides building up a good and profitable trade in ready-made garments, which is more and more likely to be the big end of future business in view of the increasing cost of making to order."43 Foy & Gibson's involvement with men's ready-to-wear is apparent from the catalogue illustration, but the women's market was much slower to evolve and on the evidence of Miss Vautier, the head dressmaking instructor at Geelong's Gordon Institute, as late as 1933 there were still few factory-made dresses, even girls' school uniforms being hand-made down to the buttonholes.44

The chain stores, the local clothing manufacturers and the new knitting sector were all expanding markets for the mills and new markets also because they wanted to buy direct from the mills, not through the warehouses. As long as imported fabrics could outsell local goods the warehouses which did the importing controlled all fabric distribution, but once protective tariffs priced all but the top end fabrics out of the market, there was no longer any reason for those mills which wanted


to sell direct to confine their distribution to the warehousemen, and it certainly made no sense to the customer to pay up to 20 per cent more for the privilege of buying through a middleman.\(^{45}\) As conditions returned to normal after the war the mills slowly began to take orders from the large department stores and the major wholesale clothing manufacturers who beleaguered them with orders in the mail.

With the exception of Doveton and Albion which already had sales offices in the city, all transactions to 1920 were handled by the office at the mill, but the growth of business quickly became too great for the manager, secretary and clerk to handle. Albion expanded its warehouse-cum-office in Degraves Street in 1920 and a year later Excelsior, Myer, Returned Soldiers, Valley and Warmambool had also established city offices. Inter-state agencies came next, either as offshoots of a Melbourne agent or as direct appointments by the mill manager. By the mid-1920's most of the major mills had agents in Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth. Lincoln's arrangement was somewhat different, having as a knitter different customers anyway. It had operated its own ruinously expensive interstate sales offices and warehouses since 1921, the year of its big falling out with the wholesalers.\(^{46}\) Commissions at this time averaged 2 1/2 per cent but by 1929 hard to sell lines like blankets were commanding 7 1/2 per cent in Queensland and 5 per cent in N.S.W.\(^{47}\)


\(^{46}\) Jobeont 1922 :157.

\(^{47}\) Castlemaine Woollen mills Minutes 24/4/1925 and 23/8/1929. Similar commissions in 1916 were 1 1/4 per cent for Melbourne, 1 1/2 per cent for Sydney and Adelaide, 2 1/2 per cent for Brisbane and 3 per cent for Perth.
Cartage of Wool Tops for Export.

Draft Horse Teams at Yarra Falls 1921. YFL.

Foy and Gibson’s Motor Fleet, 1922. MJA.
With the decline of the wholesaler and the rise of direct selling, the mill’s distribution system began to take on the same recognizably modern appearance that apparel making and retailing had developed. There were other modern trends observable around the mill too. The incidence of motor vehicles, office equipment, female staffing, the development of specialization in management and the introduction of new production technology, to name a few. Things which are integral parts of modern mill procedures but which appeared for the first time during the 1920’s.

The van deliveries mentioned in the Argus were the commercial manifestation of the prevalent enthusiasm for motoring and with improvements in efficiency and with mass production lowering the price and increasing output, Australian commercial vehicle registrations rose from 13,438 in 1922/23 to 104,487 in 1929/30.\(^\text{48}\) The city retailers pioneered van deliveries - Myer’s first Renault beginning its rounds in 1919 - and Foy & Gibson’s fleet of light and heavy vans totalled twenty-eight vehicles by 1922. Heavy transport in most city and country mills remained the domain of the draught horse teams and the railway and even in that most modern of mills Yarra Falls, dumped tops went down to the pier by dray. Right throughout the 1920’s mill accounts included stable costs for one or two horses, and even the drivers of the new vehicles at Foy and Gibson continued to put their daily hours into the standard Norman Bros. Carters and Stablemen’s Time Book along with the horse team drivers.\(^\text{49}\)

Mill owners and managers were enthusiastic motorists and their passion for the new pastime was ably assisted by the Industrial Australian with fortnightly tour guides and mechanical tips which shared

\(^{48}\) Forester: 1964: 30.

\(^{49}\) Time book for 1923 in Foy & Gibson Papers. Note: this collection is largely unsorted and more detailed references could not be provided.
page space with ads for British Bean 30 trucks and Neptune Oils. Godfrey Hirst had owned a car as early as 1916, but may have regarded it as a mixed blessing. His car was used without his permission for a seaside trip one summer Sunday in 1917, a jaunt which, given his views on the sanctity of the Sabbath, pained him so much he wrote a public apology to the Geelong Advertiser when he discovered the fact. John Ashley purchased his Buick from a friend in the trade in 1919, a transaction which stimulated a number of congratulatory letters from acquaintances, but for true despatch and thoroughness A.W. Briggs, the secretary of Yarra Falls stands alone. Initial enquiries of a seller of second-hand cars began on 7th September 1925. The decision to purchase the five-seater Dodge tourer was taken on 10th September, the transaction completed and a short course on its mechanics completed by the twenty-first and the licence obtained four days later. A 16-gallon tin of petrol and greases "all of the best and most suitable qualities . . . as specified on the Dodge Bros. lubrication Chart" was duly organized for home delivery and the conveyance itself arrived on Saturday. Mr. Briggs was launched on the roads in a fortnight.

Cars were not the only new gadgets seen around mill offices in the early 1920's. Typewriters made their appearance as early as 1904 at Laycocks and, according to John Maclellan, by 1917 calculating machines were to be found in "most houses of any size." Telephones were also common. Foy & Gibson had at this time six lines in and one out: "the latter being in my office." Nine years later most department managers at Foy & Gibson had their own phones, but there was at least one pay

[50] Letter from Briggs to Dodge agents 22/9/1925. Yarra Falls
Letter book, 14/8/1922 to 20/8/1948. YFL.

[51] Letter from Maclellan to W. Gibson, London, 22/1/1917. Letter
book 1916-17. PAG.

[52] Maclellan to Gibson 22/1/1917. Foy & Gibson Letter book 1916-
1917.
phone installed for employees' use.

Dear Sir, in confirmation of my telephone message of even date, I beg to forward herewith for your inspection specimens of waist coat buckles recovered from the slot telephone on your premises, and apparently used by members of your staff for the purpose of obtaining free calls from that telephone.53

The buckles were undoubtedly those used in Foy & Gibson's clothing factory so thereafter personal calls were made only with the manager's authorization.

Not many of the mills could have boasted a "telephone office" like the Gibsonia one, but Gaunt's and Laycock's had had telephones since 1903 at least, and by the mid-1920's all were apparently connected to the telephone system and their numbers duly listed in the Textile Journal's phone directory. Running the switchboards were the pioneers of white collar female office workers. They were followed after the war by a wave of women clerks who appeared in the mill offices from 1918. The increase of females in the wool textile workforce will be the subject of a closer examination in Chapter 4, but the impetus of females into mill offices at this time seems to have been a combination of a general trend in industry coupled with the mill offices added workload in servicing direct sales. The new clerks were ladies, the highest paid of all female workers, and were therefore fitted to become "staff" or "office", a part of management.

Modern management trends were also visible in the expansion of middle management positions. When a mill employed, say, one hundred people, one foreman could run one department and report to a manager who handled the general mill requirements, but as mills expanded, key men acquired assistants and the number of positions between foreman and manager proliferated. Warrnambool's John Bennett had his capable son

John appointed assistant manager in 1919 and at the Myer mill in 1921, Sydney Myer's brother-in-law R.F. Baillieu was assistant to mill manager W.R. Redpath. Yarra Falls appointed works manager Mr. H. France in 1919, and in big weaving sheds several foremen or leading hands now reported to one weaving department manager. At Castlemaine in 1919 chairman of directors Edward H. Williams became managing director of the mill, receiving an additional annual salary of £520 for doing that "general superintendence of the business of the company" which he had hitherto performed for directors' fees of £500.54

The public face of the new cult of management was an American one, almost the apotheosis of the businessman at one extreme. On the daily level it operated to professionalize the managerial role. The old style mill manager knew everything about the technical processes going on around him and controlled buying, selling, industrial relations and public appearances. Apart from those mills with import connections - Myers, Foy & Gibson and Williamstown - most managers had little interest in international trade or the higher reaches of domestic finance except where these intangibles impacted their local sales. The new manager was presumed to display a different style, that of the specialist generalist, one of the class of all businessmen as well as being a mill man. Judging from the material published for his consumption in the trade journals, he was epitomized as rather younger, perhaps an ambitious foreman, an up- and- comer eager to impress and innovate, a finance man on nodding terms with foreign exchange rates, trading conditions with Japan and America, trends on the local money market, new modes of efficiency, technology and cost accounting, the new art of media advertising, industrial hygiene, and so on.

[54] Castlemaine Woollen Co. Minutes, meeting of 5/9/1919. By 1924 Williams' salary was £1,250 p.a., company secretary Kerr was receiving £800 p.a. and works manager Corlett £1,200. Castlemaine Papers, MSA.
First Edition Cover of the *Textile Journal of Australia*, 15/3/1926. SLV.
Management Man existed chiefly on paper, especially between the covers of the industry's own journal, the Textile Journal of Australia, first published in Melbourne, on March 15, 1926. Old style management had been served by the Industrial Australian and Mining Standard, a venerable periodical which had begun life in 1888 as the Australian Mining Standard and changed to its subsequent name and format in 1918, reflecting an increasing interest in manufacturing. Editor Pratt had "taken up" the wool textiles industry in this year and pursued its problems with zest, especially during 1921 to 1925 when industry expansion provided much good copy. The paper ran a number of features on individual mills as well as the first "history" of the Australian industry\(^\text{[55]}\) and, not entirely as a quid pro quo, carried a great deal of A.W.T.M.A. advertising in these years. With the arrival of the Textile Journal of Australia, the mills' business went from the Industrial Australian with a rush. The new monthly had something for everyone in management with regular columns "From the Business Manager's View Point" and "Be A Real Dyer". The "Bradford Letter" came from "Our Yorkshire Correspondent", "Antonio" wrote the "Money" column, the director of the Bureau of Commerce and Industry contributed the occasional feature, and there was even some news of the doings of senior unionists. Guest contributors wrote on "Rayon the New Prodigy of the Textile World", the Made in Australia Council's activities, industrial hygiene, factory planning, technical training, the textile industries of other countries, and, as a sort of running family history, a lengthy description of the development of textiles since the stone age. Naturally the T.J.A. was sound on the tariff and did considerable lobbying of the government on behalf of the industry when revisions were in the air after 1925.

Worsted Carding Engines (showing Automatic Feeders).

Humidifier Plant.

Modern Technology at Yarra Falls, 1921. YFL.
Improved technology in wool processing and manufacture was continually advancing as users and textile machine manufacturers found better ways of using existing processes. Some of this activity occurred in the engineering workshops of local textile machinery makers like J Dyson and Sons or J.C. Brown, but the larger mills like Lincoln built their own workshops and in the early 1920's sometimes offered commercial developmental and consulting services. Foy & Gibson was particularly proud of its achievements in this regard, boasting in 1918 that its workmen had been instrumental in effecting several improvements which had been "gladly adopted by the world's greatest textile machinery builders... suggestions, emanating in Australia, have been taken up in Lancashire and embodied in the latest textile machinery designs."

One of the simplest of these was an employee-designed backwinder which reclaimed yarn from faulty hosiery, saving the firm L20 a week. Such employee innovations were known as "gadgets", a Lancashire weaver's term used to describe inspired improvisations like pull-backs, "twitchers", weft detectors and picking sticks. Major developments remained the sole property of the English firms which held the patents, but were reported in the Australian industry press more and more toward the late 1920's, hence articles on new techniques for moth-proofing of woollens, the installation of electric drives on mill machinery like mules, and new circular knitting technology. Humidifiers, which controlled atmospheric moisture in spinning areas, had been installed at Yarra Falls and Lincoln in 1919, and the new worsted cards erected after the war also had automatic feeder hoppers instead of requiring to be


[58] *TJA* 15/12/1928.


hand-fed, to the increased safety of the operatives. The greatest change of all, however, the development of the fully automatic loom was still in the future.

Intimations of the possibilities of such technology were a fruitful source of copy for the industry journals and the installation of the latest kind of "four box pick-at-will looms with great heddle capacity" at several Geelong mills aroused considerable interest. Using a box loom a weaver could create stripes, checks and tartans, the four boxes containing the shuttles carrying the colours sitting two to each end of the loom and the pick-at-will mechanism automatically inserting the pick required from each shuttle in the selected order. In its fully automated form such a power loom could enormously speed up production of fine plain and fancy goods. Weaving was the most labour-intensive department in the mill, one weaver running one or two looms at one time, watching the machines, loading shuttles and detecting and repairing breaks. With American automatic looms which changed their own shuttles, ejecting and loading as required, it was theoretically possible for one weaver to operate between six and twenty looms at once, and the Journal speculated that as many as fifty looms could be run this way, depending on the modernity of the machine. Gaunts and the Australian mills had experimented in around 1903/4 with two looms per weaver but the flawed results had quickly ended the experiment and the movement for "more

[61] eg. TJA 15/7/1927.

[62] TJA 15/7/1929. Since the new looms were designed for four colour and fancywork, the mills were most likely to have been Valley and either Federal or Albion.

[63] TJA 15/7/1927.

looms per weaver" made little progress in the 1920's. Even in the 1940s and 50s when the industry was at its peak, six looms became the top limit imposed on these automatic looms while the ratio stayed 1:1 on the old single-shuttle blanket and flannel looms.

(v) **Securing the Domestic Market:**

**Government Policy and Made In Australia**

One of the best indicators of the industry's maturity after 1919 was the sudden intense interest shown by both state and Commonwealth governments in its well-being. Certainly the prime motive behind this interest was the war-based import replacement program, but no government willingly assists an uneconomic industry and the sight of the busy mills after 1918/19 succeeding without benefit of costly bounties or subsidies must have warmed the hearts of the policy makers. They chose textiles to open their innovative "Buy Australian" campaign.

For the Commonwealth government, particularly Nationalist and Labour ministries, the chosen instruments of this policy were a major protective tariff, preference for locals in government tendering, and the creation of a new body to assist industry, the Bureau of Commerce and Industry. The Victorian government also adopted preferential tendering, but its most important contributions were its commissioning of the 1924 Barker Report on the future of the wool textiles industry and its activities in partnership with the A.N.A. and the Victorian

[65] TWA 15/11/1929.


Chamber of Manufactures promoting the Made in Australia campaign. Advertising for the campaign saturated the media in these years and its success provided the third leg of a complete protection package for the mills. Government tariff policy ensured that English goods were kept out of the market, tenders provided the mills with bread-and-butter security it required, and the Made in Australia movement expanded and solidified the local market defined by the tariff, using a heady mixture of patriotism and self-interest to cement its position.

The Commonwealth’s interest in the wool textiles industry was not a new one. Various official tariff investigations over the years had taken pains to point out its potential importance to the Australian economy. The Royal Commission on Customs and Excise Tariff, which sat from 1905 to 1908, justified its recommendation for substantial protection for the mills in these terms:

(4) That Australia should not be a dumping ground for the sweepings of the world’s markets.

(5) That a supreme effort should be made now or never, once and for all time to make the woollen industry of Australia a truly national industry, of which the people of the Commonwealth may be justifiably proud.

(6) That Australia having the best raw material growing within its limits, its woollen products ought to be the best goods of the kind known to commerce.

(7) That if Australian manufacturers had in their hands the whole of the woollen trade of the Commonwealth, fully ten thousand persons would be employed in the industry instead of one-fifth of that number as at present. 68

Again in 1915, the Inter State Commission’s tariff investigation into apparel and piece goods echoed these sentiments: "the woollen piece goods industry has wide possibilities before it; its extension provides a growing home market for a valuable Australian product, the increasing manufacture of which should reduce the cost of production, increase the

variety of output, and tend in these respects to advantage the local clothing manufacturers." ⁶⁹

If verbal excess can be used to gauge official interest then 1920/21 must be accounted the highpoint of Federal enthusiasm for the woollen mill. "Wool is our greatest material national asset" proclaimed the Bureau of Commerce and Industry in its first annual report, "and all honour to the men that made it so. That national asset can be increased to such an extent as to add millions a year to our national dividend; reduce unemployment in our land; repatriate our soldiers; and bring in its train untold prosperity." ⁷⁰ How the Bureau proposed to do this will be examined shortly, but the sentiments, like those of 1907 and 1915, were the rhetorical embellishments of hard-line tariff assistance, the sine qua non of the industry's eventual capture of the local market from British imports in 1928 and 1929.

Tinkering with the tariff was an established pastime with both colonial and Federal legislators. Exclusive of administrative legislation like Customs Acts and Customs Tariff Validation Acts, the Federal tariff of 1902 was amended in 1906, 1908 (twice), 1910, 1911, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1926 (twice), 1928 (three times) and 1930. ⁷¹ In addition there were two Customs Tariff (Industries Preservation) Acts passed in 1921 and 1922 which imposed dumping duties on certain categories of imports. Under the Victorian colonial tariff, wool textiles had sheltered under a cosy 25 per cent flat rate, so the 1902 Commonwealth rate of only 15 per cent came as something of a shock.


Bravura performances before the Royal Commission into the Tariff in 1905 by Grainger of Ballarat and Williams of Castlemaine assisted the commission in its subsequent recommendation for 30 per cent duty on piece goods and 25 per cent on blankets, subsequently reduced to 25 per cent British preferential and 30 per cent General rate for both items by the authors of the tariff of 1908.

Spirited lobbying to an increasingly sympathetic government moved the 1908 rate up even further in 1921 when the Hughes government passed the first major Federal protective tariff, that is, the first designed to foster industry rather than generate revenue. Under the revised schedule, the piece goods rate for British Preferential rose to 30 per cent and the General to 45 per cent, a change which served to restore the effective pre-war levels eroded by inflation and rising prices. The act of 1926 added 1/- per square yard to the British Preferential rate falling on those wool piece goods valued at under 3/4d a square yard and weighing over 6 1/2 oz. per square yard. Woollen piece goods not elsewhere included were separated out under 35 per cent B.P. and 50 per cent General rates. 1928’s schedule had no changes in it for fabric rates, although it did include a new category for knitted wool fabrics, and the amendments of 1929 and 1930 did not further affect the established rates protecting locally woven materials.

The shifts in duty levels are a good indicator of government perceptions of the nature of the threat to local mills from imports, both as to type and origin. Blankets, for example, were dutiable at 25 per cent B.P. and 30 per cent General after 1908 and this duty remained static throughout our period, mostly because their bulk and the excellence of the local product made their import unprofitable. Lightweight woollens used in women’s apparel were not made locally to any

extent and attracted a duty of only 10 per cent B.P. in 1908, rising to 15 per cent in 1926 when a by-law entry system was instituted.\textsuperscript{73} Woollen yarns, being necessary for local manufacture, were duty free until the expansion of the knitting trade with its attendant worsted spinning capacity required protection. Woollen yarns including hosiery yarns were dutiable at 10 per cent B.P. before 1926, but rose to 20 per cent after a successful industry representation to the new Tariff Board in 1925.\textsuperscript{74}

What was seen to be under threat was the Australian mills’ control of the middle price and quality medium and heavy woollen piece goods, the bulk of their production, and of tweeds rather than flannels. When low priced British imports poured into the country after 1923, it was in these medium qualities that the greatest impact was felt. The Tariff Board enquiry into the situation found "that whereas manufacturers producing solely high quality tweeds were generally in a good position, those producing lower qualities were struggling against the competition of imported low-grade materials."\textsuperscript{75} The board’s recommendations were for 30 per cent + 1/- per square yard on piece goods containing wool and on imitation tweeds made of cotton, but excluding lightweights and flannel, but the government’s final decision was, as we have seen, more specific and closer to the industry’s requirements. Thirty per cent plus 1/- per square yard duty on British-made goods valued at under 3/4d a yard and weighing over 6 1/2 oz. effectively blocked imports of the Yorkshire shoddy woollens which were doing the damage, a most satisfactory result for the local mills.

\textsuperscript{73} Under by-law entry, an import licence for the product is issued to the importer upon proof that a comparable product is not made locally.

\textsuperscript{74} Tariff Board Report and Recommendations, Woollen Yarns, CPP 1925 vol.2., pt.2, pp.1-8.

The second arm of government preference policy lay with tenders, both federal and state, though state business was increasingly important now that army and repatriation requirements were so much lower. The idea that Australian government requirements should be met by Australian suppliers had been in vogue for many years before the war, and naturally had the support of potential suppliers. In 1912 the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures succeeded in having local preference for tenders placed on the agenda of the upcoming Premiers Conference, and the war had proven that local mills could do the job. Commonwealth practice in the 1920's was not actively to refuse British tender bids, but merely to add to them the estimated cost of duty payable. This loading, which would not in any case have been paid by the government, plus another 20 per cent preference already given to the locals, effectively dissuaded foreign bids.

State governments also gave local preference - in Victoria only after 1924 when Labour Premier Prendergast introduced it. These tenders were eagerly sought after. The mills had the choice of tenders from tramways, railways, fire brigades, prison services, schools, mental hospitals, and the new State Electricity Commission. In New South Wales the local mills had the run of their state's requirements. Victorian mill owners claimed that N.S.W. parochialism was also extending to Federal tenders after the Tender Board moved to Sydney after the war, and were particularly bitter at the loss of a big repatriation contract in 1927 to the N.S.W. mills.

The third arm of Commonwealth support for local manufacturing lay

[76] Chamber of Manufactures Minutes, 9/12/1912.


Mr. Stirling Taylor, Director Commonwealth Bureau of Commerce and Industry.

Portrait of Stirling Taylor, Director Bureau of Commerce and Industry. IA 28/9/1922. SLV.
in its creation and operation of a new department intended to reorganize, modernize and motivate industry and commerce after the war. As a government department, the Bureau of Commerce and Industry was a singular body indeed, headed by a most unusual public servant. It had been gazetted in the final days of the war under the leadership of the Director of Munitions Mr. Leitch, but action on its formation was deferred for some time until a general conference of primary, secondary and tertiary interests could be called. The conference was held some time in 1918 and a general council representing all interests duly elected. The council immediately passed a resolution that "The organization is entirely non-governmental and non-political" and went on to state the bureau's aims as being the "complete organization of commerce and industry to effectively meet post-war conditions." 79

Very little is known about the bureau's daily activities, for apart from three annual reports, 1920-1922, none of its records appear to have survived. 80 It is clear from these documents, however, that business at the bureau only got underway in 1919 when Leitch's successor Stirling Taylor arrived. Taylor seems to have been a veritable whizz-bang of a director. An ideas man, a publicity hound, a vocal enthusiast and ideological eccentric, whose vision of the golden future of Australia's industry amounted to the creation of privately-owned but centrally-planned state trading authorities operating export-based manufacturing. This was not a common line of thought to emerge from a government bureau reporting to the conservative Department of Customs.

Taylor opened his office in Melbourne with a staff of six and set about drafting the bureau's policy. The future of the nation lay with


[80] Scott: 1936 makes only a passing reference to the bureau on p.550, and it is not listed in the Australian National Guide to Archival Material, Part 1, Agencies.
the development of secondary industries, he said. By introducing modern business methods and developing the centralized supply practices initiated during the war, Australia could become an international trader in manufactured goods. Increased domestic activity would reduce unemployment and generate capital to repay war debts and ensure a sound and prosperous economy. [81]

To achieve these ends, Taylor called for dramatic re-organization of current practices, expressly in improving efficiency and enhancing output. Common purchasing of requirements, centralization of sales organizations, allocation of orders to those factories best suited to handle them, specialization of products, standardization of plant, patterns and buildings, and an emphasis on vertical processing where possible. [82] The industry he chose as the test case for this ambitious program was naturally wool, the golden fleece off the back of the sheep on which Australia’s fortunes rode. "Per Vellera aurea ad auream aetatum" wrote Stirling Taylor; "Through Golden Fleeces to the Golden Age." [83]

Taylor’s plan was to form one company in each state - for example, the "Victorian Woollen and Worsted Coy. Ltd." - with an authorized capital of around L3,640,000 to manufacture and market wool textiles. Shareholding would be by preference to wool growers and processors as well as returned soldiers. The new state companies would then join to form a central body, which would allocate production, select sites, plant and operatives, market all products, undertake research on technical improvements, implement standardization and control a uniform


system of technical education for employees. Ultimately all of Australia's enormous wool clip would be processed with Australia, with benefits all round. War debts would be paid, taxation held down and the general wages and standards of living enhanced by expansion in fellmongering, soap and candle making and all the other adjunct industries. The 500,000 new hands required would come as immigrants to populate the country. Employment of the women and youth of country towns would be boosted and wool growers as investors would be in control of their wool up to the end processing. The scheme had something for everyone.

Taylor summarised his scheme in pamphlet form and sent copies to politicians, mill owners, wool growers and newspapers. Industry response was not encouraging, the mills' energies being concentrated on the Fair Profits Commission's activities and the all-important tariff decisions being made in Canberra. In May, Ashley replied cautiously on behalf of the industry:

The scheme as outlined is a great conception, but in our opinion such a gigantic undertaking would be economically unsound. Experience shows that Industries cannot be forced in such a manner, natural growth along sound lines is the only sure way. Capital will only be put into industries that are profitable. . . Instead of launching out in such a big way, it would be better to direct our energies towards producing the bulk of Australia's requirements first. Once this is achieved, export trade will naturally follow.

Undeterred, Taylor called up his reserves. Prime Minister Hughes wrote personally to all the mills, inviting them and other interested parties to a conference in December 1920 to discuss the plan, but although the industry attended in force, it took no action. On behalf of the industry Ashley had already pointed out that the country could not


[85] The Woollen Manufacturing Industry: Australia's Opportunity
Bureau of Commerce and Industry, Melbourne, 1920

[86] Letter from Ashley to Stirling Taylor, 31/5/1920. Australian Industries Protection League folder, BAW.
finance the L14,000,000 required without beggaring existing industries, that it would be impossible to find 110,000 extra female and juvenile workers, the labour market already being critically tight, that in the present market patterns needed not standardization but variety, and again, that government curbs on profit including taxation would not make the industry an attractive investment. Remove government restrictions, make capital available at 6% over 15 years and the businessman would do the rest. The scheme was briefly mentioned twice in the association minutes of December 1920 and thereafter never referred to again.

Taylor, who had larger goals than mere feasibility, was undeterred. The following year he reported to his superiors that his proposals, though expressed "in a somewhat startling form", had produced some marked effects. The press in every State, supported the general principles of the scheme, and the result undoubtedly was that right throughout the country attention was directed to the possibilities that such a development held, not only for any individual, city, town or State, but for the whole nation. The only opposition from the scheme had come from "districts of the Old Country whose special interest was in the manufacture of woollens." This, he felt, was only momentary "and perhaps natural, but the disposition to criticize has been replaced by a disposition to help, and some of the old established British firms are turning their attention to the possibility of manufacturing close to the raw material, and some indeed have established, and others are on their way." British investment would not only allow the threatened British industry to retain and increase its trade "but at the same time help, by his csic! knowledge and the introduction of his skilled operatives,

[87] Letter from Taylor to Ashley, 26/2/1920, setting out details of the scheme. Summary sheet of Ashley’s objections subsequently attached, n.d. A.I.P.L. folder, B&W.


to further the development of a people who are closely bound to the Old Country by every tie of blood, sentiment and ideals of Empire, and who are as intensely British in thought and aspiration as the men of Britain themselves."  

What effect had the Wool Industry Expansion Scheme had by 1921? Taylor answered his own rhetorical question by modestly pointing out the extraordinary developments ("Not all because of the Bureau’s suggestions... ") which had occurred in the industry since March 1920. Twenty-two new company registrations Australia wide including Victoria’s Stawell mills, Lincoln, Returned Soldiers and the short-lived Australian and Sinclair Weaving mills, and thirteen others in the course of formation including Port Phillip Mills and mills at Daylesford, Wangaratta, Hamilton, Shepparton, Sale, Beechworth and Albury. Moreover, the bureau had placed before each state’s premier preliminary proposals for the establishment of "Textile Technical Schools" to operate along the lines of the famous courses of the Bradford and Manchester Technical Colleges. Additionally, it had suggested the introduction of new products such as flax and linen manufacture at Ballarat and Drouin, and the establishment of a carpet manufacturing industry in Australia.

1922’s Report was a more sober affair than its predecessors. The industry was still expanding - there was interest in a mill at Albany, W.A., and the bureau itself was expanding, staff having risen to eleven - but the national scheme was no further advanced. Taylor was disappointed and angry. Australian mills supplied only 20 per cent of the amount imported. The figures, he wrote, illustrated what was:

**Economically a farce**

[90] Ibid.

Industrially a tragedy
Nationally — a humiliation.

We are deliberately choosing to continue 'the hewers of wood and the drawers of water' to those nations who use our wool to create their wealth.⁹²

The great Wool Industry Expansion Scheme never really began, but the advances in quantity and quality of the industry were indeed real and considerable. There were now nineteen mills in the country compared with eleven in 1918/19, and 142 knitting mills compared with 57 in the same years. Victorian mills in production in spinning and weaving had jumped from eleven in 1918/19 to around twenty in 1922/23, with three more being close to opening, a 100 per cent arithmetical expansion in three years, and a rather greater amount of employment growth: 2,179 compared with 4,601.⁹³ Clearly the industry was doing nicely without the great scheme and this was part of the reason the Victorian mills and their interstate compatriots had rejected it. In the absence of public statements on the subject, the rest of the explanation must be sought in the characteristics of the industry as it existed in Victoria in 1920. It was composed of a collection of independent and autonomous mills grouped together in an industry association which co-ordinated the mills' policy on big issues like tariff, wages and prices, but which was not "led" in any sense by one man or one district. It was, rather, a "conference of manufacturers" as its secretary described it in 1918,⁹⁴ a group of equals which rotated the occupancy of its chairmanship on a rarely changing basis, this year's vice president becoming next year's president. As Ashley had written in his May 1920 criticisms "the weakness of the scheme is its relationship to existing Mills. They


[93] Commonwealth and State Yearbook figures for woollen mills are not entirely reliable because of occasional inclusions of wool scourers and general inclusion of knitting mills in figures published.

would only act as feeders to the Central Selling Agency." One member was the equal of another, each in total command of the destinies of his own mill, and given this autonomy it was never likely that a centralized authority would be accepted by the industry.

The Australian government's flirtation with centralization of secondary industry had failed. Still, the Victorian government at this time also believed that wool textiles had a big future. In the first years of the 1920's, it decided to quantify the industry's prospects by commissioning the eminent Professor Alfred F. Barker of Leeds University to visit Victoria and investigate the industry, which he did in 1923. Barker's Report to the State Government of Victoria upon the Wool Manufacturing Industry of Victoria, upon the Educational Requirements of this Industry and upon Textile Research and Trade Standardization (Melbourne 1924) reflected several of the same concerns of the bureau, specifically its call for economies of production and technical education. Apart from this gesture and continued support for manufacturers lobbying for increased tariff protection, state government left the industry to run its own affairs, as it preferred. Stirling Taylor and his bureau departed from government service before 1925, the bureau gone into extinction and Taylor into a new job as Director of Publicity and Organization for the Wheat Pools of Australia.

Official efforts to foster the development and expansion of the domestic secondary industry were partnered by the Made in Australia Movement. Of necessity, local demand for local goods had to be enhanced and in the face of considerable prejudice in favour of English goods, especially textiles. There was after all no point in keeping foreign

[95] The only copy of Barker's Report now to be found in Australian libraries is held at the Geelong Historical Records Centre.
Albion Exhibit at the 1906 A.N.A. Exhibition. MP 15/2/1906.

Valley Worsted Mills' Exhibit.

Block through courtesy "Geelong Advertiser."

Valley Exhibit at the 1928 Geelong Textile Exhibition. TJA 15/8/1928.
goods out if Australians refused to purchase the local offerings.

Made in Australia was the child of the Australian Natives' Association. The association also promoted Australia Day and every February held an Australian Made exhibition at its annual fete. With the active support of Buckley's stores, the various chambers of Commerce and Manufactures, both state and federal governments and a gaggle of war patriotic societies, the A.N.A.'s campaign soon bore abundant fruit. By the 1920's, Australian-made goods became the patriot's first choice.

The A.N.A. held its first Australian Made exhibition in 1905 in conjunction with its annual February Fete and a number of the Victorian mills took display space. Paradoxically, it seems to have been the very great colonial respect for things English which first turned the tide of public opinion toward Australian-made textiles. The governor-general's wife, Lady Northcote, visited the exhibition and was profoundly impressed by the display of the Albion mill's products. She ordered a number of rugs as well as fabrics for costumes and coats for herself and her husband, and these were followed by "generous" orders from Government House staff. She also gave Albion permission to exhibit made-up costumes in her name[^6] and continued to champion the mill's products in later years.

With the Inter State Commission's tariff hearings under way, the interest generated by the exhibition of 1906 was further enhanced by a Herald report of a meeting at the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures of a new society to promote consumption and wearing of Australian goods.[^7] Mr. C. Atkins, the president of the Federated Chamber of Australian Manufactures spoke at the opening of the display, pleading for an


[^7]: *Herald* 30/5/1906.
encouragement to the wool industry "which should be our greatest manufacturing industry."\(^{98}\) Even the Australasian Traveller which represented the warehousemen was temporarily carried away: "As a journal owned in Australia, and by Australian commercial travellers, it has always been our policy and pride to encourage Australian industries by every means in our power."\(^{99}\)

The A.N.A. kept the national flag flying with displays and lobbying until reinforcements arrived with the outbreak of war. Anti-German feeling prompted Chamber of Manufactures' proposals for the amendment of the Commerce Act requiring all imports to bear a statement of origin,\(^{100}\) It also sought the introduction of a pledge card system into state schools, pledging students to purchase only Australian made goods,\(^{101}\) and sent representatives to assist with the Australian Patriots' Leagues' work against enemy made goods. The Chamber conducted its own Australian Manufactures' week displays in 1915 and 1918, as well as financially supporting the A.N.A. exhibitions in 1916 and 1920 and several local shows such as the Geelong Textile exhibition of 1928.

Considerable impetus to the program was given by the newly-formed Australian Industries Protection League, an organization of manufacturers whose first object was to use "popular propaganda ...\(\ldots\) to compel the Legislature to give to Australian producers the command of their own domestic markets."\(^{102}\) The thirty-man state executive announced in March 1919 included most of the states important

\(^{98}\) The Advance Australian 15/2/1906.


\(^{100}\) Chamber of Manufactures, Minutes 29/3/1915 and 8/5/1916.

\(^{101}\) Minutes 13/12/1915.

\(^{102}\) Australian Industries Protection League boxed correspondence, March 1919- January 1924. BWW. See also appendix 5 for objects of the League.
industrialists plus a representative from the Returned Soldiers’ Association.

Clement A. Hack was president. Ambrose Pratt, editor of the *Industrial Australian*, Victor Leggo of Leggo metalurgical and chemical works, J.L. Law of Pelaco, shirtmakers, and Essington Lewis of B.H.P. were vice presidents. Ashley had been offered a vice presidency on behalf of the mills but had declined in favour of a seat on the executive committee, pleading pressure of work. As it happened this ploy got him no relief, for he was immediately recruited by the committee to visit the heads of the various Chamber sections and point out the importance of joining. Victor Leggo wrote personally to Jack Ashley seeking his assistance: “We all recognize that of all our Executive committee you have, by far, the most weight with the various members of the Chamber . . .”\(^{103}\)

Ashley brought with him the wool textiles industry’s cheque for L500 and this donation was followed up in 1920 with a further gift of L250 for the fighting fund.\(^{104}\) The successful introduction of the new tariff made it money well spent and when the A.I.P.L. announced its Made in Australia campaign in October 1922, the mills were right behind it. In September 1923 the Chamber of Manufactures set up a special propaganda committee to support Australian industries and endowed it with L1000. On the committee were representatives from the A.I.P.L. and the A.N.A. as well as the Advertising Association, the Victorian Railways and Education Department. By 1926 the committee was formally known as the Made in Australia Council.\(^ {105}\)

\(^{103}\) Letter of 17/5/1919, AIPL box. B&W.

\(^{104}\) A.W.M.A Minutes, 1/4/1919 and 13/1/1920.

As an associate member of the Chamber, the AVMA was directly involved in the Council's work. Council lecturers addressed mill owners on the subject in 1924 and many mills participated in the "All Australian Exhibitions" of 1924 and 1929. The most successful publicity campaigns of the 1920's were the "Shopping Weeks", inaugurated in 1926, and Albion, Ballarat, Excelsior, Returned Soldiers, Myers, Valley, Warrnambool and Wangaratta were regular participants. The format of these weeks was designed to allow retailers in city, suburbs and selected country towns such as Ouyen, Stawell and Bairnsdale to dress their windows for the week with posters and placards supplied by the Council and so to enhance the display of Australian made goods on show. The Education Department usually gave the children a half holiday and the schools marched down to the local cinema to view the Council's films on the wonders of Australian manufacturing. One of the most popular of these was about wool textiles and "From the Sheep to the Shop" played to packed houses in 1929. As well as the schools, A.N.A. branches were favoured venues; one thousand Natives of the Footscray branch saw the film in February 1929 and two hundred more at the Gardenvale branch a little later. Some audiences may in fact have seen it more than once, for the Council updated bits of it from time to time, adding for example, an up-beat finale with "a pretty girl, pointing to a map of Australia on which is written the words 'Wherever you trade, buy Australian made' with the title 'Miss Australia appeals for your support. Do not let her down'." \(^{106}\)

Despite Lady Northcote, the war and the Made in Australia Council, decades of English dominance in textiles left a legacy too great to be instantly dissipated. The aristocratic or quality connotations of the imported product obdurately remained, and prominent amongst those

\(^{106}\) TIA 15/3/1929.
Cartoons from the *Textile Journal of Australia*, 1926. SLV.
rotters who were letting Miss Australia down were the very mills whose support she enjoined. C.L. Woods’ article in the Textile Journal of 15/4/1928 on "The Importance of Being Honest" made the point. "There can be, I think, no serious objection to the statement that the practice of selling our best goods as British is almost universal." Because of this deceit "the consumer sees only the lower grades of cloth marked as Australian and thereby he is strengthened in his opinion that we are unable to produce anything but goods of the 'shoddy' class." Urging public education rather than trickery, Wood’s article underscored a complaint about the practice delivered in cartoon form in the edition of 16/10/1926. The practice was also condemned by the Victorian branch of the Australian Textile Workers’ union, the executive resolving to bring to the attention of Premier Hogan the fraudulent retail practices involved which operated "to the detriment of Australian Industries and we strongly urge that legislation be introduced to prevent this evil." 107

Because of the populist nature of the campaign, and possibly also because of the industry’s fear of the Japanese textile industry’s ambitions in Australia, the Buy Australian campaign came by the mid-1920’s to reflect another populist theme, that of White Australia. The author of the regular Textile Journal column "From the Business Manager" argued that despite differences of opinion Australians were "united as a homogeneous whole" in their desire for a White Australia. "This inbred desire to perpetuate the achievements of our pioneer forefathers and open out this fair continent by means of white brains and labour is today our heritage and national idea . . . Convert this talk into White Australian- made goods and the most rabid free trader is silenced . . . White Australian- made assists the people to visualize just what their support of our home manufactures means to them as a nation . . . . In no

ACTWU. Papers. MUA.
industry does it apply with such force and truth as the textile, for there the raw material to the finished article is throughout White Australian-made.  

Made in Australia was a considerable popular success, spawning at least one imitator, the Graziers' Association's "Wear More Wool" campaign of 1929-30, but its true significance for industry lay in its integration with existing State and Federal schemes for developing Australia's industry. Commonwealth tariff policy ensured that English competition was kept out of the market, State and Federal preferences in tendering provided the locals with bread-and-butter security should it be required, and Made in Australia, with its combination of patriotism, sentiment and education created popular demand for the expanding range of Australian goods.

(vi) Investment Patterns in the Twenties.

Government implementation of the protective tariff of 1921 came at a time of unparalleled shortage of tweeds and flannels from the local mills. The stresses generated by intense demand at retail were inevitably passed back down the chain of supply, and we have already seen small apparel makers furtively purchasing single pieces over the counter at Foy and Gibson and rushing back to the workshop to cut and make. The bigger clothing manufacturers and their suppliers the wholesale softgoods houses were in a particularly bad way, having huge orders lying on the books of the mills, unmade and undelivered. Pressure from wholesalers desperate for fabric is very evident from

files of mill correspondence during 1919-1921, and in Ballarat, Ashley seems to have suffered health breakdowns in August 1920 and March 1922 partially as a result of being unable to keep his promises to customers. Unable to source adequately from local mills and cut off from workably-priced British piecegoods, the wholesalers took the one avenue open to them and, unable to beat the mills, joined them.

Foy and Gibson had shown the way in 1900, being the first wholesaler/retailer to build its own mill, and had been expanding its ranges and capacity along with consistent profits ever since. Myers led the post-war trend to mill investment in July 1918 when it purchased Denniston's old Doveton mill, and Sargoods moved in December 1919 when it purchased Walter Gaunt's equally run-down Alfred mill at Williamstown for the sum of £30,000. Both mills made tailoring tweeds and the Alfred also made flannels, but in Sargood's case the expected benefits were slow to follow the purchase. By March 1920 only a few pieces had been delivered into the warehouse and the massive re-developments planned by the new owners had been shelved pending the publication of the Fair Profits commission's report. It seems in fact that Sargoods never did get around to it, since the mill was described in 1926 as being the most out-of-date in the state and closed down entirely in September 1931.

[109] See, for example, the letter from Richard Allen to Ashley, 27/3/1920: "We also trust you will not overlook that we have had tweeds on order for three years and have not received a yard . . ." BOW.


The Myer Woollen Mills Proprietary Ltd.

MYRAU
Pure Wool
BLANKETS, TWEEDS AND RUGS

Ballarat, 17th. October 192

YARRA FALLS LIMITED
Wool Combers, Spinners & Weavers
JOHNSTON STREET, ABBOTSFORD
VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

16th. November 1925

Letterheads, Myers Mill, Yarra Falls. B&W.
Myers was a different story altogether, and a whirlwind of reorganization and expansion swept through the old Doveton mill in 1918/19. When completed the "Mycall" mills would double the old output of 1000 yards a week and would be working two shifts. Two thirds of the increased output would be in women’s apparel fabrics and economies of scale were expected to drop prices 25 per cent across the board. The mill was to weave flannels, blankets and rugs and also to venture into hosiery and by July 1918 the new American knitting plant was already on the water. Although the mill’s profitability suffered in the first half of 1921, the company made a good profit in the second half as the £25,000 worth of new machinery came on stream and seems thereafter to have amply repaid the investment decision.

The new mill companies formed after the war also boasted substantial shareholding by wholesalers and drapers, as well as others connected with the industry - wool brokers, wool scourers and graziers - backing their knowledge with investment funds. Yarra Falls and Stawell Woollen mills were respectively one of the largest and one of the smallest of the state’s new mills, Yarra Falls starting life as a topmaker and spinner in October 1917 and Stawell as a vertical woollen mill in October 1919. Both were public companies by the mid-1920’s and both had large merchandising interests on their boards. Yarra Falls, the "Finest mill South of the Line", had amongst its directors W.L. Baillieu (director 1917 and chairman from 1920), C.L. Baillieu (director 1928) and Arthur Hordern (director 1920). Stawell’s Board did not run to representation from Baillieu and Allard or Horderns, "The Universal Provider", but humbler merchandizers were well to the fore. Provisional directors in 1919 were seven Stawell businessmen, including three.

[114] Myer Woollen Mills 1921 income tax return, Myer Papers, MUA.
[115] See appendix 7 for directorates of six post-war mills.
drapers, a tailor, a store-keeper, a merchant and the proprietor of the local paper. By 1921 the most influential director was G.S. Stogdale of Stogdale and Sons, merchants and agents of Melbourne and Sydney. Stogdale not only travelled to the U.K. with the mill’s manager Henry Wormald to buy its plant but on his return took over the selling of its output to the big warehouses. \[116\] Stogdale’s interest in the mill was substantial, he owned 4,000 shares - the same amount as that of his fellow director C.H. Dawson woollen merchant of Flinders Lane - and he had purchased his interest on the understanding "that he would be placed on the same footing as Flinders Lane" as to supplies of fabric. \[117\]

Lack of working capital to buy wool and some degree of managerial and directorial incompetence forced Stawell into liquidation in August 1926, when it was purchased by the Bennett family, \[118\] who still operate it successfully as North Western Woollen mills. The Geelong mill we next consider had no such problems and recorded considerable profits throughout the 1920’s. The Commonwealth’s mill in North Geelong was sold into private hands in April 1923 for £155,000, over the vocal protests of the Federal Labour opposition which tended to see the mill as a step towards nationalization of a principal industry. \[119\] The successful tenderer was a group of three businessmen headed by James Dyer, a Flinders Lane merchant, Julius Solomon a Geelong draper, and Senator James Guthrie, the flamboyant, one-legged, Corriedale fancier and general manager of Dalgety's Geelong who had recently pulled his


\[117\] News 24/10/1923.

\[118\] John Bennett was at this time manager and director of the Warrnambool Mills. His son John, assistant manager at Warrnambool, became Stawell’s new manager.

\[119\] Scott: 1936: 262.
money out of Lincoln Mills.\textsuperscript{120} Dyer was almost the largest shareholder of the renamed Federal Woollen mills and he was elected chairman, but draper Solomon owned 17,328 one pound ordinaries and his fellow director and mill manager James Robertson 10,000, double the average holding for the other directors - two graziers, a Melbourne solicitor and a local agent.\textsuperscript{121}

Local men already in businesses associated with wool merchants, early stage processors, knitters - made significant input into the new mills.\textsuperscript{122} Tweedside Mills was built by the Thompson brothers on the site of their commission scour in Abbotsford in 1921. The four set mill turned out specialty lines in heavy woollens, saddle cloths, horse collar checks and the like and was an instant success, employing 100 people even in 1931. Yarra Falls, half a mile further up the river, was also built around an existing scour, that of E.M. Pierce. Pierce provided the site and some of the buildings of the new Yarra Falls Spinning Company, plus sufficient capital to ensure a chairmanship for E.M. Pierce and a directorate for P.H. Pierce. The managing director was F.F. Robinson, who like J.E. Thyne, was a director of the nearby Australian Knitting Mills in Richmond, and the man responsible for the original concept.\textsuperscript{123}

Lincoln Mills, spinners and knitters, was founded by the larger-

\textsuperscript{[120]} Typescript notes, no author, undated, "Events in the History of Federal Mills". Federal Mill Papers, Classweave Industries Geelong. See also Barnard, A., biography of Guthrie in A.D.B. Vol.9, pp.144-5.


\textsuperscript{[122]} Listings of the directorates of companies discussed here appear in appendix 7.

\textsuperscript{[123]} Tweedside Mills Defunct Company Papers, VPRS 932 C 6923 and "Yarra Falls Ltd." Typewritten company history, 1957, 2 pages, Yarra Falls Papers, YPL.
Letterhead: Lincoln Mills, 1921. BW.

Mr. T. N. Rowlands.

Portrait of T.N.Rowlands. IA 16/2/1927. SLV.
than—life Neville Rowlands, the larrikin from the bush town of Eureka. Rowlands had moved from timber carting to knitting mill with barely a pause for breath. At the same time he was shifting his wife’s little knitting business into large and modern premises at Coburg, he was also establishing a meat freezing plant and buying into Victoria’s first specialty top-maker, Port Phillip Mills, founded in 1919 by Townsend and Rhodes-Smith.\footnote{124} Rowlands was a far better entrepreneur than he was manager. In February 1924 he was thrown off the board of Lincoln, ironically, voted out by the firm’s majority shareholder William Gaunt, an investor whose presence in the company was the result of Rowlands’ particular talents. Rowlands had first met Gaunt in 1919 in the course of a British buying trip for machinery, and had succeeded in interesting him in a substantial minority shareholding in Lincoln. Gaunt, who had started in business as a Yorkshire wool merchant and small scale spinner, had amassed a considerable fortune during the war and at the time Rowlands met him was investing in businesses all over the world.\footnote{125} Once his attention fixed on Australia, Gaunt moved to consolidate his interests, increasing his holdings in Lincoln from 49 per cent to 51 per cent in 1922. Rowlands had developed a distressing tendency not to appear at board meetings, and Gaunt replaced him as managing director with his own man, J. Whitehurst of Bradford in June 1922. Whitehurst, who was dismissed in his turn in 1925, also acted for Gaunt as managing director of Lincoln Hats, Carlton, and chairman of directors of the new Valley Worsted Mills at Geelong.\footnote{126}

The minutes of Lincoln’s director’s meetings in the 1920’s make stimulating reading to later non-stockholders, being a compound of


\footnote{125} Sheridan: 1977: 1, 78.

\footnote{126} Lincoln Mills (Aust.) Ltd. minutes, meeting of 2/2/1925.
ineptitude, character assassination, farce and fraud. Being a public company with a large register of smaller shareholders, its fortunes also provided many column inches of entertainment in Melbourne papers at the time. Valley Worsted, on the other hand, was so private a concern that it was known as "The Mystery Mill". \[127\] Gaunt was generally supposed to be the man behind the venture, and Yarra Falls' secretary Briggs reported to director Robinson in September 1923 that "Gaunt was putting in a big mill in Geelong", \[128\] but nobody was certain. In fact, Briggs was right and the four subscribers to the first set of Articles of Valley Worsted were William Clifford Gaunt, Seymour and Hereward Church, Melbourne merchants, and the firm's solicitor Edward Outhwaite. \[129\] It seems likely that Gaunt's interest in Australian textiles ended abruptly in 1928, the year severe business problems at home forced him to sell his holdings in Lincoln to the National Bank, which held its enormous overdraft, but because of the habitual secrecy of Valley and the destruction of its records, we cannot be entirely sure.

The other English investor in Victorian wool textiles at this time was Saltaire Ltd., \[130\] more impressively known as Sir Titus Salt, Bart. Sons & Co. Ltd., another power in Bradford. When Robinson and Pierce decided early in the war that the only way to guarantee A.K.M's knitting yarn supplies was to spin their own, Robinson succeeded in attracting a 49 per cent investment in Yarra Falls by Saltaire, a considerable coup given that it was accomplished several years before the new tariff looked like barring the British mills from the Australian market. The

\[127\] Forster: 1964: 84.

\[128\] Memo from Briggs to Robinson, 8/9/1923, Letter book 1923. YFL.

\[129\] Memorandum and Articles of Association. Valley Worsted Ltd. Deceased Company Papers, VPRS 932, C 8372.

\[130\] Tweedside was attempting to obtain 2/3rd of its capital from English investors in 1920, but I have not been able to determine if this bid was successful.
mill they put up was the biggest in the state and the most modern, employing 800 people when its giant weaving sheds were built in 1921. Shares in the new company were divided between A.K.M. which held 318,000, and Saltaire, whose three proprietors Sir Henry Whitehead, F. Hill and E.H Gates, held 76,357 shares each. \[131\] The company papers do not mention the duration of Saltaire’s involvement, but the Yarra Falls "History" \[132\] notes the death of Sir Henry Whitehead in 1928, the same year Jobson’s Investment Digest listed a change in the company’s London board, with Whitehead, Hill and Gates being replaced by W.S. Robinson and C.L. Baillieu, the sons of the senior Australian directors. This suggests that Saltaire was suffering similar problems to Gaunt at this time and indeed, the Textile Mercury Annual records 1928 as a particularly bad one for the British trade.

If this is so, British involvement in Victorian wool textiles in the 1920’s amounts to two mills and eight years for Gaunt and one mill and eleven years for Saltaire. Put in other terms, this investment created about 1500 new jobs and introduced in Yarra Falls and Valley two big mills with capacity for fine and fancy yarns in wool, cashmere and silk, items rarely made in this country before this time. Because they were both worsted system mills these two also made tops, and their exports of these also set them apart from their non-exporting Victorian peers.

Forster writes that because of their size and product mix, the importance of British investment in the industry was greater than the number of mills indicated, and in part this is the case \[133\]. On the other hand, it should be recalled that there were twenty-one mills operating

\[131\] Forster: 1964: 83.

\[132\] Yarra Falls Ltd. .1957. "History of Company” typescript. YFL.

\[133\] Forster: 1964: 82.
in Victoria after 1923, and all but three were 100 per cent locally owned and operated, financed from local funds derived from sources involved in the wool industry, wholesalers and scourers especially. Because the records are sparse and the employment figures ambiguous,\(^{134}\) it is not possible to quantify the importance of the British activity, particularly since each mill's vote had the same value in the association which set the parameters of the national market they shared. It is probably best understood as the harbinger of the greater flood of British textile investment in Australia between 1933 and the early sixties. In these most prosperous decades, British money built plants for flax, cotton, silk and rayon, for carpet yarns and carpet weaving, and for the extrusion, throwing, knitting and weaving of new man-made fibres. Most of this activity was to occur in Victoria, building for it an ever more important place in the country's manufacturing economy.

(vii) The Union.

Much has been made in this chapter of the sweeping changes which occurred in the industry during the 1920's - in the products, the market structure, in distribution and marketing, business practices and technology, in government policy and in investment patterns. Naturally these economic and political pressures affected the jobs and lives of mill employees, and in the next section we will be pursuing the nature and extent of some of the changes which occurred as we investigate wages, jobs and working conditions over the 1900-1930 period. However, before concluding this survey of the structural development of the industry, it would be remiss to neglect the equally changing fortunes of

\(^{134}\) Official statistics do not make clear whether employment figures include workers knitting mills or top making establishments.
### ATWU Membership, 1926 to 1930

#### (a) Victorian State Divisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1926</th>
<th>1927</th>
<th>1928</th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1930</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>1,653</td>
<td>2,380</td>
<td>2,895</td>
<td>3,504(est)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geelong (1910) 150, (1915) 200,</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>1,101</td>
<td>1,120</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballarat</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castlemaine</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrnambool</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS:</strong></td>
<td>2,936</td>
<td>4,889</td>
<td>5,325</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### (b) State Branch Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1926</th>
<th>1927</th>
<th>1928</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>2,936</td>
<td>4,889</td>
<td>5,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>1,083</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Australia</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS:</strong></td>
<td>3,642</td>
<td>6,093</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### (c) Sectional Membership - 1927

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Knitting</th>
<th>Woollen &amp; Worsted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>1,019</td>
<td>2,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Australia</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS:</strong></td>
<td>1,108</td>
<td>3,985</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### (d) Membership by Sex - 1927

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adult Males</th>
<th>Females &amp; Juniors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>1,085</td>
<td>3,804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Australia</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>27 ? {Sic}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS:</strong></td>
<td>1,233</td>
<td>4,860</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** ATWU Vic. Branch Minutes of 3/12/1927 and 31/12/1928.
the mill employees’ industrial representative in the 1920’s, the Textile Workers’ Union.

As we saw in chapter one, the T.W.U. had been reorganized by William McAdam, who was secretary of both the national and the Ballarat branches during the years 1917 to 1926. By 1919 the union had branches in Geelong, Warrnambool and Ballarat as well as a head office at Trades Hall Melbourne. The great increase in the number of mills and of employees of those mills after the war was matched by a similar expansion in branches and membership of this union, especially in the later years of the decade. General secretary and union trouble shooter David Lark travelled from the Ballarat Trades Hall office to establish the union at Stawell in May 1926, and at Castlemaine in December. Knitting employees at Maryborough, at Schamp’s mills Ballarat and at Clunes Knitting Mills joined up in May and September 1927 and May 1928, apparently without any opposition from management in at least one case, since the union wrote to thank the manager at Clunes for his cooperation. The Melbourne branch was also expanding, into Austral Silk and Cotton in October 1927 and in nine other city mills during the last quarter of 1928. In 1926/27 it reported its greatest membership increase ever, from 2936 in September 1926 to 4889 a year later.

Expansion into other states was also proceeding with industry growth. The South Australian section was re-organized during 1927 and a West Australian section listed as "being organized" in the same year,


[137] At parliamentary level, the union’s interests were handled by William McAdam, MLA (motion of appreciation 29/10/1927) and J. Scullin, MHR, who was thanked "for his attention and action on behalf of the union on matters requiring Parliamentary pressure." State Executive Minutes meeting of 3/12/1927.
probably at the Albany Woollen Mills. Much of the Victorian expansion was into cotton and knitting mills, and after 1926 a separate knitting section was established. According to an analysis of sectional membership made in 1927, however, there was still a woollen and worsted predominance of nearly five to one, a similar ratio to the breakdown of membership in favour of females and juniors.¹³⁸

There were internal changes afoot also as the union’s new broom swept away the slacker and the malfeasant among union officials. Ballarat Trades Hall delegate F.F. Taylor, for example, was summarily dismissed for non-attendance at meetings in 1927, yet his case was trivial compared with the scandal that rocked the Geelong branch in 1929. The branch itself had run down under the inept and apparently delinquent administration of secretary Cunningham, who worked at the Federal mill. The state executive resolved that "In view of the apathy of the members of the Geelong division and the failure of the responsible officer of the Geelong division to administer local disputes and the affairs of the division, the State Committee of Management should conduct a full and complete enquiry. ."¹³⁹ David Lark was charged with the conduct of the investigation and presented his report to the executive at the annual meeting. Secretary Cunningham had failed to appear at the arranged meeting with Lark and on being tracked down at work and confronted: "reported that a fire at his place of residence had destroyed the books of the Union" and furthermore, that owing to some mistake for which he could not account, the divisional cheque forwarded to the state offices could not be met due to a shortage at the bank.¹⁴⁰

Lark was subsequently sent to Geelong to revitalize the branch but

¹³⁸ see table opposite.
¹³⁹ State Executive Minutes, 27/7/1929.
¹⁴⁰ State Executive Minutes, 2/11/1929.
achieved only partial success. Even in 1935 when goods times had once again come to the industry, only half the Geelong mill work force belonged to the union. Geelong managers had remained obdurately anti-union throughout. Even the sympathetic Robertson of Federal Mills for example, refused to allow Geelong branch president J. Farnworth (a Federal employee) leave to visit the Returned Soldiers’ mill on union business in work time.\footnote{141} In the breakdown of membership by mill presented by the then secretary of the division to a meeting of the state management committee in 1935 the hostility of the Valley and Hirst mills to unionism was particularly evident:\footnote{142}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mill</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Financial</th>
<th>Non-Union</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hirst</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albion</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldiers</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| TOTAL    | 2,800      | 1,467   | 1,073     | 1,333     |

Perhaps "successful hostility" would be a more accurate phrase, for Collins Bros.’ management had been particularly active against unionists and Wages Board representatives in the pre-war years and had had more industrial strife over wages and conditions than any of the Geelong mills. Perhaps as a result of these battles, unionism had become more tenacious at the union mills than at the other calmer, privately owned mills like Albion.

The greatest boost to the T.W.U’s position came with the introduction of the industry to the Commonwealth Arbitration system, a process which culminated in the first Federal award for the mills in

\footnote{141}{Victoria Branch State Executive Minutes, meeting of 29/10/1927.}
\footnote{142}{AWU Victorian Branch, State Management Committee Minutes, December 1935-October 1935, Meeting of 14/12/1935. MUA.}
June 1927. This move took away the power of the Wages Board to set wages, though it continued to regulate conditions, and put the mills into the hands of the Arbitration Court, a move which firmly established the T.W.U. in all states except N.S.W. as the only representative of wool textile employees before that court.

The basis of the Award of 1927 was an artificial dispute created by the union with a log of claims composed on 13 September 1924 by the Federal Council of the ATWU, meeting in Melbourne. The log was circulated to employers on February 19, 1926. Since the log included such economic outrages as equal pay for adult women and female apprentices, a forty-four hour week, thirteen paid public holidays on top of twelve days paid annual leave, and four weeks full pay sick leave, the union’s shocked surprise that not only had employers refused to grant the terms of the Log but moreover, had shown no desire to meet to discuss it must be taken with a grain of salt. Citing “serious dislocation in the industry” and the interests of industrial peace generally, the union’s general secretary Edward Painter applied for a compulsory conference under the Commonwealth’s Conciliation and Arbitration Act and was granted it, to be held before Sir John Quick in Melbourne on 23rd April 1926 at 10.30 a.m.\(^{143}\)

Forster has pointed out that during the 1920’s, all major awards of the court relating to textiles were consent awards\(^{144}\) and, in fact, the private negotiations between parties which had been evolved in Wages Board proceedings were simply carried over wholesale into the Federal

\(^{143}\) Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, Plaintiff No. 82-1926 between Australian Textile Workers Union and Albion Woollen Co., and Others, respondent. File held Conciliation and Arbitration Commission Archives, Melbourne. Ref. folio 1 and 2.

\(^{144}\) Forster: 1964:92. There is an earlier reference to a Compulsory Conference between union and employees held under the Commonwealth Act in September 1918, in Wages Board Minutes, meeting of 3/9/1918, but no further details are supplied.
sphere. The conference immediately referred the dispute to the Federal Court and in a series of smaller and undocumented meetings during the next year, employer and union representatives hammered out an agreement considerably less ambitious than the proposals of 1924. Women would be paid at 52 per cent of the male rate as they were in other industries, hours would remain for the moment at forty-eight, public holidays would be nine days—with paid annual leave at the discretion of the employer—and no sick leave provided. At the close of these protracted negotiations, on 20th June 1927 the parties applied to Judge Lukin for an award and this was granted to come into effect from July 1, 1927.  

The impact of this award on the wages and conditions of females and juniors will be examined later but it is useful to note here that it marked a new direction in the conditions of mill employees as regards dispute solving mechanisms. The award provided for the creation of a formal adjustment committee for each state, comprising three representatives from each side, which would act to resolve disputes as they arose, and also assume some of the responsibilities of the chief inspector of factories in issuing permits to aged and infirm workers. Justice Lukin was doubtful that such a committee could work without a chairman, and therefore a chairman’s casting vote, but the industry’s traditional hankering for consensus seems to have prevailed. Four years later when the Chamber of Manufactures and the Wool Textile Manufacturers Association applied to the court for a 10 per cent reduction in award wages, the union (unsuccessfully) requested that the matter be handled by the adjustment committee, stating that it believed a much lighter reduction in wages could be agreed upon if only the employers and employees were present and not the chamber representative. In support of this request union advocate Patrick Sheehan said that the committee had successfully settled sixty disputes.

over the last three years without the need for a chairman.

Sheehan's figure is an interesting one, for it is abnormally high. Mill correspondence, general newspapers, trade journals and association minutes from 1900 to 1927 mention only nine disputes and only one more between 1927 to 1930, an apparent contradiction to Sheehan's figures. First, these were Australian figures, not just Victorian and second, they included disputes in all textile establishments, not just woollen mills. However, since wool textiles was still one of the biggest textile sectors, and Victoria still the centre of the wool textiles industry, the apparently high level of disputes has still to be accounted for. It seems most likely that the union was becoming more involved in those disputes once resolved face to face by employer and employee and settled by dialogue or dismissal. These disputes were rarely recorded outside the mill, but once the employee had a shop steward to represent him, as increasingly he had, any dispute however small would involve the union, to be reported on and recorded by the state executive and thereby artificially raise the apparent level of industry discontent.

Some time between July and December of 1927, the AIWU applied for a court hearing on the forty-four hour week, but the proceedings seem to have been short-circuited by a court decision affecting another industry. In the words of advocate Sheehan: "this union was one of the applicants before the Court for the 44 hour week and was one of those

[146] The new name for the Associated Woollen and Worsted Textile Manufacturers of Australia.

[147] Plint 82-1926, folio 11: Application for 10 per cent Reduction in Wages. Summons of 11/2/1931. CAC.

[148] First mentioned in AIWU Victorian Branch State Executive Minutes, meeting of 3/12/1927. MUA.

unfortunate applicants who could not get their cases heard after the
finalization of the engineering case."^150 Although no transcripts of the
negotiations on hours under the 1927 Award have been kept on file, it
seems in any case probable that the adherence to the existing hours was
one of the employers non-negotiable tenets. The engineers' case was
being heard at the same time as the woollen industry negotiations were
in progress, and in the course of the hearings which ultimately restored
to the engineers the shorter week they had lost in 1922, employer's
representatives from Foy and Gibson gave evidence on the projected
impact of a forty-four hour week on the mills. John Maclellan, who was
by now chairman of directors, testified that shorter hours would reduce
output, at a time when the company was locked into certain fixed
payments, especially the interest on its capital. If output was reduced
by 1/12th, the company would have to get as much for the remaining
11/12ths, difficult to do on the present very small profit margins. In
support of his employer, A. Fullard the Gibsonia mill manager stated
that the company had orders booked up to June 1927 and had made no
provision in its costing for the proposed reduction in hours. The extra
cost would reduce the local advantage against U.K. products and their
low wage structure would once again lead to a flood of imports.
"Woollen mills are trading close to the line. The company cannot afford
experiments by the Court in hours and wages."^151

The union finally got its hearing in 1933 when revived activity in
the industry prompted the NFWU to apply for recision of the 1931 wage
reduction order (unsuccessful) and for a forty-four hour week. The
shorter week was already in force in the mills in Queensland (1924) New
South Wales (1925) and West Australia (1926), while the Victorian
knitting industry had worked a forty-five hour week since 1917, so the

[^150] Plant No.82- 1926, folio 13. C.C.C.

time was ripe for correction of this anomaly. The Full Court heard the
evidence in May and June, visited the mills to see conditions of work at
first hand and presented its decision on June 3, 1933. In view of the
large number of females employed, the noisy conditions in which many
worked, the intense concentration required of menders and pin setters,
standard hours would henceforth be forty-four. To avoid the obvious
production difficulties arising from other parts of the mill work force
being on forty-eight hours, both males and females would work the new
hours. 152

The ATWU had by the early thirties firmly established itself as the
textiles union, and its increasing membership and pivotal role in
Commonwealth Arbitration proceedings as well as domestic disputes
pointed to it becoming a powerful and important body. It seems possible
that the shift away from the Wages Board where the employers had
somewhat of an edge into the larger and more radical Federal forum of
the Arbitration Court assisted the strategic position of the union, at
least in good times. The new system did not work in markedly different
ways from the old in real terms and negotiation towards a conservative
consensus remained the hallmark of industrial relations in the mills.
Amongst the union’s achievements in the 1920’s must be numbered its
ability to improve its internal administration and extend its membership
both in Victoria and interstate. The extent of T.W.U. unionization in
the mills by 1927 would appear to have been 42.5 per cent of all wool
textile employees (excluding knitting), given an employment total of
6752 for 1927/28. 153 Although comparable figures are not available for
other years from union records, this comparatively high membership was a

152 Except apparently those men treating wool in the pre-scouring
stages, who were members of the Wool and Basil Workers union and under a

153 The ambiguous definition of state employment totals for wool
textiles employment should be borne in mind here.
most respectable total, achieved as it was in the face of continuing hostility from most mill operators throughout the three decades. The union’s supreme achievement was in bringing of the major part of the industry under the uniform wages and conditions embodied in the 1927 Federal Award. Its biggest failing in this decade was the forty-four hour week, for wool textiles was one of the last industries under a Commonwealth Award to get the shorter week, and it was gained sixteen years after the knitting industry won the same concession.

The 1920’s drew to a close in mixed circumstances for the Victorian industry. Those mills which were predominantly woollen system spinners woke in mid 1928 to the realization that they were not so slowly smothering under the weight of huge stocks of flannels and blankets. Warrnambool and Castlemaine had temporarily resigned from the Association in the crisis of 1925, when their need to cut prices to survive had conflicted with the official set prices for woollens, and they were pushed into the same situation again as British goods poured into the country in the van of depression. Price cutting on flannel became endemic by August, and by January 1930, Castlemaine, Warrnambool and Collins Bros. were reporting idle looms, overstocking and only three weeks’ work in hand. Collins was hardest hit of all, for the company had just built a big new mill at nearby Marnock Vale and its abrupt closure was a blow from which the company did not recover for many years after. Although the British were blamed by the mills for the malaise in flannel, the Tariff Board investigation into the problem in 1930 indicated that public preference for knitted underclothing in favour of old style flannels was equally important.\footnote{Tariff Board Report and Recommendation on Flannel 1930. CPP 1929-30-31 vol. 3, p.1845.} Certainly the worsted mills and their customers the knitters were not in anywhere near the difficulties of the woollen mills. Federal and Returned Soldiers were in
fact expanding and Roy and Gibson's knitting plant was running double shifts at this time, but as 1931 wore on most mills were rationing work, and even Yarra Falls' weaving sheds were on three and four day weeks. 1932 was to be the nadir of the industry's fortunes until 1974-5, with wages cut by 10 per cent across the board and the prospect of a further cut sparking off the industry's first big strike, eleven city mills closing for one day on the 25th of August. Generally speaking it would not be as bad a depression for wool textiles as would be for many other industries, but even so, after the heights of the receding 1920's, the slump was a bitter experience. 155

The Royal Commission into the Tariff had predicted in 1908 that if the Australian mills had control of their domestic market the wool textiles industry could employ 10,000 people, and this duly came to pass in the late 1920's. Employment jumped from 8,735 in 1925/26 to 11,068 the following year, two years before the industry gained control of its market in piece goods in 1928/29 and two years after it captured the market for wool yarns from the British. In the collection of necessary conditions to achieve this end, six elements are discernible, these being the huge post-war demand for all textiles; the ability of Australian mills to produce large volumes of the middle market qualities most in demand; a fashion swing to worsteds both in piece goods and in knits of all types; the availability of wartime profits and British capital to permit expansion and diversification into worsted technology; sufficient tariff protection to safeguard the desired investment and expansion, and finally, the instilling in the newly created market of a patriotic preference for locally made goods. Of all these conditions tariff protection was paramount, as evidenced by the suddenness of the

decline in the locally held market share when the effective barriers of 1908, 1921 and 1926 were eroded by inflation or depression, and the equally abrupt rises in the industry's output, at least in 1908 and 1921 when they were restored. It might be said that in this respect the expanded industry was a government creation.

During the process of capturing its own market, the industry had undergone unprecedented changes in its structure, its size, its products and the way it marketed its output, changes of such magnitude as to justify calling them a transition from a Victorian industry into a modern one. In terms of marketing, it may even be true to say that the mills' transition from being mere suppliers to wholesalers to becoming independent marketers was a structural change of a magnitude not since exceeded, for all Victorian mills now supply a variety of customers, wholesale, retail, manufacturing and governmental.

On the industry's own benchmark, i.e., profitability, the 1920's were a great success. This was particularly true of those big new mills which had the most capital to put into worsted technology and thereby to dominate the market; the bigger the mill, the closer it was able to keep to trends in demand and so the big and consistent profits of Yarra Falls, Valley and Federal came about, paying shareholders between 8 and 14 per cent on their investment. The smaller and the less efficient woollen system mills were less able to cope with the depressions of 1924/25 and 1929/31, but none of them closed permanently during the bad times - which were shorter in duration for wool textiles than most other secondary industries - and in the good times they had made high profits. Overall most would have felt the decade to be their best ever, so perhaps Stirling Taylor's belief that the Golden Age could be achieved through wool was closer to the truth than his detractors thought.
PART TWO

MILL MANAGERS, MILL GIRLS. THE WORKFORCE AND THE WORKPLACE, 1900-1930.

During 1900 to 1930, there were dramatic changes in the nature and organization of work in the mills. Part two of this investigation is a work history of the industry and it seeks to quantify and explain these changes. It is designed to bridge the gap between the public world of business and the very private world of the mill family which constitutes part three, so inevitably it contains elements of both. To cope with these conflicting viewpoints, social and cultural methodologies have been used; social history for its investigation of social change via statistical evidence,¹ and to a lesser extent here, cultural for its interpretation of work as the expression of social rules.

In these chapters, I argue that in assessing the changes which occurred in the workforce of the mills and its working conditions, the most significant event was the unprecedented feminization of the industry after 1906. The most important of the changes were impelled by just this phenomenon. Shifts in occupation, wages, hours and physical working conditions all occurred because of the influx into the factories of young females and the differing responses of legislators, arbitrators and managers to the fact.

As stated in the introduction, the manager's perspective is used throughout this work. In part two, he is shown as the physical interface of public and private action in the mill. The factories acts and allied legislation like the compensation acts were implemented by him in the factory, as were the decisions made on rates of pay and conditions of

work by the wool trades board and the arbitration court. The focus of attention in these administrative activities was always the female mill employee, for public reaction against working women was strong. As a responsible member of Victorian society and as a major employer of young females, the manager had a fine line to tread. In his implementation of the decisions of parliament, court and wages board he had always to consider both his own imperative to make a profit as well as his legal and familial obligations to his "girls".

The manager's viewpoint is, as mentioned, both vital and accessible, but strong attempts must also be made to balance the picture. By seeking the views of the people most directly affected by decisions taken from above, that is, the mill workers and most especially, the mill females, we can establish why young women chose to work in mills rather than some other job and why the movement into the mills occurred when it did. We can ask what they thought of the wages and conditions they encountered at work, and, where we cannot find direct verbal testimony, we can seek an objective assessment of just how low the wages were and how dangerous the work was compared with contemporary industries.

Because of the innate deficiencies of evidence and the limitations of method, the findings about the different attitudes managers and girls brought to their work cannot be definitive, but some generalizations can be made. For the manager, cheap semi-skilled female labour was essential and usually not difficult to attract. Skilled females, on the other hand, were often in short supply and unusually strong efforts had to be made to attract and keep them, even to the extent of recruiting overseas and, in the 1920's, instituting major welfare schemes in the mill. For the girls, most worked to support their struggling parents and siblings. They preferred to do this with mill work rather than domestic
service, the usual option for unskilled girls. Turnover was high as girls left for marriage, but the skilled warper and weaver could keep their jobs into old age if they chose and many others seem to have benefitted from their time in the mill. Good friends were to be made at work, and happy social events planned and enjoyed. If larger troubles loomed, the manager was available to intercede with outside authorities.

In the opinion of women who had worked in English and Australian mills, the Victorian mills were much better employers; better hours, better wages, better conditions and happier atmosphere. Yet by the end of the 1920’s, industry expansion and worsening economic conditions were imposing ultimately fatal stresses on the comfortable old ways. Henceforth the manager’s personal obligations to his employees, which will be detailed in Part Three, would attenuate in proportion to the distance between them, and the mill would become more and more just a place to work.

The currently topical debate on the deskilling of work by monopoly capital, based on Braverman’s Work and Monopoly Capital, is not the subject of this investigation of the mills. It does however raise important issues and some explanation of why it is that they are not dwelt upon here is in order. In part, my stated preference for an internal viewpoint over an external one is the reason, deskilling not being an issue to anyone in the mills at this time. Additionally, it is my strong conviction that this industry was neither deliberately deskilled nor controlled by monopoly capitalists. The mills here were owned and operated by families or by the local shareholders of the towns in which they were located. Here there were no spinning empires as there


were in Britain and the United States, no centralized monopolies of mills.

Wool textiles occupied an odd place in the hierarchy of modern factory organization, being neither entirely the domain of tradesmen nor totally given over to assembly line operations. The whole woollen manufacturing process had been continuous from raw wool to finished fabric ever since weaving and dyeing had moved out of the cottage and into the factory in the 1850's. Tradesmen in the 1920's still ran the wool processing areas - sorting, blending, scouring, carding - as well as mule spinning and loom tuning, and every department had a male tradesman as foreman. In all the important skilled jobs except weaving, the same men exercised the same skills in the factory as they had done at home, without any change in the work processes used. As far as I can tell, this situation existed in Victorian mills into the 1940's.

There was certainly a change in the sex of the weaver, as young females and the power loom replaced the journeyman hand loom weaver. In Australia too, there was a corresponding degradation in the average female wages as against male. However, there was no breaking down of the processes of spinning and weaving into several simpler functions or combining them into one complex automatic machine, nor was there any continuing inducement of operatives to work several looms or frames simultaneously at this time.

Braverman's approach has not been adopted because it does not fit the realities of mill life. However, that of Herbert Gutman has much to recommend it. In *Work, Culture and Society* Gutman recommends a more suitable approach for this slow-moving, paternal, consensual industry.

Centred on discovering and interpreting the beliefs and behaviors of individual groups of workers, rather than imposing on them the rigid and exclusive trade union vs. capitalist framework, it is this attitude which is acknowledged in part two and adopted extensively in part three. American and British studies of mill life deriving from this introspective approach have been particularly helpful in understanding Australian behaviors. Tamara Hareven's *Amoskeag*, Steve Dunwell's *The Run of the Mill*, Eric Sigsworth's *Black Dyke Mills* and Plummer and Early's *The Blanket Makers* were all of interest and are acknowledged in later chapters.

The paternal nature of the society within the mill, the structure which these works and my own investigations present, is profoundly important to our understanding of the actions of Australia's mill people, for the mill's family-modelled social arrangements governed most decisions made. No study of paternalism in Australian businesses has yet been undertaken and even overseas it is a new field of interest for scholars. The development of paternalism's sex-based work patterns and family-modelled social structure from its Protestant origins has lately been summarized by R.E. Pahl in his *Divisions of Labour*. On the authority of Pahl and of M.B. Miller, in his excellent history of Paris' greatest department store, the Bon Marché, paternalism was the preferred social model for most businesses of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as for national domestic, educational and legislative institutions in England, Europe and the United States. These

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considerations far exceed the scope of my localized study, but they should be born in mind when considering the development in Australia of worker welfare schemes and industrial hygiene initiatives in the 1920's, in line with similar overseas activities.

The family-modelled factory can be recognized in histories of many Australian companies, but in none is it explicit. Australian patriarchs, benevolent and otherwise, are to be glimpsed in action in recent works on the flour, meat, baking, automotive, building supplies, pastoral and retail industries, but the dimensions of industrial paternalism have yet to be fixed. In chapters nine and ten we will be paying particular attention to the ways mill people created and maintained the family at work. Here, in part two, my aims are simpler; to quantify aspects of work, wages and conditions in the mills and to begin to establish the existence of the patriarchal work family.

WOMAN'S WORK

BY
HENRIETTA D. MCGOWAN & MARGARET CUTHBERTS

1/-

Cover of Woman's Work, 1913. SLV.
CHAPTER 4

THE ADVENT OF THE MILL GIRLS

The consistently expanding output of the mills before 1923/24 was the most marked economic event of the industry's progress, but remarkable changes had also occurred in the demography of the mills' work force. From its stable nineteenth century form favouring junior males and middle-aged men, the mill work force changed abruptly in 1907 to become a majority female structure, a condition which still prevails, and consisting of women younger than ever before. In part this movement was a state-wide trend of women into paid non-domestic employment. However, it occurred in mills to a much greater extent than in other industries and because wool textiles was one of the most capital-intensive and important state industries¹ and the only heavy industry employing significant numbers of females, it tended to become a focus of the strong public reactions against women and children working in factories.

(1) The Rush Into the Factory.

Apart from the disastrous year of 1892 when female employment in the mills had crashed from 410 to 260, the trend toward increasing female employment had been evident since 1891. According to my findings, based on figures extracted from Victorian Year Book tables, females became a majority of mill employees in 1907 and they averaged around 54 per cent of employees thereafter. In Victoria's manufacturing sector generally the proportion of females employed stabilized earlier, in

¹ See appendix 8.
1902, and on a lower level, and although war conditions temporarily inflated the figures the thirty-year average was only 32 per cent.²

In My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Anne ³ Beverley Kingston places the beginnings of female shifts into non-domestic employment in the late 1880s. Moving from the public service then into the industrial work force, she states that women’s employment peaked in 1911 when 28.4 per cent of the country’s industrial work force was female.⁴ Thereafter this proportion declined – 26.3 per cent in 1921, 23.6 per cent in 1933 – as women moved on into health, education, commerce and finance. Not till 1947 was this high proportion of women in industry regained. On the basis of my findings, neither this timetable nor its proportions seem to have applied in Victoria, at least to 1930, and given the state’s pre-eminence in manufacturing, this is slightly disturbing. Probably the answer lies in Kingston’s use of census data rather than year book figures. The censuses of 1901, 1911, 1921 and 1933 have little to say on the activities in Victoria during intercensal periods, but if the employment figures for every year 1900–1930 are individually tabulated, the results provide quite different information. The Victorian Year Book figures for female employment in manufacturing industry 1900–1930 show that peak female employment occurred not in 1911 but during the war when 36 per cent of the Victorian industrial work force was female. Peak peacetime year was in fact 1909 when factories employed 35.5 per cent of females.

Why this rush occurred when it did and why girls chose to work in mills rather than in some other sort of occupation are complementary

² See appendix 9a and 9b.


Dear Mr. Pike,

Sunnyside Hills
Ballarat.

About a week ago I got a letter to get me a work in a mill and she wrote and told me your address. I worked in this mill here for a year, I was working on the winding and whipping for a while but I was mostly on burling and mending. I learnt blanket and flannels and was going to be taught the tweeds when the mill closed down. I am willing to learn anything and I would like to work myself up higher as I have a mother and four sisters to help to keep.

I will have to pay my board at Ballarat, and if I get enough to pay for it and a few shillings over I would be satisfied for a start. I am enclosing a stamped envelope as soon you can let me know as soon as possible when I can start, as I am leaving here Thursday.

And Oblige

Gladys Lea.

Letter, Gladys Lea to Mr. Pike, 22/11/1925. EWW.
questions, need and opportunity going hand in hand. Because of the buoyant conditions prevailing in the wool textile industry, the mills were constantly expanding and seeking young starters, particularly girls for the new jobs created. It was customary for preference to be given to family members of existing employees. News of a vacancy would come home with a relative in the mill and mother and daughter would go up to the mill to call on the manager the next day. Girls straight out of school generally began work in the mill at fifteen, usually starting off in the spinning area as pieceers, winders and frame attendants or perhaps, if they had any darning skill, in the mending department. Subsequent moves to carding room or combing department were common, and if the girl was interested and showed aptitude she would be offered the chance to learn weaving, "the ambition of every girl who has any desire to get on . . ." as Miss Cuthbertson remarked in 1913.\(^5\) Gladys Lea who wrote the letter opposite was halfway down the optimum female career path when she was offered a mending job at third year rates at Ballarat in 1925, and it would have been as a weaver that she was intending to "work herself up higher". Her letter also supplies us with the principal reason she and her many peers were working, that is to support her mother and her mother's children.

In her important study of American working women in this period, Lesley Woodcock Tentler has thoroughly documented the absolute imperative of working class daughters to contribute to the family wage. She writes:

> working class family life, while often marked by conflict, was also characterized by a high degree of cohesiveness and by strong and controlling bonds of obligation and loyalty, deriving at least in part from the marginal situation of many families. These ties were especially strong for daughters. For most young women, wage

earning was an essentially domestic obligation; their wages belonged to the family. As they also did in England, Victorian mill girls gave their wages intact to their mothers, only receiving pocket money back and that only if the family could afford it.

Like their American contemporaries, Australian mill girls worked because they had to. Ballarat’s girls, like those of Castlemaine, often came from large families whose fathers were ex-miners either dead or permanently invalided by miners’ complaint or brown lung. Judging from their letters to Ballarat’s manager these families were kept together by their desperate mothers and the wages of older brothers and sisters living at home and employed as agricultural labourers, servants or mill hands locally. As they did in America, many of Victoria’s mill families lived very close to the poverty line and when the gold mines began to close in 1905, the need for every member of the miner’s family to work became critical. At the Royal Commission On Customs and Excise Tariffs running that year, Castlemaine’s manager Edward Williams testified to the gravity of these families’ position. Thirty or forty young people whose fathers had been local gold miners worked at the mill and were, he said, the means of keeping their homes together. Similarly, the children of four local widows were also working to help bring up their younger brothers and sisters. Ballarat’s foreman David Wilson corroborated the position: “In Ballarat scores of girls and boys vainly


apply to us for employment. Half of them perhaps have to maintain their fathers and relatives. It is pitiful to see these children searching for work."

It was the age of the new workers which first attracted the attention of concerned observers. For well intentioned middle-class people, raised on Dickens and concerned about sweating and similar industrial abuse, the enormous jump in the numbers of working children in 1902 had ominous implications. A certain amount of confusion was immediately generated by conflicting definitions of "child", for while in a legal context a child was anyone under twenty-one, state statisticians had already sensibly decided that since some of this group were already exercising adult activities by holding down paid jobs, workers under fifteen would be classified as children and over as adults. In 1902 they raised the age of "adult" to sixteen years.\footnote{Statistical Register of Victoria, 1900, 1901. Melbourne 1901, 1902.} Factories and shops legislators for their part had already decided\footnote{Factories and Shops Act 1890, s.32.} that true children - who were totally forbidden to work in factories - were thirteen and under, while working boys were between fourteen and sixteen.

It seems safest for us to think of these children as young teenagers straight out of school, and to note that as a percentage of the state work force their numbers had jumped from 2 per cent to 6 per cent in 1902, and thence to an all time high of 8 per cent three years later. (See appendix 9d). In the mills the jump was far greater, from 7 per cent to 17 per cent in 1902, thence to an unreported 19 per cent of all mill employees in 1903. 11 per cent of 1902's total had been

\footnote{Royal Commission 1905 Minutes, p. 1316.}
Chief Inspector of Factories' Office,
GOVERNMENT OFFICE, SPRING-STREET
Melbourne, MAY 18, 1914

Permission for Girl between 14 and 15 Years of Age to Work in a Factory.

Act 2305, Section 17.

I HEREBY grant permission to

[Liau Sather] of 334, Farrel Parade, Broadmead, a girl of 14 years of age on 5th April, 1914, who is not required to attend school under the Education Acts, to work in a [Blank].

Factory.

[Signature]

Chief Inspector of Factories.

Permit for Girl Between 14 and 15 to Work in a Factory, 1914. BW.
boys, but girls had gone from 3 per cent to 6 per cent by 1902 and to 9 per cent in 1903, and the average age of girls was falling. In the fourteen to twenty years group, consistently the largest category of employees, the census of 1901 showed 21 per cent of Victorian mill workers were females fourteen to nineteen, but by 1933 this had risen to 27 per cent, mostly at the expense of boys of comparable age.¹²

As they had done in Britain, legislators in Victoria acknowledged the imperative for poor children to work for their families. If the job was suitable and the family's need severe, fourteen year old girls were permitted to leave school and work under a special licence issued by the Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops. As Ord reported in 1911 "Although the youngest age at which a boy may be employed in a factory is fourteen and a girl fifteen, permission to work may be obtained from the Chief Inspector for a girl of fourteen to work ... if it is shown that the parents are poor and the interest of the girl will be best served by that course."¹³ This provision, which became law with the passing of the 1911 Factories and Shops Act was a practical acknowledgement of both the arrival of younger girls into the workforce and of their right to work in factories to help support their families. It was not apparently introduced without opposition and, as Premier and Minister for Labour John Murray said during the bills second reading, "Honourable members are aware that another place raised the age at which girls should be employed in factories to fifteen years. The Government proposed that the minimum age should be fourteen years, but another place added on a year." ¹⁴

By the end of 1911 Ord had issued 177 permits to school-age girls

¹² Appendix (SF).


FACTORIES AND SHOPS ACTS.

Certificate under the Factories and Shops Acts.

I, Henry Arthur Bradley of 43, Lincoln Rd, Ballarat, being a Certifying Medical Practitioner under the Factories and Shops Acts, have been satisfied either by a certificate of birth, statutory declaration, or other sufficient evidence, that

is of the age of 16 years, and I certify that has been physically examined by me, and is not incapacitated by disease or bodily infirmity for working day for the time allowed by law in the following Class or Classes of Factories,* viz.:

[Signature]

Certifying Medical Practitioner.

Date 9/7/1918

* Note.—The Certifying Medical Practitioner may here insert the words "all classes," or he may confine the certificate to any particular class or classes of factories by naming same. Certificates are only required by persons under sixteen years of age, i.e., by boys between fourteen and sixteen, or by girls between fifteen and sixteen.

No. of School

Name of School

Section 35, Education Act 1915.

I hereby certify that the Records of the above School show that Donald Heddle was born on 12th Oct. 1904

Signed: J. Anderson

Date: Oct 12th 1918

Act Principal Teacher.

Doctor's Certificate and School Birth Date Certificate for Underage Child, 1918. B.W.
seeking factory work. For a mill to employ such a girl, two preliminary
documents had to be obtained by the prospective employer. First was the
medical certificate certifying fitness for mill work, this being
required for any child under sixteen, and secondly proof of birth date.
This last was obtained not in the form of a birth certificate, but as an
extract of the school register, usually a handwritten note from the head
teacher endorsed with the school stamp. Documents in hand, parents and
child then sought an interview with the Chief Inspector at Spring Street
and, if all went well, a permission to work form was issued on the spot.
Thereafter all documents were held at the mill office, and judging from
the Ballarat correspondence, Sunnyside seems to have employed only about
a dozen of these very young girls between 1910 and 1930.

As we will see, Ballarat’s employees tended to be related to each
other and to live in close proximity to their work. This was an
important consideration, given the low wages paid to mill girls and with
the availability of mill jobs was an important factor in the choice of
occupation. Because of their youth, their low level of education and
marketable skills, these girls had little choice of occupation. In the
professional opinion of Miss Cuthbertson and her co-author Henrietta
McGowan, women who worked for money could be classified into those with
and without capital. That majority which had no financial backing, who
must "turn to" practically at a moment's notice, were at a serious
disadvantage: "Domestic considerations hamper the actions of thousands
who, by some means or another, must add their quota to the family
exchequer. Remunerative employment must frequently be found for women
handicapped with ill-health, while elderly women with no previous
training are all too often driven to attempt money-making in their
declining years." 15

Those Ballarat women who did have capital or skills to invest in their choice of job were the fortunate ones. From trade directory entries, I estimate these women ran 25 per cent of Ballarat’s trades, shops, and businesses during 1889 to 1917; from their privileged ranks Sunnyside’s telephonist, typist and bookkeeper were drawn. Far removed from their well-groomed company came the younger daughters of the city’s poorer families, straight out of school at fifteen with their shabby dresses, old shoes and bad teeth. Their choice was between domestic service and factory work, at least until the war solved the servant problem. Servant girls were always in short supply and it was no wonder, given their wages - 7/– a week in 1900. Inspector McGlinchey who policed the Servants Registry Office Act of 1897 reported in 1900 that he had had it "on good authority that the scarcity of servants can be traced to the fact that the conditions of factory life has [sic] so improved during the last few years that the majority of girls prefer the factory to domestic life. In the factory they have their evenings to themselves, and every Sunday, so that it is hardly to be wondered at that the girls choose the factory, as the domestic servant may be called upon to work from fourteen to sixteen hours per day, and very often Sunday is the hardest day of the week." 

For the many who chose factory work, Ballarat had a much larger manufacturing sector than most other country towns, and girls could seek employment with the town’s two soft drink companies or the pickle and sauce factory. But only the city’s two woollen mills, Doveton and Sunnyside, offered reasonable pay for beginners and the prospect of further training which could be done on the job while still earning

money. The mills were also part of a board trade, with the details of current wages for every class of employee put up in the workplace for all to see and enforceable by the visiting factory inspector if necessary. Lucy Wilson, who worked in one of the Geelong mills during 1912 and 1919 as a comber girl, was a beneficiary of such a visit.

The inspector came round once and he used to look through the books and everythin' and he's talkin' to me and he says, 'do you know if you're gettin' your right wages?' I said 'Well I don't think I am,' and he said, 'Why not?' I said, 'Well five shillings a week's not much is it?' That's all we got for workin' from quarter past seven in the mornin' to quarter past five at night. So he went up to the desk and he took all the books out and the old devil, he had another book and he'd hid it right at the back of the drawer in some secret spot and the inspector found it. Well you can imagine what I was like after that because it was me who first put the report in. After that he gave me a heck of a time. He'd come up and say to the girls, 'Where is she?' and the'd say, 'She's sick.' 'Pity she wasn't dead, the old so-and-so'd be outa all our worries then.' He only had to give me two guineas back pay that's all. The fuss he'd made you'd'ave thought he had to pay about a hundred dollars or somethin.'¹⁹

There were other, less visible advantages to mill work. A social life with friends of the same age, for example - board mates in the weaving room often became friends for life - the security of working with relatives, and the convenience of living close by. Employees in good mills like Ballarat also had access to the manager for assistance in dealing with personal problems or outside authorities. Contrasted with the isolation, drudgery and petty tyrannies of domestic service, the dirt and noise of the mill faded into insignificance.²⁰

(ii) Reactions to the Rush.

Public reaction to the established reality of females working in factories was almost entirely condemnatory. The only cautious support came from those with direct experience of the world of work - female


Girls Finishing Tops, Yarra Falls 1921. YFL.

Boy Piecer at Foy and Gibson, 1922. MUA.
factory inspectors like Miss Cuthbertson and Miss Thear, mill owners and managers, and we must assume, the needy families of the younger girls. The debate was at its height between 1907 and 1912 despite the trends having become apparent in 1902’s employment figures. Why then was there such a delay? Why the debate at all? Basic provisions for the welfare and safety of women and children working in factories were already in place, incorporated into the manifold clauses of existing Factory and Shops Acts, some in place since the act of 1885.

For any boy or girl under sixteen to work in a factory, it was necessary they be certified medically fit by a physician. They were forbidden the perilous trades like white lead making, mirror silvering and match dipping. The processes of metal grinding and fustian cutting were subject to minimum age limitations for children, though not women, and those under eighteen and all women could not be employed unprotected in unhealthy areas like the wet spinning used in rope making, or in dangerous activities like cleaning mill gearing in motion or working between the fixed and moving parts of self-acting machinery like mules. No boy of fifteen, girl over sixteen or any woman was permitted to work for more than 48 hours a week or ten hours a day or past 9 p.m. without the approval of the Minister of Labour. Overtime would be granted for one day a week only, ten days a year, and a modest amount of tea money was payable by the employer on the night. As to hours worked, the mills had instituted the eight hour day officially in 1890 and unofficially somewhat earlier. As Grainger proudly told 1905’s Royal Commission into the tariff, "before we were actually forced to do so, we adopted the eight hours principle, because we saw that it was the will

[21] Factories & Shops Act 1890, s.32.

[22] FSA 1890, Sch.3.

[23] FSA 1890, s.43.

[24] FSA 1890, S.30. This section apparently excluded all adult males.
of the people, and that our reputation was suffering in consequence of our working our employees nine hours daily".\(^{25}\)

Paradoxically, manufacturers complaining about shortages of juvenile labour seem to have been the catalyst in raising public awareness of child labour. After a setback in 1905, Victorian manufacturing had quickly reached top gear and by 1907 employers were commenting loudly on the scarcity of both child and female labour. Parents sending their children into lighter employment or commercial colleges were blamed, but as the chief inspector pointed out there was in fact no falling off in the size of the labour pool. On the contrary, compared to 1896 figures the numbers of boys employed in factories had risen by two and a half and of girls as much as six times.\(^{26}\) The economy was simply expanding faster than the cheap labour supply. By 1909 "good" boys were still proving hard to get in the wool industry and for the first time in eight years female weavers were also in short supply.

This situation had been exacerbated in 1909 by the success of the Upper House in fixing the minimum age at which girls could be employed in factories at fifteen. The greatest effect of this move was felt in the clothing and wool textiles trades, so heavily reliant on school leavers as trainees. Inspector Miss Thear reported that raising the age had caused considerable hardship in the restricted job market for such young girls. Since the alteration "considerably over one hundred of them had had to be refused employment."\(^{27}\) Following her visits to factories to check on ages, some girls had been dismissed and others,

\(^{25}\) Royal Commission on Customs and Excise Tariffs Minutes of Evidence. CFP 1906 vol. iv, p. 1283.

\(^{26}\) Report 1907, p.68. VPP 1908, vol.1.

she felt sure, had been forced to lie about their ages to avoid the same fate. She went on to say: "An employer having had long experience in the woollen industry states it has been his experience that the most tractable and teachable employes have always been those who commenced immediately on leaving school! The general explanation is that after an absence from school for a time, it is difficult to get employes to willingly settle down to learn a trade."[28]

To hardship and efficiency Miss Thear later added another reason for reverting to the previous age limit: "All healthy girls should be allowed to work in factories on leaving school . . . The period intervening between their leaving school and going to a trade is said to have a bad moral effect."[29] In support for the fifteen-year limit, Miss Thear's superior Miss Cuthbertson felt that while it was hard on poor families, the extra year gave girls "time to grow before settling down to the burden of factory life."[30] It also allowed girls a year or two between school and factory to learn necessary housekeeping skills and this, she felt, might also go some way to solving the chronic shortage of domestic servants. In the following year's report she added that the increasing prosperity of Victoria's economy was giving parents the opportunity of keeping their children at school for longer, or at home, and of choosing business college enrolment as an alternative to factory work for girls.[31]

As well as the manufacturers and the middle-class point of view represented by Miss Cuthbertson, a third sector of public opinion existed. Like the Geelong petitioners of 1900 who feared the loss of

[31] Report 1910, VPP 1911, p.82.
(presumably) male jobs to cheaply paid girls, supporters of this viewpoint were sufficiently vocal for their views to need rebuttal in the chief inspector's report of 1909: factories were not "over run" by children taking older peoples jobs. In fact he said, during 1904 to 1908 the numbers of thirteen and fourteen- year old girls had decreased by forty and employment of children of both sexes aged fifteen to seventeen years had increased at only one fifth the rate of the adult work force. 32

For mill owners in 1909 the position was simpler. Jobs were available and the most suitable people to fill them were fourteen year old girls - in Miss Thear's words, "tractable and teachable." To deny one hundred willing applicants on a whim of age was stupidity, particularly in view of the limited job openings for girls this young, and of the poor backgrounds of many. 33 The middle- class opposition view was more complex, carrying as it did a number of moral judgements. Children should not work, girls particularly, and the only excuse for doing so was to help support their families. The proper place for a girl was at home "growing" and learning housework until the time came for marriage or paid domestic service.

Those who opposed working children on economic grounds found much to support in the moralists' views. In fact, it is instructive to see that throughout the debate all participants used "children" as a synonym for "girls". Generally speaking no one seems to have worried much about fourteen- year old boys working. Apart from the basic safety provisions and work hours laid down in the Factory and Shops Acts nothing special was done for mill boys, and we might conclude from this that boys were males and therefore independent adults the moment they left school.


Girls, on the other hand, were children until the day they married and even beyond. To this day, as I know from my own experience with the industry, mills employ only men, boys and "girls", girls being any female under sixty.

The main debate on factory children died away by 1912, resulting in no great changes in employment figures. A slight drop in numbers did occur 1912 to 1914, levelling off at around 5 per cent thereafter, but by 1925-26 when the first survey of the group was completed there were around 800 of which 10 per cent were in mills. Expressed as percentages of total children employed in factories this represents a rise of 6.8 per cent, despite adverse public opinion, and their presence in the work force continued to be felt as a sort of sore spot. Official sources like the state's Year Books continued to maintain brittle optimism on the subject: "The number of children under 16 years of age employed in factories has decreased considerably during the last four years..."[34] and "A very favourable feature of factory statistics has been the small proportion of children, especially girls, engaged in factories".[35] or, "A favourable feature of factory statistics has been the small proportion of children engaged in factories".[36]

(iii) Family, Gender and the Factory

Apart from their tender years, the real problem with these young mill girls was one they shared with their older workmates: they were female, and potential mothers. It was the reproductive and familial roles of working women that most disturbed their middle-class critics.

[34] Victorian Year Book 1912-13, p.757.


During his second reading of what was to become the Factories and Shops Act of 1911 and in the middle of that same debate on the licensing of 14 year olds, Mr Murray came to the innovative clause 19. This provision, another response to the rush of females into the factories, specifically forbade females under 18 years to lift weights of over 25 lbs. at work. Despite conspicuous lack of sympathy from the agricultural members, Murray’s party carried the day. Girls who were "compelled to enter factories" had to be protected, for "These girls are growing into the mothers of the future."[37]

Middle class opposition was based on real fears for the future of the family and even of the race in Australia. According to the findings of Beverley Kingston, Ann Summers[38] and E Ryan and A Conlon,[39] in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century Victoria and New South Wales recorded a marked drop in the birthrate, the most rapid anywhere in the world at this time. Unaccompanied by any fall in marriages the decline was seen to be the result of women using birth control to attain a manageable, small family of only three children. Faced with these unsettling innovations, middle-class commentators moved to protect what was seen as the future of both society and the race. In Victoria, the responses included Factories and Shops legislation regulating hours and conditions for women and children, the introduction of the first wages board in 1896, and the combatting of sweating by imposing minimum wages for workers in the clothing industry.[40] At about the same time, legislation setting up slum kindergartens for workers’ children and prohibiting the sale of alcohol and tobacco to juveniles was passed.


[40] Ryan & Conlon: 1975: 39
Public emphasis on the importance of mothers being full-time child raisers was underscored by two important court decisions which established fathers as sole legal supporters of the family. The Harvester decision of 1907 was formulated by Justice Henry Bournes Higgins around the archetype of the unskilled labourer, his non-paid wife and their three children living in frugal comfort on wages earned by the man alone. Higgins expanded on this theme in the subsequent Mildura Fruit Pickers Case of 1912. A woman had no legal responsibility to maintain her family as had a man, so the wage to which she was entitled could only be that which would allow a single woman to find her own food, shelter and clothing. Only where the lack of a separate male rate would tend to force men from available jobs would women get equal pay for equal work.\textsuperscript{41}

The war had little effect on the pro-family, anti-female work campaign, and social emphasis on the importance of the home continued to grow. By 1921 more women were housewives than at any earlier time this century, and housewives' groups like the Country Women's and Housewives Associations proliferated and became powerful. The Australian marriage rate jumped sharply from 1921 to 1928 and women married younger,\textsuperscript{42} but they continued to have only small families and in Victoria 30 per cent of the industrial work force obdurately remained female.\textsuperscript{43}

Specific objections to working women were often the same as for the younger girls. For example, it was claimed that they threatened the jobs of men with families to support. Nevertheless, middle-class

\textsuperscript{41} Summers, 1975. p.338.


\textsuperscript{43} See appendix 9b.
critics most feared that factory work would damage both women worker's reproductive capacities and the nuclear family unit upon which society was based. It could even lead to the eradication of civilization as they knew it. For without the mothers, who would bear and raise the next generation? Who would populate Australia's vast empty spaces? The application of Lamarck's theory of transmission of acquired desirable characteristics provided a possible solution. The threatened but superior British stock could be saved by improving the working and living conditions of its underprivileged groups. By protecting the mothers of the next generation, infant mortality could be reduced and the future of society assured. For successful production of healthy children the woman had herself to be healthy, and factory conditions were thought to present a threat of major proportions to health, directly through shop floor conditions and indirectly through the promiscuity popularly thought to be endemic amongst factory girls. Despite repeated attempts to prove medically that promiscuity and venereal disease were common among factory girls, it did not seem to be the case that they were any different to their sisters at home.

The alleged dangers to the race were summarized in the report of the 1910 N.S.W. Royal Commission on Female and Juvenile Labour in Factories and Shops, designated by Kingston as "the high water mark of masculine liberal concern with the true and natural role of women in Australian society." Commissioner A.B. Piddington and his panel of eminent medical witnesses claimed that factory work for married (that is, sexually active) women had six drawbacks; it encouraged


contraception, risked miscarriage, caused the neglect of the home and idleness and extravagance in men, induced infant mortality because it discouraged breast feeding and finally "the influence of married women with the unmarried girls is often far from good." Uncomprehending of the attractions of pay packets, independence and social life, the commissioner could see no reason why any female would voluntarily desert the comforts of home for the noise and dirt of a factory.

In this pre-war period, intense cross-pulls of opposing opinion can be observed at work. On the credit side, manufacturing industry was booming for the first time in about fifteen years, wages and productivity were increasing, job creation expanding. On the debit side lay the declining birthrate, the shortage of servants and the possible threat to the future of the race caused by occupationally-based ill health of working mothers and children. Politicians had the difficult task of reconciling the need to support a viable manufacturing sector increasingly dependent on cheaper labour, with the almost universal belief that the place for women and girl children particularly was at home. The new work force was composed of people seen to be in need of protection from exploitation and dangerous working conditions, but who should not be encouraged to make a career in the factory. Young women had to work, but at what? They had to be paid, but how much? With a combination of improved work conditions and low wages, Parliament, wages boards and Arbitration Court struck the desired balance.

(iv) Implementing the Balance: Jobs and Wages.

Mill owners and managers, often the same people, had the

Carding—Excelsior Mills, Geelong.

Combining—Excelsior Mills, Geelong.

IA 22/7/1920. SLV.
responsibility of putting into place and enforcing the various laws and regulations governing the work and wages of their employees. More significantly, as representatives on the Wool Trade Wages Board they and their foremen, the usual representatives of the rank and file workers, were in charge of the actual mechanisms by which wages and jobs were defined and allocated for all the state’s mills. It will be recalled from chapter one that once the board’s members had achieved a minimal ability to work together, government had thankfully withdrawn from its operations and left it to regulate its own affairs unhindered. The board’s first determination was made in April 1902, before the publication of the statistics which first established the new female presence in the industry. Its provisions therefore described an existing state of affairs in the mills, both as to jobs done by females and wages paid to them. It stated that "boys or girls, other than apprentices or improvers, may be employed in the process, trade or business carried on in a woollen mill in the different departments as piecers, winders, tiers-in, drawers-in and finishing room boys." Additionally: "Boys or girls from the ages of thirteen to twenty-one years" could also be employed on carding machines or in the spinning department as winders or worsted spinners and as piecers and twisters.\footnote{Victorian Gazette 22/4/1902, p.1482.} Pay rates were for both sexes identical.

By 1913, the date of the third determination, the impact of the feminization and youth of the new workforce had changed the categories of juvenile work, enforcing a tendency to have boys replace girls in the more dangerous areas of processing. From now on boys would run the feeders on the burr crusher in the scour’s carbonizing area, and girls would be employed as comb and gill box minders in worsted combing and top making, as roving and drawing frame attendants in spinning, as
warper girls, and as burlers and darners in the mending department. With the 1927 Federal Award, a consent award composed by the industry rather than one imposed by judges, this process was completed. By the combination of the categories of girls and women, a new class of "female" was created with a prescribed range of occupations even more restrictive than before. "No females shall be employed on woollen or worsted carding machines, back washing machines, or self-acting spinning mules, but those who have been so employed for a period of not less than three months at the time of this award coming into force shall not be discharged solely because of the operation of this clause."50

The classes of work now open to females were:

(a) Mending and Darning Department; mending, darning, knotting, burling and purling.

(b) Winding, Warping and Weaving.

(c) Worsted Department; comb minding, twisting and drawing.

The award further prohibited females from lifting warp beams or drums.51

Unsurprisingly, there were no such restrictions on men. Thanks to the inclusion of an "all others" category in the official occupations lists, men had access to any of the jobs allotted to women, while the reverse did not apply. With the blessing of the government and the consent of his employer, the male mill hand could work at the job he liked as long as he liked as well as get paid 48 per cent more for it than the equivalent female rate.

By 1933 the disposition of the sexes by major occupations can be


Federal Mills Office Staff, C1918. WIMA.

Female Staff in Engineer’s Department, Foy and Gibson 1922. MUA.
summarized from the 1933 census figures for the Australian woollen textiles industry (See appendix 12) in these terms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mill hand</td>
<td>12.09</td>
<td>Mill hand</td>
<td>15.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>Weaver</td>
<td>9.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinist</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>Machinist</td>
<td>8.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>Warper/Winder</td>
<td>5.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wool sorter</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>Spinner (frame)</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinner (mule)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Darnner/Vender</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While no comparable tabulation is available in earlier censuses, the concentration of female skills into weaving, warping, frame spinning and mending is apparent, comprising 22.2 per cent of the total work force. The traditional male strongholds of woolsorting, fellmongery, engine driving and stoking, plus all the building and mechanical occupations remained intact.

Since the Award of 1927, women had been denied employment in carding and mule spinning, but they had moved into several new areas and this had not gone unnoticed, at least as far as pressing went. As early as 1925 the N.S.W. branch of the ATWU had called for the restriction of manual steam pressing work for females and juniors but to no avail; by 1933 there were 168 females operating presses.52 The best paying of the new jobs were in the mill office and work there was the best paid women's work anywhere in the country in 1929.53 Such was the female monopoly of this work in the late 1920's that no male typists or office machinists were recorded in the 1933 census. The photo of the engineering office at the "Gibsonia" mills opposite shows lady typist, book-keeper and clerk diligently at work in 1922.

These figures present us with a paradox. An increasingly young, increasingly female work force was being concentrated into fewer

occupations but at the same time apparently taking over in a number of formerly male occupations like pressing and clerical work. It seems probable that the relatively unskilled jobs of mill hand and the various categories of machine minder would be the most suited to the abilities of girls just out of school, and that the relatively low skilled pressing jobs would be the next step. The complete absence of women in any of the skilled, traditionally male jobs listed indicates that with the single exception of office work, females were moving into limited unskilled areas only. Office work, with its requirement for literacy and numeracy, would seem to be the only new opening for better educated, adult women in the mill in these three decades.

With the wisdom of hindsight, it is easy to condemn the undoubted tendency of act, determination and award to destroy the acquisition of skills and the development of career paths for females in the industry. However, the motivation of the men with power to dictate these working conditions is important and though expediency certainly headed their motives, the job restriction moves were well meant. They knew, as we will see in chapter six, just how dangerous a place the mill was to work in, and that most of its serious and fatal accidents occurred around the scour and carding departments. Boys, being raised as tool users and considered adult at fourteen, were presumed competent around dangerous machines. Young girls with no experience of machinery, and dressed in the pre-war years as became girls with frilly frocks, big bows and long hair were a positive liability around heavy equipment, so the move out of scouring and carding was commonsense. Given society's perception of girls as future wives and mothers, it was peculiarly dreadful that a scalping might ruin a girl's chances of marriage, or that the hand that rocked the cradle might be missing a finger.

In the wages of female mill hands, the restrictive action of
Menders at Foy and Gibson, 1922. MUA.

determination and award can again be seen. Females should not work and those that did should be protected from the factory environment and paid as little as possible to enhance the attractiveness of home. If this statement of middle-class attitudes is correct, and if we know, as we do, that it grew in strength from around 1909 to its peak in the 1920’s, it would be reasonable to expect a fall in the value of women’s wages over the 1900 to 1929 period, matching the restriction on types of occupation. Using wages rates set out in determinations and the weekly trade averages listed in factory inspectors’ reports, we can in fact demonstrate such a decline not only in the few jobs shared by both sexes, but also in the average weekly wages of females vis-à-vis both male and trade average rates as well.

In 1902 the jobs with the best wages and highest status were, in descending order, foreman, pattern weaver and loom tuner. In a few mills, female pattern weavers were employed and, in many more, female warpers, these being the highest status jobs for women. In the movements of these high status jobs relative to each other and set out in appendix 13, several points of interest emerge. Between 1902 and 1927, warping and mule spinning wages fell as those for pinsetting, loom tuning, comb minding and worsted mending rose, clearly a technological influence as the demand for worsted skills degraded the value of woollen capabilities. In the decline of the pattern weaver, and the widening gap between the wages paid for skilled jobs performed by both sexes like warping and basic male and female rates, we must look elsewhere for explanations. The listing also illustrates the growth in size of the industry after the war. Not only did jobs become greater in number, they also became more specialized. Loom tuners now specialized in repairing worsted looms, menders specialized in repairing finer, more difficult fabrics. Foremen became management and acquired assistants, and top

labourers become men-in-charge or head fellters.

Warping and pattern weaving were two of the few jobs in the mill which were open to both men and women. The warper had the exacting job of tying each of the hundreds of warp threads through a reed or comb onto the big warping cylinder and then winding onto the beam which would finally be placed in a loom. Each thread had to be placed in the correct sequence and spacing required by the design and construction of the end product, and it was tedious, painstaking and exacting work, hard on the back and fingers. Both men and women did this job and in the early years were paid a similar wage differing by 5/-, i.e. the female rate was only 16.7 per cent less than the male. By 1927 this difference had dramatically increased to 43/-, 48 per cent of the male rate. Over this same period the difference between female warper and weaver's rates had also narrowed: 3/6 in 1902 and 1/6 by 1927. What was happening here was that market demand for lightweight fabrics plus the introduction of new technology after 1913 were combining to put a premium on a new range of skills.\[55\]

1913 saw the last determination for the category of "Dandy Loom weavers", this loom being the principal unit in worsted production before the introduction of worsted power looms.\[56\] The determination of 1916 was the first to make provision for the new (to Australia) semi-automatic looms for twills and tweeds and to take into account the demand for lightweight woollens, particularly flannel in stripes and checks.\[57\] These more demanding fabrics commanded top piecework rates, plus a loading for extra colours (and thus shuttles) in excess of the usual four in a box loom. Warping too was undergoing changes. By the

\[55\] figures in appendix 13.

\[56\] Victorian Government Gazette 19/12/1913, p5487.

\[57\] Gazette 10/3/1916, p. 1173.
Pinsetters at Yarra Falls, 1921. YFL.

Spinning Frame Attendants at Foy and Gibson, 1922. MUA.
mid-1920's porcelain yarn guides on doubling and twisting machines were in use preventing many of the yarn breakages which plagued warping. Several ultra-modern warping creels in use also incorporated a new stop motion device whereby the electrically powered winding of yarn onto the warp cylinder was automatically halted when a broken thread was detected by the equipment. So looms got more complicated and warping a little less so and the rates drew together. The real difference was, however, rather greater than it appeared since warping was a flat rate and weaving a piece rate, and on the evidence of wages books and inspectors' reports it seems that most weavers habitually exceeded the base rate.

As a further result of the market demand for worsteds and lightweights, the status of worsted mechanics like pinsetters and worsted loom tuners increased as did that of those fellters able to maintain worsted cards. Mule spinning was mostly woolen system and much of the new lightweight worsted yarns were produced on automatic cap, ring and flyer frames tended by semi-skilled females. The decline in the mule spinner's status follows the lessening demand for his products. In the female section the same thing happened; worsted menders shot to the top of the list, surpassing woolen menders and weavers, and even the lowly occupation of worsted comb minder paid 3/- more than the basic female rate.\textsuperscript{[58]}

The decline of pattern weaving was abrupt, from second on the list in 1902 to complete disappearance after 1916's determination.\textsuperscript{[59]} Since the pattern weaver is still considered the most skilled weaver in the mill, the job itself had not gone from the industry so another explanation must be sought. Perhaps the answer lies less with the job than with the

\textsuperscript{58} app. 13.

\textsuperscript{59} Appendix 13.
identity of the weaver. In eighteenth-century England the journeyman weaver was, of course, a man, and into the next century handloom weaving continued to be a man’s job. Godfrey Hirst, for example, began his Australian career as a handloom weaver. With the advent of power looms the most skilled workmen became pattern weavers, working from sketch or sample to produce each year’s new designs and colourways in a form which could be adapted to mass production on power looms operated by females. In the determination of 1916, pattern weavers had slipped in status to third place behind foremen and loom tuners and thereafter seem to have been amalgamated with other weavers, though presumably at the top of the range. In the absence of concrete evidence one way or another, it seems feasible to speculate that with the pre-dominance of females in the industry from 1907 on, the old hand weavers were not replaced by male apprentices, and by default the pattern weaver became female and not a journeyman payable at journeyman’s rates. As was happening in the Victorian clothing and furniture trades, female predominance in a job devalued the skills required to do it.60

It was the proud boast of mill employers that their industry paid the highest minimum wages of any board trade.61 Comparison of male and female base wages in woollen mills is made difficult by the presence of both flat and piecework rates in the wage structure. Both weavers and some mule spinners worked under piece rates until the introduction of revised rates for weavers in 1916.62 Thereafter all spinners worked on


[61] Evidence of John Ashley before the Fair Profits Commission, May 1920. Transcript in loose papers Fair Profits box. BWW.

[62] The 1902 piece rate minimum for spinners was 4 1/2d per vartern of six skeins, 20 skeins standard. For power loom weavers the rate was 22/6 per week minimum. Determination of 1902, Victoria Gazette 22/4/1902, p.1482.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DETERMINATION</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
<th>MALE (shillings)</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>DIFFERENCE</th>
<th>% DIFFERENCE</th>
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<tr>
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<td>48</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>any other</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>22/6</td>
<td>29/6</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>any other</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>47.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>any other</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>1920</td>
<td>any other</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>basic wage</td>
<td>88/6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>42/6</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Determinations of years stated.
flat rates at about the same level as male warpers. Determinations and awards from 1913 to 1927 did provide an "any other" category of male and female wage and this does give scope for comparison as do the weekly averages we will also consider. In 1913 the difference between the male and female "any other" rate was 56.3 per cent, that is females earned 56.3 per cent of the wage earned by a man in this category. In 1927 females earned only 48 per cent of the male basic, a fall of 8.3 per cent over fourteen years.

A broader and therefore safer comparison may be made using the trade averages supplied yearly in the chief inspector's reports to parliament. The figures were aggregates of all rates of wages paid in the mills and included the take-home pay of adult, juvenile and learner, irrespective of whether it was earned by flat or piece rate. The table opposite shows that in 1901 - the year wool textiles became a board trade - women were earning 69.2 per cent of the male rate and 80.8 per cent of the trade average. By 1930 this had fallen to 52.2 per cent of the male rate and 73.5 per cent of the average wage, a drop of 17 per cent and 7.3 per cent respectively over the twenty-nine years. In only one year, 1906, did the average female wage equal the trade average and this year was also the occasion of the highest female vs. male rate in the industry, perhaps till the introduction of equal pay.

The beginning of the industry's first Federal arbitration hearing in 1926 and the award of the following year had settled the female basic wage at 52 per cent of the male (46/-) with limited margins for skill and experience.63 Male margins ran from nil to 16/-, female rates from nil to all of 3/-; it was little enough, but valuable compared with

<table>
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<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>FEMALE ------</th>
<th>MALE ------</th>
<th>TRADE AVG. ------</th>
<th>F AS % MALE</th>
<th>F AS % AVG</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ses.dd (=pence)</td>
<td>ses.dd (=pence)</td>
<td>ses.dd (=pence)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
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<td>1901</td>
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<td>1911</td>
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Source: Chief Inspector of Factories Annual Reports
other female awards such as that of the confectioners. Their 1928 award
had only one job classification and no margins at all for skill.\[64\] One
positive virtue for female mill workers was that the 1926 award seems to
have arrested a sharp decline in the average value of female rates from
1921 to 1925, when wages fell as low as 52.4 per cent of the male rate.
It should be noted that the apparent anomaly of the female weekly
averages always exceeding the set basic wage is the result of the
different composition of the averages used, the basic wage being the
minimum flat rate legally payable and the weekly rate including basic
wage, margins and piecework payments as well.

It would seem from the figures that the general trend of board
determinations from 1902-1927 was to lower the value of female wages
vis-à-vis male at a time when the average trade wage was rising
steadily in line with the general prosperity of the industry. Moreover,
in this as well as in several other industries employing females, this
tendency became most pronounced in the 1920s, the decade of the
housewife. In the evidence from wages as well as that from working
conditions and occupation, trends in the woollen mills follow the broad
outlines of the hypothesis of Summers and Kingston, though at an earlier
date. Within the scaffolding of the existing factories legislation, the
Wool Trade Wages Board responded to wider social trends by erecting an
increasingly structured edifice of working conditions, job definitions
and wages, designed to protect the new workers from physical duress
without encouraging them to stay long in the trade or aim at any other
career than eventual marriage and family. The increasingly specialized
and restrictive wage rates it devised kept female labour cheap while
market forces supplemented by new worsted technology assisted the
decline in the skills and wages of women warpers and weavers.

[64] Bennett, Laura. "Job Classification and Women Workers:
Institutional Practises, Technological Change and the Conciliation and
From the vantage point of the present, the period can be viewed as one of increasing infantilization of women. The limitations on long hours, night shift and dirty and dangerous work are one example, being applied equally to adult women and fourteen-year-old boys. Contemporary motives were less self-conscious. Working females were perceived to be at risk and like children, in need of paternal protection. Perhaps as a result of this process, welfare concern for the predominantly young and female work force of the mill grew at the same pace wages declined. We shall see, by the time the female basic wage had been set in 1926, conditions in the mill had never been better.
Mill manager's public reactions to the influx of female workers were enacted through the wages board in the two ways just described. Their private responses, made as heads of their own mills, took different forms. The manager had to weigh his duty as a businessman to make profits for his shareholders against his personal reactions as a respectable middle-class Victorian holding appropriate views on the place of women and his "familial" responsibilities to protect the daughters of the mill family. Of these three, profit was by far the most important consideration, being not only the principal rationale of mill operation but also the necessary condition upon which any other charitable and philanthropic activities of management were based. This relationship was one of the fundamental credos of the industry everywhere. Ballarat foreman David Wilson, who had 40 years experience in mills in both America and England, expressed it to the 1905 Royal Commission. "As a rule, employers - when they are prosperous - are willing to extend a helping hand to their employees. In my travels, I have learned that they have no desire to grasp all the profits."[1]

The mill which failed to make profits soon went out of business, but ever since the introduction of power spinning frames and looms into the factories, the young girls and women who operated them had become a leading component of such profit. Raw wool supplies were always the biggest item on any mill's accounts during these years, but wages came

second, and the majority of those wage earners were female and more cost-effective for the work they did than males could be, given the sex-based structuring of the wages system prevailing. More and more, as the industry expanded and the rush of females into the mill workforce continued, mill profitability came to depend on adequate supplies of female labour. Directly as a result of the influx, established ways of attracting and retaining employees changed dramatically.

Unskilled girls and boys, school leavers, were seldom in short supply in the mills. It took only a week or two to train a girl in the basics of running a rover or a twister, or to mind a comb, and the presence of friends or family members already at work in the mill media advertising for a place was rarely necessary. Mr. Max Wilson, presently a foreman at Classweave Industries, got his first job this way. His father was the local barber who cut the hair of Federal’s manager, and when his son’s schooling had finished, the father’s request for a job for his son was met with the next suitable vacancy.

Skilled help was something else entirely. For females "skilled" was usually synonymous with weaving. 1911, 1916 and the early 1920’s when demand was heavy, were periods of particularly severe shortages of skilled weavers. All technical skills were endemically short throughout 1900 to 1930. Few apprenticeships were given and no formal technical textile education was available, so most workers learned on the job, graduating to better paid jobs if they demonstrated tenacity and ability. Two weeks’ training was enough for most machine-minding jobs,

[2] Stawell Woollen Mills accounts for 1924 indicate that wool and cotton accounted for £40,200.0.0 of an annual total of £71,998.17.0. Wages were the next biggest item, running at £14,470.6.0. and coal followed at £2,097.18.0. Stawell Woollen Mills Ltd. Annual Expenses Estimates March 1924. Loose papers, Norwellen Textiles Papers.


but it took four months and more to train a useful weaver. Furthermore if a mill owner decided, as many did after the war, to expand into worsteds or knitting, skilled operatives had to be got in a hurry to set up, teach and work in the new venture. To keep up or expand production skilled workers were essential, and to get these locally they had to be trained. Ideally, that someone should be another mill manager, for learners had to be paid even when they were not producing and they had a nasty tendency to leave just when they began paying their way.

The manager in search of greater output or new skills had four options. He could "steal" trained staff from other mills, poaching talent wherever it could be found with offers of above-award payments. He could increase his own intake of trainees and work to keep suitable "improvers" past the time they became productive. He could keep on or encourage the employment of skilled but socially handicapped working women such as widows, supporting mothers and the physically disabled or aged. Finally, he could recruit the requisite skills from mills in Britain, either relying on the mill's English contacts to select suitable staff for five-year contracts in Australia, or visiting in person to select suitable mill workers for sponsorship under the Australian immigration program.

(i) "Theft."

For an industry which preferred short-term solutions, theft was definitely the preferred method of acquiring trained workers. Theft had the double advantages of being both quick and cheap. A discreet personal approach here, a small newspaper advertisement there, or simply a warm welcome for unexpected arrivals and the current difficulty was over. Or was it? As often happened with immigrant workers, new
arrivals could promote discord in the mill. Furthermore, while mill managers themselves practised theft assiduously, they regarded the practice with outrage and abhorrence when it was perpetrated on them by competitors and, as a group, felt strongly enough about it to evolve a code of conduct within the wool textiles association to govern the situation and regulate poaching.

The code had its beginnings in a perfectly moral acquisition of workers by Ballarat Woollen and Worsted. Ballarat had in 1906 purchased the plant of the defunct Australian Woollen Co. Ltd. of Footscray, and along with the looms had relocated a number of Footscray flannel weavers. By March 1907 these weavers were claiming in print that they were being underpaid. By May discontent had spread, the Age reporting that Ballarat was being charged under the Shops and Factories Act (s.15) with seven counts of non-compliance under the minimum age requirements. Carder girl Kate Carnell was reportedly receiving 1/- below the 11/- weekly rate and twister Flora Williams 3/- below the 12/- minimum. Ballarat pleaded guilty to these two counts on the understanding that the remaining five be withdrawn, and because of the mill's good record, the fine was a mere £2. Ballarat's management without ado then sacked the two troublemakers. Despite pleas by the Trades and Labour Council to the wages board the mill refused to reinstate them.

The whole matter was disturbing and touchy, and the AWMA general meeting had already tabled for consideration "the question of engaging hands required without unfairly treating members of the Association." The committee apparently believed that Footscray workers were the

natural property of the Melbourne mills rather than those in the country. Intervening drama with the wages board deferred the discussion till the meeting of June 11, 1907 when "Re hands changing from one mill to another" was deferred again, without explanation. The situation crystalized in July 1908 when Denniston of the Doveton mill abruptly resigned from the association "on account of other mfrs. [sic!] taking his discharged hands." 8 The association replied to this puzzling fit of pique by deciding that no rule prevented such action, but that mills were not to induce hands away except by open advertisement. Grainger of Ballarat was presumably the offender as the meeting directed him to dissuade Denniston from resigning. He later reported that "the girl said she had been away from the Doveton mill for six months" and the matter was smoothed over. 9

In November 1910 when Collins Bros. was threatened by strikers, the association added to the rules. No employer would take on any ex-Collins Bros. employees while the strike continued. 10 The motivating force behind all this employer solidarity, the need to protect one's own work force from the depredations of competitors, was to be tested most severely by the opening of the Commonwealth mills in Geelong in late 1915, for the advertised wages in most categories were well above the prevailing award and bonuses for experience were promised. 11 Applications were pouring in by July 1915. This fact, added to the large build-up of defence department orders and complicated by staff enlisting for service, caused the AWMA to protest to the department in August, demanding that the Commonwealth mill train its own hands instead

[8] Minutes 14/7/1908
of taking them from other mills, especially those working on defence contracts. The reply is not on record, but certainly Commonwealth took no notice.

The war came and went, leaving the mills weary but richer and without much change in the tight labour market. An allegedly unwitting breach of the association's rules on advertising by Godfrey Hirst's son Lewis caused Castlemaine's instant resignation in 1925. In November of that year Hirst had had the temerity to advertise for hands in the Castlemaine newspapers, for which breach he expressed regret, claiming to be unaware of the members' agreement. The committee ruled that in future members could advertise only in their local paper, plus the city dailies and on this promise Castlemaine returned to the fold.\(^\text{[12]}\) It was no coincidence that the two mills which felt strongest about "theft" - the two which resigned to underscore their protest - were small mills, and in the country, and with something of a history of labour unrest; mills with none of the economic and social advantages that larger mills and city mills could offer to prospective employees. In the Doveton and Collins Bros. cases another element of motive is visible, that of discipline. None of the mills questioned Ballarat's right to sack troublemakers, just as none queried Denniston's apparent vendetta against a girl away six months from his employ. All agreed that the Collins' strikers should be contained at the Union mill for the industry's good. This sort of co-operation suggests that the status of each "head of family" was a recognized concern of other mill "fathers" and that for this reason the bigger mills, and here even the offending Ballarat and Hirst mills, were prepared to curtail their activities (within reason) to permit the improved functioning of the smaller country mills.

\(^{[12]}\) Minutes of 10/11/1925 and 8/12/1925.
(ii) Training

As poaching became harder to get away with, managers were forced back into training their own staff. On-the-job training suited most semi-skilled mill jobs, but the high level skills of carding, mule spinning, finishing and weaving were traditionally taught through the apprenticeship system, a legal, contractual arrangement guaranteeing formal tuition and employment in return for three years service.

For a variety of reasons, apprenticeship had fallen into disfavour by 1900. It was, however, a powerful article of faith amongst mill owners and managers, and though the system was downgraded and largely supplanted by 1930 with a new system of substituting improvers for apprentices, it was never formally abolished. Indeed, the census of 1933 listed sixty-seven male and sixty-five female apprentices working in woollens and tweeds in Victoria.\textsuperscript{13} As we will see, there was by 1918 no separate rate for apprentices in the wool trade determination and the term seems to have been used as a synonym for learner or improver thereafter. Very few, if any, of 1933's female apprentices would have had legal indentures. "No general system of apprenticeship has been in force in the majority of Victorian factories for some years" said Harrison Ord in 1901.\textsuperscript{14} A glance at the forbidding terms of the standard apprenticeship contract in appendix 15 provides some idea of why this should be so.

Factory inspector Miss Thear had remarked in 1907 that apprenticeship was not availed of to any great extent for women.\textsuperscript{15} As

\textsuperscript{13} Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1933, Pp. 1293, 1315.
\textsuperscript{14} Report 1900, VPP 1901 p.11.
\textsuperscript{15} Report 1907 VPP 1908,Vol.1 p.69.
Bulbeck reports, there were none to be found in the bedding industry and throughout the 1900–1930 time frame there appears only one report of a Victorian mill indenturing females. The sole case on record occurred at the old Doveton mill which in 1904 apprenticed three weavers, an action sufficiently unusual to merit mention in the factory reports for that year. 1904 was a year of acute skilled labour shortfall in the mills and Doveton had the added disadvantages of being old, small and in the country. Manager Denniston indentured the girls for three years, each at the approved rate of 12/6 per week, plus piece rates for production above this amount.

In theory, apprenticeships were available to both boys and girls in the carding, spinning and finishing departments, and also in the weaving shed. In practice the first wool trade pro forma indenture drawn up in 1911 was interpreted to mean that finishing was restricted to boys and weaving to girls, and after 1918 carding and male spinning too became all male occupations.

In 1900 most people learning trades were known as “improvers” or more simply as boys and girls and without the legal protection of an apprenticeship contract they had no guarantee that their low learners’ rate would entitle them to thoroughly be taught their chosen trade. In some industries, like dressmaking and millinery, “improvers” worked for years at semi-skilled assembly line jobs where no improvement in skills and pay was possible. Employers had no incentive to reward such “improvers” and employees even less to increase productivity. The first action of the new wages boards was usually to produce a determination changing the flat learners’ rate to a sliding scale rising with


[18] Victoria Gazette 1911, vol.1, p.2131. (See appendix 15 for text.)
experience. The Wool Trades Board's first determination set separate rates for apprentices and improvers, but did nothing to increase the number of legal apprenticeships. Until the determination of 1913 apprentices and improvers were paid the same top rate of 12/6, irrespective of sex, a rate of double or treble the ordinary workers' rate, but between 1913 and 1918, improvers were paid more than apprentices. In the following years to 1930 the rates were again combined, at the new, low level.

This active campaign to devalue apprenticeship had its origins in the legal and binding nature of the apprenticeship contract. The employer contracted with his apprentice to pay higher than usual wages, make sure that proper and sufficient instruction was available, not to move the apprentice around the mill to fill a sudden vacancy, or away from it if the location of the factory had to change. Since the contract was a legal instrument he could be brought up before the chief inspector or a local magistrate if the apprentice felt any of the covenants had been broken. The final indignity was that such contracts appeared to be unenforceable on the unruly apprentice. Inspectors reported many complaints about bound apprentices, particularly those in the clothing trade defaulting - "just when they were getting useful"\(^{19}\) - to go elsewhere for better wages. "Just as the employer is expecting to get some return his apprentice, though bound for three years and upwards, coolly goes off to another factory to work because she can get more wages."\(^{20}\)

Such base ingratitude was of course only common in the prevailing conditions of acute shortage of skilled labour - the only time when "she" could afford to throw her weight around. However, a principle was

\(^{19}\) Report 1907, VPP 1908, vol.1. p.4.

\(^{20}\) Report 1907, p.4.
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at stake and some employers sought legal redress. "Some effort was made to stop this trouble by taking action against an apprentice for breach of agreement, but it was found that though an apprentice can be compelled to complete her term of agreement, it is very unsatisfactory to have an employee working against her will. Therefore in the majority of cases the apprentice is allowed to depart."\[21\]

If the apprenticeship contract failed to guarantee to the employer the use of the skills for which he was paying, it is no wonder that he preferred to use improvers. They cost as much to pay and train, but there were no legal expenses involved and they were mobile within the mill and also between mills, as well as being easier to discipline.

Mill owners encouraged improvers at the expense of apprentices, doing so by paying the same wages to both until 1913, then increasing improvers' wages above the apprenticeship rates until 1918. It seems also to be the case that by instituting separate male and female categories within the improvers rates, the mill owners on the wages board set about deliberately encouraging the employment of cheaper female improvers after 1908. To meet the enormous demand for fabric during and immediately after the war, weavers had to be got and trained as fast as possible. Improvers had to be paid apprentice-level wages so, by creating a separate and lower female rate, more could be hired and trained. The process was speeded along by abolishing the separate improvers' rates for carder and spinner. After 1918 all male improvers and apprentices received the same base rate irrespective of occupation, as did all improver females, though at about 2/- a week less than the male rate. The determination of 1913 had lifted improvers' rates above apprentices, but it had also succeeded in putting the final nail in the coffin of female apprenticeship. It did this by definition.

\[21\] Report 1907, p. 4.
"Apprentice" was any person under twenty-one years bound by indenture. "Improver" was any person under twenty-one years and not an apprentice who did not receive other board wages or piecework rates. All females apprenticed from this date would start at 10/- a week, 2/6 below the old rate for both apprentice and improver, as well as 2/6 under the new rate for first year improvers. Furthermore, the yearly increment for the female apprentice was only 2/-, compared to 2/6 for males and all improvers. From this date no female, fifteen to twenty years, could afford to be apprenticed, even if the unlikely event occurred and she was offered an indenture.  

The determination of 1913 made universal the already common practice of training weaver girls on the job. Like the Ballarat mill, most mills permitted girls from other departments - knitting, mending and spinning especially - to leave their jobs for a few hours a day to learn weaving. Experienced weavers were paid a small bonus to teach one or two hopefuls, and the best of the candidates got the job when the next vacancy occurred. The position of these trainees became formalized six years later when 1919's determination defined trainee power loom weavers as "Learners" and stipulated they be paid piecework rates less 15 per cent for the first six months, and less 10 per cent for the rest of the year. The slow rate of apprenticeships had led to the Factories and Shops Act being amended in 1903 and consolidated in 1905 to allow unlimited numbers of apprentices to be taken on. Abuse by several employers who took on large numbers of children with no intention of teaching anything led to a further amendment in 1909, limiting numbers. (It was already on a 1 : 1 basis in the mills though it changed to 1 :  

[22] Determination in *Victoria Gazette* 19/12/1913, p.5488.  
3 by 1913). Authority seems to have flung up its hands at this point - it was all too hard - and it was not until 1924 that the Australian Textile Workers Union included a revision of the 1911 wool trades indentures in its log of claims for that year. The following year the Department of Labour and Industry began to collect information on apprenticeship with a view to research on proposed legislation and in 1927 the Apprenticeship Act came into force. The act established the Apprenticeship Commission to control the boys-only indenturing in the traditional trades of painting, plastering, plumbing, gas fitting and carpentry. Notwithstanding the AMWU's proposal, wool textiles sailed serenely on ignoring apprenticeship and making profits. The industry still remains outside the control of the Commission.

By 1919, employers had decided that their immediate requirements were for trained weavers and plenty of them, and that the best and simplest way to get them was to employ learners as improvers, not apprentices. Apprenticeship certainly had long-term benefits to the industry, but like technical education it was costly in the short-term and contained no guarantees that the person who paid for it would be the one to benefit from it. The economic sense of this decision was obvious to employers, but the matter of apprenticeships remained in the back of employer's collective consciousness, resurfacing from time to time to disturb their reflections.

(iii) Retention

In most Victorian industries between 1900 and 1930 a girl's projected work life was not expected to continue past marriage. In food industries like biscuit manufacture, being unmarried was in fact a

formal condition of employment, and turnover was high. In the mill a male wool sorter might work fifty years at his job, while a girl would only work the five or six years between school and marriage. Over the same time span ten female machine operators would need to be found and trained compared with one wool sorter. Where valuable skilled women like weavers and office staff were concerned, the problem was particularly knotty. It was well to the fore of Burdett Laycock’s considerations on the hiring of office staff for the “Laconia” mill in 1904. "Type writer," he headed his weekly letter to his Sydney partner. "Note that you are struggling along with your lad, if he has any adaptability at all he will soon get expert. The chief trouble with a boy is that he soon outgrows his billet & then it is a case of starting afresh. Personally I prefer a woman, who is also capable of doing other clerical work. & csicl one not too young. So there is not much fear of her getting married."[^27]

Marriage was similarly weighing on the mind of Aaron Hume, Ballarat’s interim manager in the difficult years of 1926 to 1929. At a gloomy half yearly meeting of mill shareholders, a suggestion came from the floor that “they might do as other mills had done and get weavers from England.” Hume replied morosely that not only would it take six months to get people from home, but that generally the girls would not stay long in towns like Ballarat and Geelong. Furthermore, he said, such girls only came out with the idea of getting married. Another shareholder, clearly a fellow pessimist, then stood to express his view that English weavers "might stand up to the bar like men" on their way


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONJUGAL CONDITION  of TEXTILE EMPLOYEES, 1911 and 1933.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women in Victorian Textiles, Fabrics and Dress. 1911 Census.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>widowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>divorced</td>
</tr>
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<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m,w,d=</td>
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<tr>
<td>never married</td>
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<tr>
<td>total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m,w,d=</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ballarat's board eventually went ahead with the idea despite these dangers, but in the meantime Hume's remarks attracted the attention of the industry's own journal, the Textile Journal of Australia. "Assume," wrote the editor of the May 15 edition, "that it be a fact that imported women weavers seek honourable marriage. Is that a crime? Are they any worse than or different from their sister women in Australia in that respect? Every employer of labour understands fully that when he arranges with a woman worker he accepts a risk so far as the permanency of her employment is concerned. And every reasonable hirer of girls is satisfied — even if he be not gratified — to say 'God speed' to each one that leaves his employment to take on the cares of wifehood."  

Most mill managers were family men, pillars of civic life, conservative and responsible members of society and few would have had serious antipathy to the girl's established and expected role of home and family. However, because they were also in business as employers of women, they had strong motives for encouraging the possessors of scarce skills to stay at work wherever possible. That they were in fact actively doing this by hiring and continuing to employ married women is suggested from several statistical sources, including the 1933 census. This shows that married, widowed and divorced women made up 11.6 per cent of the textile industry's national work force. In the clothing and dress categories, the biggest employers of females, the average was slighter lower at 11.2 per cent, but both surpassed the more general averages prevailing in other industries; 8.6 per cent for female

jewellers and 8.3 per cent for rubber and leather workers.\textsuperscript{31} 1933's textile figures included canvas and cordage employees, but if the five specifically woollen categories are separately totalled, the married, widowed and divorced proportion comes to a high 14.4 per cent. Important supportive evidence relating specifically to woollen mills is to be found in a most interesting survey of factory women's health, done in 1927. Dr. Marion Ireland of the Commonwealth Health Department and Dr. Kate McKay, Victoria's first female medical inspector surveyed the state's twelve major industries employing women, and visited four woollen mills. Here they interviewed a random sample of 246 women, 140 of whom were under twenty one. Of the total 246, a surprising 13.4 per cent were married and 3.3 per cent widowed, compared with the averages of the other industries surveyed at only 5.9 per cent and 2.8 per cent.\textsuperscript{32}

Judging from wages books entries, married women in the mills were concentrated in the weaving shed, the only place where female skills could grow over the years. It was not the very young girls of the spinning room who were married, but the older and more experienced weavers who fell within the 25.7 year mean age of brides in the 1920's.\textsuperscript{33} As McGovern and Cuthbertson had written in their book "There are not any higher positions than that of a weaver open to women in Woollen Mills, but a good living can always be obtained in this branch and a good weaver is a person of real value in a mill and can carry on her work if

\textsuperscript{31} This was a big jump from the earliest comparable figures, 5.5 per cent for all Victorian textiles, fabrics and dress categories in 1911. The 1921 census figures did not include comparable industry/sex/occupation tables.

\textsuperscript{32} Ireland, M. \textit{A Survey of Women in Industry, Victoria 1928}. Commonwealth of Australia Department of Health Service Publications. (Division of Industrial Hygiene). Number 19, Canberra 1928. See appendix 17 for a summary of findings.

\textsuperscript{33} Drysdale: 1984: 14.
she wishes it to a greater age than in almost any other trade."

Aged and infirm workers who could not work fast enough to earn the prevailing board minimum rate had been safeguarded in their jobs by a system of licensing, permission to work at an agreed lower rate being issued yearly by the chief inspector of factories. In 1900, the first year of operation of this clause, Harrison Ord had issued only sixty of these licences.\textsuperscript{35} It is unlikely that any of the sixty licences mentioned were mill hands, as the woollen trade board's first determination was not finalized until April 1902, but even after this date it does not appear that the wool textiles industry commonly used the licensing provisions for its handicapped employees. Although this is difficult to prove, some evidence at either end of the 1900-1930 period is available. In the Report of 1902\textsuperscript{36} inspector Duff wrote of the "very old" weavers employed at the Ballarat mill. Some of these men and women had worked at Sunnyside for thirty years, but management had not found it necessary to apply for licences because the slower workers were "carried" by fast weavers and the learners, a good example of mill family co-operation in these years.

By 1927 the AITWU seems to have assumed control of the licensing procedure, but it was still not a common occurrence. The permit issued to Ballarat's Mary Williams, a drawer with a "crippled hand", is the only one to be found in the company's files between 1916 and 1930.\textsuperscript{37} Foy and Gibson's worker compensation records provide more evidence on the employment of aged and infirm workers, illustrating the rarity of licensing as well as the retention of skilled females. After the

\textsuperscript{34} McGowan: 1913: 219.

\textsuperscript{35} Report 1901, VPP. 1902, vol.3.

\textsuperscript{36} Report 1902, VPP. 1903.

\textsuperscript{37} Permit dated 27/9/1927, Letter book 14/1/1927- 21/1/1928. BNM.
Workers Compensation Act of 1915, it became customary for high risk employees to enter into a contract limiting the maximum rate of compensation payable in case of accident. In these cases the regulations required the worker to obtain a medical certificate stating that age or disability rendered him specially liable to accident and injury.\(^{38}\) Insuring companies required a yearly statement of employees in this category and the Gibsonia returns to insurer Colonial Mutual for 1927 to 1929 have survived.\(^{39}\) In 1927 the Gibsonia woollen mills employed 425 people, seventeen of whom were listed as old or infirm. The worsted spinning mills employed a further 296 of whom only six were categorized. With few exceptions most were aged, between sixty and sixty-eight, and there were very few invalids. The records do not state if licences had been sought for any of the twenty-three, but in all but one case the wages paid suggest that licensing for these people would not be necessary.

The male basic wage handed down in June and September 1927 was 88/6 a week with additional margins for skill, responsibility or long service. The female rate was 46/- plus margins. The seventeen "special cases" listed for the woollen mills this year were all, with one possible exception, paid at least the legal minimum and nine of them were on above-award wages. The exception was sixty-one years old labourer John McKay who was listed as receiving 88/4 weekly, but perhaps this was a misprint. Twopence a week seems too little for which to bother about licence formalities. In the spinning mill, five of the six men listed were aged wool sorters, the mill aristocracy receiving 106/- a week, and only one handicapped. Edward French must have been licensed, as he was paid only 70/- a week and he was the youngest person on the

\(^{38}\) Worker's Compensation Act 1915, Second Schedule (1).

\(^{39}\) "Staff Records and Workers’ Compensation" box, Foy and Gibson Papers, MIA.
list. He was thirty-one years old and paralyzed in both legs, yet somehow earned his living as a mill labourer. In the woollen mill list six of the seventeen were women and all earned above their awards. Two weft winders, two darners and charlady Mrs. Olsen were aged over sixty, and Alice Hayward, a weaver of 46 years was listed as infirm. She suffered from thrombosis, a bad disability in a weaver, but was still earning 7/6 weekly above the weavers award rates.

In "keeping on" the married women, the widows and the aged women with valued skills, the managers put industry pragmatism before the accepted public wisdom on working women. They seem to have done it again in the matter of unemployment, although there are important qualifications to be made. Unemployment in the mills was low throughout 1900-1927, as would be expected in such a successful industry. By 1927 when the production downturn that heralded the depression first began, the structure of Victoria's wool textiles work force had been comparatively stable for some years as regards age groups and sex.\[40\] Upon this stable structure the depression imposed the stresses of retrenchment. Ranges were pruned, wages cut by 10 per cent, work time rationed and employees laid off as mills battled to stay afloat. For the first time in thirty years the mills had more than enough applicants for skilled jobs, and in the management decisions on who would be laid off and who would keep their job or fill the rare vacancy, we can find useful indications of the value of each of the groups of employees to management.

Beyond annual comments on the shortage of skilled mill labour made by the chief inspector of factories, official estimates of unemployment in the mills were not available between 1902 and 1921. Expressed as percentages of employed workers, Victoria's unemployed mill people

[40] See appendix 18 (a).
constituted 1.9 per cent in the census of 1901 and 3.4 per cent in 1921. 1933’s census covered the industry at a national level with 22.2 per cent unemployed. Figures for all three censuses appear in appendix 18(a).

Males, though a minority of employees in the mills, contributed disproportionately to the unemployed totals. As percentages of total Australian mill workforce (employed and unemployed) in 1933, unemployed people comprised 18 per cent, men being 10.1 and women 8.0 per cent. Put another way, as a proportion of total men in the mill workforce, 22.7 per cent of all mill men lost their jobs compared with 14.5 per cent of mill girls.\textsuperscript{41}

The age of the unemployed is also significant. Perhaps the majority of unemployed were past fifty-five and persuaded into early retirement? The available figures, for 1933 only, do not support such a conclusion. Unemployment was highest in the largest age group of fifteen to nineteen years - 4.3 per cent of the total workforce being in this category, and 2.6 per cent of this proportion were females. Male unemployment predominated in the second largest group twenty to twenty-four years, and amounted to 2.1 per cent.\textsuperscript{42} In broad terms, unemployment followed the basic age structure of the industry with the greatest number of jobless being aged fifteen to twenty-four years, but there was more to the phenomenon of male unemployment than simple numerical weight.

To the mill manager, scanning his wages books with an eye to reducing the payroll, it was obvious that the highest wages were going to indispensable skilled staff, the experienced sorters, mechanics and foremen. Numerically few and usually of the middle or senior years

\textsuperscript{41} Appendix 18 (a).

\textsuperscript{42} Appendix 18 (b).
commensurate with experience, the mill could not function without them, so savings had to be made elsewhere. Not amongst the very young, for these were cheap enough for the simple work they did - between 18/- and 32/- weekly\(^{43}\) - but from nineteen to twenty-one the rate jumped to 60/- and from twenty-one years on, experience or no, the award was 88/6 plus margins. The managers' criteria therefore became men who had not acquired essential skills but who were in receipt of comparatively high wages and in the 17.6 per cent of mill employees who were mill hands and labourers aged between nineteen and twenty-four, he found them. Commenting on the results of this anomaly, a member of Federal Mill's finance committee wrote in 1927: "The work is without prospect for juvenile males. The general practice is to discharge a youth at twenty-one years of age, when he has to start again as an unskilled worker."\(^{44}\)

Similar though not identical reasoning dictated the female unemployment pattern with the bulk of the unemployed being in the fifteen to nineteen and twenty to twenty-four age groups. Reflecting the lack of any career path past weaver, the percentage of women employed fell abruptly after 19 to 24 compared with the equivalent male figures, and there were few old, expensive crafts people among them. As with the males, mill hand was the biggest employment category, 15.6 per cent of females being so employed, but unlike males, female labour was a very good bargain indeed. A fifteen-year old girl started at 16/- and by twenty could rise to 35/- weekly. The basic wage for twenty-one years and over was 46/-, a little over half the male rate.

\(^{43}\) Award 91 of 1927, C.A.R., XXVIII, p.585. This case extended Award 80 to five more mills including Gaunt's, North Western, Gippsland and cotton spinner and weaver Airedale Weaving Mills of Footscray.

\(^{44}\) Federal Woollen Mill finance committee. Notes on Employees Welfare Schemes 1927. CMH. See also 1927 Ballarat reference for William Cox, dismissed from the carding department because of his turning 21. BMW.
Economic motives certainly prevailed in the selection of essential and non-essential employees. Yet the manager’s position of head of the mill family dictated that responsibilities to faithful service, coupled with need, be met where possible. The plight of the unemployed labourer with dependants was, like that of the supporting mother, particularly severe. Judging from the 1933 figures, mill managers recognized the problem: 79.2 per cent of the total unemployed were unmarried, but only 3.3 per cent of these were married women. Since we know that the industry average of employed married women in 1933 was 11.6 per cent, the figure of 3.3 per cent is abnormally small, and when expressed as a proportion of the total Australian mill work force, unemployed married females became a vanishingly small 0.7 per cent.\(^4\)5

The extent of this discrepancy indicates positive discrimination at work in support of workers with dependants, particularly female breadwinners. Separate figures for mills are not available, but census data for textiles, dress and fibrous materials for 1901, 1911 and 1921 (set out in appendix 19) indicates that about 23 per cent of women in these industries were their families’ sole breadwinners. The woman who returned to the mill after marriage was likely to be a supporting mother or a widow with children to provide for and much more in need of an income than the younger unmarried girl or boy still living at home. In hard times managers sacked the young before the old and the more expensive males before the females, but it seems reasonable to conclude that they also made a special effort to keep on married women in preference to unmarried. Viewed in this light, they seem to have executed their economic and social obligations with an apt balance of efficiency and concern, keeping the mill afloat while retaining the traditional obligations to their mill dependants.

\(^{45}\) See appendix 18(b) for age and conjugal condition figures.
(iv) Importing.

For some mills, the chronic shortage of skilled employees was met by sourcing the desired workers from Britain. Not all managers chose to do this and not all categories of mill worker were economic to import, but there is no doubt that English expertise made a considerable contribution to the industry in this, as in the last century. The principal exponent of the importance of being English has been Colin Forster through his important work on the mills in *Industrial Development in Australia 1920-1930*. Describing industry expansion in the 1920's Forster writes "the local system could not turn out quickly enough leading hands, foremen, managers, pattern designers, etc., and to obtain these the mills most often turned to the United Kingdom. The extent of this dependence . . . is difficult to estimate precisely but it appears to have been very great." He goes on to say that at least ten Australian mills "employed Englishmen in leading positions and they often brought out trained workers from England. The examples given illustrate the role of English labour; certainly Bradford experience was held in very high esteem and to have had this background was often necessary and even sufficient to obtain responsible positions in Australian mills."

Much of this is true, but important qualifications need to be made about the extent of the British factor, which varied considerably as to time and degree. For instance, no doubt exists about the overwhelming contribution of English and Scottish migrant talents in the first great surge of mill building in the colony during the 1870s. Englishmen like Edwin and Walter Gaunt, who managed Collins Bros. and Yarraville before


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MILL</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NUMBER and CATEGORY.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warrnambool</td>
<td>1910/11</td>
<td>3 foremen, 25 woollen weavers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1922?</td>
<td>worsted workers, unspecified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laycock</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>1 worsted foreman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stawell</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>25 woollen workers, incl. flannel weavers, finishers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>drawers, cutters and fettlers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>12 managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>1 manager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>1 manager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley Worsted</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>&quot;experts&quot;, unspecified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarra Falls</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>&quot;experts&quot;, incl. worsted menders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>&quot;several expert weavers and others&quot;; worsted operators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>worsted weavers, unspecified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballarat</td>
<td>1927/28</td>
<td>10 worsted weavers, 1 loom tuner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: company records.
opening the Alfred, Mr. Horsfield Leeds-trained engineer at the Victoria and the Albion, and Scots like Godfrey Hirst weaving for the Victoria then establishing the Excelsior, and Mr. Murray the carder turned consulting engineer at the Barwon and the Albion. Between 1900 and 1930 the proposition is less categorical; in fact it seems hardly to apply at all before 1920 and not generally thereafter. This is not to deny the continuing close links between Australian manufacturers and the British industry. Machines and specialty yarns continued to be sourced in the U.K. and mill owners continued to take ship "Home" every year to keep up with designs, colours, new technology and to compare wages and conditions. There was also, as we have seen, considerable large-scale English investment in Australian wool textiles in the 1920s as British mills sought to extricate themselves from the collapsing export economy of 1920-22.48

Before 1920 the only instances of Victorian mills actively recruiting British workers occurred at Warrnambool in 1910 and 1911 and at Laycocks in 1918. After 1920 there seem to have been about six others, mostly by those mills with U.K. investors anxious to ensure the success of new ventures. Lincoln spinning and knitting mills’ imports arrived in 1922, Yarra Falls and Valley’s British staff arrived in 1924. Victorian-owned mills with British-trained managers also looked to England for staff, mostly to set up new ventures or instal new technology. The new Stawell mills were managed in 1921 by Leeds man Henry Wormald,49 Warrnambool under John Bennett, another Yorkie, recruited a number of worsted weavers the following year, and Ballarat under Aaron Hume acquired a group of English weavers in 1928.

48 For the Scottish textile situation see MacIntyre, S. Little Moscow: Communism and Working Class Militancy in Interwar Britain, London 1980, pp.20 & 93.
49 Jobson, A. Australian Investment Digest, 1921. Sydney p.405.
To put the British influence into perspective it should be pointed out that by the mid-1920's there were eighteen mills spinning and weaving wool in Victoria and of these only eight seem to have recruited from overseas. As the table opposite shows, the actual number of workers and managers brought out was also not large, and as far as can be ascertained their range of occupations was rather more limited than Forster suggests. It would also be wrong to assume that all of them came to stay. Many managers worked on short-term contracts; Bennett of Warmambool began with a five-year contract and in the case of Lincoln, and possibly also Valley, a number of managers arrived under five-year terms, returning to England thereafter. With three exceptions Victorian-owned mills did not recruit staff overseas. Two of these, Warmambool and Stawell, were brand-new mills and all three were country mills with poor prospects of attracting trained staff locally or from the city. The first two indeed were in towns with no pool of textile-trained people to draw on, so it is no surprise to find their Yorkshire-born managers turning to the familiar Midlands for the skills they needed.

Workers recruited by Australian mills seem to have arrived here as sponsored, assisted immigrants. Victoria's assisted immigration policy had been revived in 1909 and was designed to attract people willing to work and live in the country. Suitable persons were assisted with the cost of third class passage on nominated ships, the government paying £10 of the £14 adult ticket and £5 of the £7 child's fare. Farmers and domestics were the first choice of selectors, but in 1912 the immigration policy was extended to include assistance to artisans and women factory workers. In this year 1,139 artisans, mostly married men with families, and 429 unmarried women workers arrived in Victoria, a
very small proportion of the 14,016 arrivals for the year.\textsuperscript{50}

Warmanbool was the first of the mills to recruit female workers overseas, and the only mill to do so before the war. Manager John Bennett left in December 1909 seeking both machinery and foremen to erect and run it. By early 1910 he had signed up John Fenton foreman finisher, Thomas Skirrow foreman spinner and Oliver Stansfield weaving foreman. The new mill’s chief carder, engineer, scourer and dyer were all locals.\textsuperscript{51} The mill officially opened in November 1910 and the next year Bennett went again to the U.K. to select twenty-five blanket and flannel weavers to begin production and teach local girls the job. Allowing some delay for organization and passage, these weavers may have been part of the 429 who arrived in 1912.

British investments in the big mills of the 1920’s - Yarra Falls, Lincoln and Valley - came in the form of managerial staff as well as capital. The best documented case is that of Lincoln Mills and its Bradford shareholder W.C. Gaunt. Justifiably concerned at the shaky progress of the firm, Gaunt sent over in 1922 twelve “experienced managers, mechanics and skilled workmen” from his own and related mills in Bradford.\textsuperscript{52} The most senior of these were J.W. Whitehurst director, J.A. Floyd "Management Supervisor", F. Hede "Managing Staff" and George Kettlewell, a wool merchant. The following year Gaunt sent R. Feather a

\textsuperscript{50} Subsequent numbers were much smaller; 19 artisans and no women in 1913. Account in British Association for the Advancement of Science, \textit{Handbook to Victoria}, Melbourne 1914, pp.95-101. For a detailed account of the operations of Australian immigration policy in the 1920’s, see Jupp, K.M. "Factors Affecting the Structure of the Australian Population with Special Reference to the Period 1921-33." M.A., ANU., 1958, p. 60-73.

\textsuperscript{51} "Warmanbool Textiles. Seventy-five Years of Progress". Typescript, Warmanbool Woollen Mills 1984. WZ.

Bradford auctioneer and textile engineer to report on efficiency and restructure the company and in July 1924 he sent J. Kellet, a spinning mill manager. Most seem to have been engaged on five-year contracts, but not all filled them: Whitehurst was sacked. Feather returned to England. Kettlewell and Kellet remained as settlers on the expiration of their contracts.53 Of the recruiting activities of the remaining 'British' mills in the state, little can be said. Yarra Fall's U.K. partner Saltair Ltd. provided "experts",54 and Forster cites Bradford as the origin of a "nucleus of experts"55 responsible for the erection of the Valley mill, but the absence of most of the Yarra Falls records and the loss of all of the Valley papers precludes further comment.

From the information available thus far it seems that the U.K. personnel sought were mostly either in managerial/supervisory categories or else they were weavers, and that the most common motivation for overseas recruitment was the beginning of a new enterprise - starting a new mill, or with U.K. capital vastly expanding the activities of an established business. It is interesting to note that amongst the skills apparently not widely sought after were mule spinning, drawing-in, pattern weaving and pinsetter, the skills which, given the swing to worsteds at the start of the 1920's, one would expect to be most in demand. This suggests that the requisite skills were already available in Victoria, though not necessarily in great supply, and that the much vaunted skills of the English migrant tradesmen were seen to be vital to the Victorian industry only by other Englishmen.

Judging from the limited amount of information available, there

[54] Yarra Falls Spinning Co.: 1921: np.
were between five and eight occasions during 1900 to 1930 when Victorian mills sought skilled female workers from Britain. Because managers tended to come from Yorkshire and because it was the epicentre of the British woollen trade, managers unable to obtain sufficient local girls to operate the new worsted combs and looms returned to familiar territory to recruit their requirements. Bradford contacts were further facilitated when the Australian mill was buying its new worsted machinery from one of the famous machine shops at Cleckheaton or Keighley, or where the Australian family had relatives in the trade, as did the Laycock family.

Laycock's short-lived venture into worsteds began with their application to the Directorate of Munitions for permission to import a small worsted plant in late 1918. The Laycock's Bradford cousins were co-ordinating not only the purchase of the plant but of the recruitment of an overlooker or foreman to run the new department. In May 1919, after considerable difficulty, a man was found who could do the difficult job and who would accept the comparatively low wage offered by Laycocks, Melbourne. Frederick Cresswell had one other advantage in his wife, who was a trained comb minder and despite having three children under ten agreed to operate one comb and train girls to run the two others in return for her passage.

Migrating to the ends of the earth was a big decision for anyone to make, perhaps especially so for untravelled factory people. When Stawell's twenty-five experts were finalized, the news made the front page in both the Yorkshire Evening Post and the Bradford Observer.

[56] Appendix 16 includes copies of the documents in this case.


"Leeds Workers for Mill in Australia" said the Yorkshire Evening Post headline. Travelling as a family seemed much safer than going alone, even though there were many adventurous single women in the group heading for Stawell just as there were amongst Ballarat's nominated migrants who landed in 1928. In April of this year, loom tuner Wilfred Oldroyd escorted to Ballarat a group consisting of his wife and daughter Miriam, Mrs. Jane Hargreaves and Florence, presumably her daughter, as well as Emily Holdroyd, Beatrice Eyre and Gertrude Brooke, all weavers.

As has been mentioned elsewhere, weavers were in chronic short supply in these years, but there seems to have been a certain reluctance amongst the established local mills to recruit overseas. Not before 1911 did a Victorian-owned mill publicly state its intention of recruiting English mill workers, and in the booming early 1920's the owners' association ignored scores of letters from English mill workers, male and female, anxious to work in Victoria's industry. Even the 1911 event was not entirely what it seemed. There was certainly a dire shortfall of weavers, and the AWMA wrote into its October minutes that "room could be found for fifty female weavers in the Woollen Mills in Victoria." The meeting decided that the fifty should be imported, but took no steps to organize this. Probably the decision was the result of March's wages board meeting which had handed down what mill owners regarded as outrageous wage hikes. One of the Geelong mill owners present (probably Godfrey Hirst) had leaped to his feet vowing to go to England for workers. "Sensation!" reported the Age.

With the wave of U.K. migration which followed the war, plus the skyrocketing demand until 1926/1927, it might be expected that the Victorian-owned mills would take advantage of the scheme. Certainly

[59] Minutes 10/10/1911.

they were presented with every opportunity to do so, for the Chamber of Manufacturers became a clearing house for enquiries from British workers seeking information on Australian job prospects. A preliminary enquiry from the chamber was met by the association's oblique response that there were always a few openings for skilled workers under wages board conditions.\textsuperscript{61} Offers came thick and fast after this. The Bureau of Commerce and Industry wrote offering "textile specialists" as immigrants from the U.K. "No openings" said the members.\textsuperscript{62} Other letters came direct from the prospective immigrants, with dozens of enquiries in the last quarter of 1921. Like all the other correspondence it was tabled, then ignored. The labour market continued to contract, and the association notified the chamber that the mills could absorb another one hundred weavers and twenty menders.\textsuperscript{63} The Italian Consul contacted the association over job prospects for Italian woollen mill workers and received a short note requesting further details. The enquiry was not pursued, nor was any more attention paid to another spate of U.K. enquiries in July 1923.

Overseas enquiries fell away after 1923 when U.K. conditions began to improve and local ones decline. The apparent disinterest of the Australian-owned mills in directly sponsoring or otherwise finding the immigrants who could have filled the gaps is, however, interesting. Was it the cost? Lincoln's expenses for its British managers had been high - passage, salaries and accommodation for each. In the case of director Whitehurst these last two items had come to £1,250 p.a. plus £8,000 for a house, and the bills for Floyd and Hede not far behind.\textsuperscript{64} It may simply have been counterproductive to pay comparatively high

\textsuperscript{[61]} AMMA Minutes 9/9/1919.

\textsuperscript{[62]} AMMA Minutes 12/10/1920.

\textsuperscript{[63]} AMMA Minutes 13/5/22.

\textsuperscript{[64]} Sheridan: 1977: 9.
amounts for tradespeople particularly, even good weavers being limited in their productive capacities by the limits of output of their machines and prevailing wages, board hours and conditions. There was in addition a case to be made for simply waiting for mill workers migrating as land settlers to tire of the country and return to the city and their old trades. At Ballarat in 1927 Arthur Senior wrote in response to an advertisement in the Argus for a loom tuner. He was, he said, an English trained Hattersley weaver.

My present age is 21, but I have not been in mills since I came to Australia just over a year ago, but I left the textile work to come to Australia farming & now my time with the Government is up & I can go back to my trade which I started when I left school.  

The real reason lay in an unspoken but pervasive bias against outsiders which ran through all the local industry’s transactions. Ballarat’s Charles Grainger, an Englishman himself, had begun his mill career in England at the age of ten and therefore had claims to informed opinion on the industry. He told 1905’s Royal Commissioners that although Australian hands showed less perserverence than the English they were more skilled and quicker to learn. Tasmanian mill owner Robert Hogarth concurred; "if we get a youth into our own mills and train him he will be worth two English men...A man at home is like a machine...and employed to do only one thing. In Australia they get more play for their brains. I dont like imported men".  

When industry expansion forced the industry to seek not only managers but weavers overseas, this earlier bias against imported men was extended by the undeniable fact that those mills which acquired

[65] Senior to manager, letter of 26/6/1927, BMW. Sherinton offers a useful example of this trend, citing the 1925 complaints by the Victorian branch of the Electrical Trades Union of the constant stream of electrician "farmers" arriving from overseas under the immigration scheme and landing on the already overstocked labour market. See Sherinton, G. Australia's Immigrants, 1788-1978 Allen and Unwin, Sydney 1982, p. 108.

[66] Royal Commission on Customs 1905, p. 1284, 1426.
British management or a body of English weavers often experienced disruptions as a result. Forster cites cases of British mismanagement at the New South Wales and Goulburn mills in 1927. In Victoria, the high-priced managerial team at Lincoln also continued to misread the market in 1923 and by failing to anticipate the flood of imports - from Britain - succeeded in bringing the firm to its knees. The inventive factory fire which followed soon after seems to have been their final miscalculation and although the insurance money saved the firm and allowed replacement of obsolescent plant, the same re-organization could have been achieved by following the same procedures used after the fire, sales of surplus land for example without the loss of market share the year-long reconstruction process occasioned.

Those mills which possessed a body of British weavers also tended to experience difficulties. The biggest factor in local antagonism to English weavers was simply that they were so fast and accurate at their work. The weaver who began at ten and worked for the next ten years on two or more worsted looms under the 56-hour week prevailing in Yorkshire’s mills had no real need for extraordinary talent to out-produce (and therefore out-earn) Australian girls starting at fifteen under a 48-hour week and working under a far less demanding management style. Mrs. May Hansford who began work at the Alfred in 1913 at fifteen remembered many English weavers employed there over the years and said that they were not liked by the Australian girls because they were “too good”. She also recalled a sign outside Laycock’s during the depression advertising for weavers: “No Australian weavers need apply.” The long-running Warrnambool weavers dispute of 1927, ostensibly a tangled conflict involving victimization of certain girls by the weaving


shed foreman was stated by Mr. Lark, the AIWU representative, to be actually about favouritism towards English labour at the expense of local. At a Warrnambool public meeting on March 25, 1927 Lark said "The strike really arose out of the question of favouritism to English weavers. We have been everlastingly receiving complaints from local people that they were not considered while there are applicants from overseas." 70

The extent of local resentment towards favoured British migrants can be judged by the established weavers’ reaction to the arrival of the English weavers at Ballarat early in 1928. Weavers Miss Duggan and Miss Rutherford reported to the Ballarat branch of the AIWU:

that the English weavers who had recently arrived at Sunnyside were being paid £2.10.0. per week whereas they earned it or not and that the local weavers were very hostile to think that the management had slighted them by not putting the flat rate in operation throughout the weaving room. 71

Whatever else, the new arrivals evidently became good unionists, for four months later the AIWU was briefing a solicitor on their behalf to prosecute the Sunnyside management for "back money owing" even though there was felt to be a slight possibility that the union could lose the case. 72

As businessmen, managers could not operate their mills profitably without adequate supplies of weavers. If these had to come from England, skills would be guaranteed but not necessarily the harmony of the workplace, and this, more than the cost of the exercise explains the reluctance of the local mills to import weavers. It is the contention of part three of this investigation that the locally-owned mill run by a

[70] AIWU Papers Box 11/17-27, item 11/23, MUA.
[71] Meeting of 3/4/1928, AIWU. Papers, Box 1/1-10, Minutes Ballarat Branch AIWU. 1926-1930. MUA.
social arrangement I have called the mill family, and in the Ballarat mill under John Ashley and Returned Soldiers under Albert Schofield particularly, harmony and co-operation between everyone in the mill was held to be essential. The managers and owners on the early wages board had time and again rejected employees' nominees who were either not employed in or who had recently left mill work. Ballarat had had a taste of the disruption which seemed always to accompany blocs of new faces when it had taken over the Footscray flannel weavers in 1906. The local weavers at Warrnambool in 1927 and Ballarat in 1928 felt out-performed and under-valued, and when they rejected the newcomers, production fell immediately and everyone in the mill suffered. Good managers knew their industry did not like outsiders, even if the intruders came from other mills in the same business. Harmony meant profit, and profit maintained the mill family. If the mill was a family, it was tightly nuclear in attitude rather than open and receptively extended.
CHAPTER 6

DARK AND SATANIC: WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE MILL

The continuing efforts of managers to gain and retain female workers had by 1930 moved away from theft and apprenticeship toward on-the-job training and retention of married or handicapped women with skills. Overseas sourcing of female skills was comparatively rare and the numbers acquired small. Increasingly it would be internal solutions enhancing working conditions and social life at work which managers would seek in their attempts to keep up female labour supplies and therefore profits.

Managers took pride in the fact that they paid the highest of all board minimum rates. They gave bonuses for special efforts, paid girls to learn on the job, and kept on skilled women who in other industries would have been "let go" on marriage. Yet it was inescapably the case that mill females were working in a heavy industry, in dirty, noisy and hazardous conditions; conditions that few men in 1900 had encountered outside of mines and foundries and far fewer women. Into these dark and satanic conditions poured the young females of 1902/3, more numerous than ever before and in most cases totally new to the work and conditions.

There is no doubt that in its worst form, the early 20th century woollen mill was an unlovely and dangerous place in which to work. Situated near its water supply it was subject to flooding and the humid atmosphere necessary for spinning made for dampness and chill in winter, and for steambath conditions in the heat of summer. Greasy wooden floors and piles of waste created fire hazards; almost every mill had a fire of
some magnitude in the first forty years of this century. The overhead shafting of the mills' power train ran endless leather belt drives one or two to a machine and these could catch and entangle unwary operatives. The machines themselves, jammed back to back in close ranks, were masses of moving and unprotected parts, capable of snatching and pulling on clothes or hands or hair.

Each department of the mill had its special perils: live steam, fire and boiling water in the engine room, caustic chemicals and greasy floors in the scour, the hooks and slashers of the opening machines like the willey, the barbed rollers of the mighty carding sets, lightning fast gearing and pulleys on gill boxes, combing machines and spinning frames, the ponderous moving carriages of the mules, dropped warp beams, flying shuttles ejected by automatic looms, the strong acids and bases of the dyehouse, and more live steam and boiling water in the finishing area. Humid air, poor lighting, the most primitive of toilets, bad ventilation, no place to eat or rest away from the machines, and no place to sit while tending them, fluff covering everything and above it all, the whole building jumping and shuddering with the roar of the looms.

(i) Disaster and Disease.

The potential for disease, disaster and physical injury inherent in such surroundings was considerable but not always what contemporaries perceived it to be. For example, in practice, the dangers did not include that greatest catastrophe of the steam age, the boiler explosion. Mill boilers and engines were among the largest and most powerful of their kind, only marine engines exceeding them, and their maintenance and efficient running was a matter of considerable pride with the mill's highly paid engineer and his grimy staff. There were in
Pencil Sketch; Barwon Floods of 1880. The Albion and Collins Bros. are in the Centre of the Drawing. GHRC.

Mill Boilers at the Albion Mills, 1906.
Melbourne Punch 15/2/1906. SLV.
fact no boiler explosions in Victoria’s mills during 1900–1930.¹

Neither did they include floods. The Barwon mills were the most flood prone, but the inundations of 1880 and 1909 and those which followed as late as the 1970s did little more harm than destruction of the stored wool, fuel and dyelogs habitually stacked on the river bank. Nor fires, at least as far as loss of life or injury to people went. Fires were the greatest scourge of mills for so flammable were the buildings and so deficient the fire fighting services, even of cities like Geelong, that once a fire took hold in a mill it was almost impossible to extinguish unless changing wind direction aided the fire fighters. Appendix 20 sets out in detail the circumstances favouring mill fires and the results of two of the biggest of them, Godfrey Hirst’s 1912 fire and that which gutted the Albion in 1916, but here we need to note simply that almost all mills in the period had fires, that these usually occurred on hot summer weekends when nobody was about, that no one was hurt by them, and that very few people even lost their jobs permanently because of them.

There was certainly some danger from disease. Traditionally there were two great killers associated with textile mills in both England and the United States. Wool sorters’ disease, the pulmonary form of anthrax, killed a number of British workers most years – ten in 1905 and three more in 1912.² Byssinosis, also called brown lung or cotton death, was a more gradual killer and was endemic to the cotton mills of the Midlands and New England. Spinners were particularly at risk, inhaling a constant stream of airborne fibre particles flung off frames, and ultimately developing bronchitis and emphysema as a result. These scourges seem not to have been a major problem in Australia, byssinosis

¹ See appendix 20 on disasters.

² Textile Mercury, Wool Year Book 1914, Manchester 1914, p.97.
perhaps because wool fly waste is less brittle and of larger particulate size than cotton, and anthrax because of the type and source of wool spun here. English mills imported large quantities of low grade and shoddy wools to keep down the cost of the industry’s basic export item, indigo serge. Most of this came in the grease from anthrax infested areas like Persia, Russia and the East Indies, so the wool sorters who unbaled it before scouring inevitably made first contact with any anthrax spores present. Australian mills, on the other hand, used better grades of locally grown merino and crossbred wools, produced in a predominantly anthrax-free country. Although it was a notifiable disease in Victoria and held top position in the list of recognized industrial diseases appended to the 1915 Workers Compensation Act, there seems to have been no recorded instances of anthrax in the mills during 1900-1930.¹

The gravest danger Victorian mill workers faced from disease was from tetanus. Although neither the Department of Labour nor the Board of Health reported on disease incidence by industry, death from tetanus was so dreadful that its occurrence was usually mentioned in factory inspectors’ reports. Typically, tetanus spores distributed in topsoil or in jute fibres entered the body of the victim through puncture wounds or deep lacerations, the oxygen-free environment ideally suited the anaerobic requirements of clostridium tetani. Incubation lasted between two days and two weeks, the shorter the time the more violent being the infection. Tetanus anti-toxin, though developed 1890-2, was not widely available until after the First World War, and an efficient vaccine not developed until 1930, so a victim’s chances of surviving a


[4] In the intercensal period 1911-1920 a total of 9 deaths from anthrax was recorded for Victoria and only 37 for all Australia. Census, 1921, p.2080.
severe infection were not good. Woollen mills provided near-perfect conditions for tetanus infection, being both dirty and equipped with power machinery, and the wonder is that only two Victorian mill workers seem to have died from this cause 1900-1929. In 1923 a mill proprietor, trying a card before the feeder had finished, had both his hands caught and mangled and died within days of tetanus. Four years later, a second fatality occurred when a man fell on the greasy floor of a wool scour and slipped into an open drain, scratching one leg and scalding the other. He died of tetanus in seven days.

With the rest of the state's population, mill workers took their chances with T.B. and the "enteric" diseases of the warmer months: typhoid, hepatitis and dysentery. Factory inspectors kept a watchful eye on sanitary conditions since the act required that the factory occupier keep the work area clean and free from effluvia arising from drains or privies. The act did not, however, impose a minimum number of privies or hand-basins, and further did not require the owner to maintain them beyond the avoidance of the above-mentioned "effluvia". Maintenance was, in fact, felt to be the responsibility of the facilities users, and inspectors in the 1901-07 period were somewhat critical of the lack of soap and water and the general state of the toilets. True, the factory toilet was not designed to encourage the patron to linger, but the inspectors felt certain minimum standards should be met. Most city factories had been sewered by 1906, but Geelong


[8] Factories and Shops Act 1890, s.19(1)

[9] Following the acts of 1919, 1920 and 1922, a minimum of one privy for every 20 workers of each sex, one urinal for every 40 men and one hand-basin for every 20 women was stipulated for unsewered areas.
and Ballarat relied on the open drain, the local river, and the night cart well into the 1920's. In 1925, 8,657 of Geelong's 9,200 buildings had been connected to the sewers, but Ballarat by July the same year had connected only one.\textsuperscript{10} This was less of a problem than might be imagined, for as inspector Powell observed, both cities were hilly.

Along with tetanus and enteric disease, a third class of disease existed in woollen mills, a group of occupational injuries rarely or recognized and described in this period. English mule spinners, for example, were found in 1926 to be at risk of developing what was termed mule spinner's cancer. As the \textit{Textile Journal} reported the syndrome: "The men lean over the bar of the mule to 'piece' broken threads, and their trousers become soiled with the lubricating oil. The combined irritant effects of the pressure and the oil have been, in a number of cases, the development of cancer of the scrotum. Ulcers and other skin infections may arise in processes concerned with spinning."\textsuperscript{11} Long-term, cumulative disabilities, including repetition injuries and hearing loss must also have been present, at least by inference. Dyestuffs containing lead salts were known to cause dermatitis in some men, but their cumulative and sensitizing effect was not known and dye chemicals were not recognized as they now are, as strong allergens. Injuries arising from rapid, repetitive movements of hands and forearms - tenosynovitis and craft palsies - are today known to occur in occupations like bootmaking, telegraphy and music, but they must also have been present in the mills, probably in warping. Such injuries are particularly common amongst both new starters and old hands learning new processes and would probably have been dismissed along with the bleeding fingers of the novice piece worker, as simply part of learning the job.

\textsuperscript{10} Victorian Year Book 1925-26, Melbourne 1926, p.243.

\textsuperscript{11} TJA 9/7/1926.
Hearing damage must have been a considerable hazard, judging from modern research in this field, but the first workers compensation payment for it does not seem to have been made until 1949. All mill machinery was noisy. Weaving was the noisiest department of all and weavers quickly learnt to lip-read as an aid to socializing while working. That the vast majority of mill girls do not seem to have been much affected by the appalling noise could only be because they were rarely exposed to it for more than the six or so years they worked before leaving to get married. Again, by inference, loom tuners and weaving shed foremen must have been the chief sufferers of hearing damage simply because of their customary thirty to fifty years employment in the job. In factories today health department regulations permit an 8-hour shift worker to be exposed to no more than 90 dB(A). Over this limit, the operative must be supplied with, and must wear, ear muffs. Weaving rates just below woodworking as a noise-ridden industry. The noise put out by a circular saw ranges from 101.2 to 106.7 dB(A). By comparison a modern blanket loom generates 99.9, a gilling unit 92 to 103.3, a comb 92.4 and a power loom 91.9 to 100.6. Bearing in mind the amount of noise suppression design embodied in modern wool processing machines, the output of pre-depression textile mills must have been, literally, deafening. Assuming an average exposure of 100 dB(A), current research would indicate that after twenty years, 90 percent of male workers would suffer a hearing loss, and that the


[13] When Dorothy Hewett was working in Hughes' Alexandra mills in Sydney in the late fifties, her description of the din in the roving department showed little had changed: "A little, snub-nosed girl with a thick body and eyes like brown pensies, came singing and swaying to herself through the rows of roving machines. Only her parted lips betrayed the song. The noise of the mill roared out of the summer like waves beating and thudding against the mind, drowning all subsidiary sounds with ruthless ease." Hewett, D. Bobbin Up, 1st ed. Melbourne 1959. This edition, Virego, London 1985, p. 85.

loss would have an average value of 10 per cent. For females 88 per cent of workers would be affected, with an average loss of 9 per cent. Beyond this point it becomes impossible to quantify typical damage to hearing during 1900–1930, although certainly it would be higher than modern estimates for the industry, and more prevalent in long serving men.

Diseases specific to women in mills were often sought but rarely found. British and American weavers' habit of "shuttle kissing", sucking the end of a broken thread through the eye of the shuttle, was implicated in the transmission of infectious diseases there, but in Australia mill girls seem to have been a healthy lot. Dr. Kate McKay, the state's first medical female factory inspector, was appointed in 1925 and commenced duty on October 1. Her duty statement was threefold:

1. to investigate the effects of industrial conditions in factories and shops on the health of female workers, and when necessary to suggest remedial measures;

2. when considered necessary to examine female applicants under fifteen years of age for permits to work in factories;

3. to furnish reports, when required to do so, and to recommend action necessary to secure the health and well-being of female workers.

Her first job was to examine the 800 young girls applying to work under licence. By December 1926 she was able to present the report of her findings. Unsurprisingly she found the common diseases of poor people were prevalent in these girls. The children examined were found to have "almost universal" dental defects; caries, pyorrhea and gingivitis. No treatment had been sought except where severe toothache had occurred, and McKay felt that such negligence could result in


rheumatoid arthritis, gastric disorders and "impaired industrial efficiency". She found numerous ocular defects, some "quite gross". Ten per cent of applicants were affected and, as in the case of those with oral conditions, issue of work permits was delayed until the sufferers had been treated at the Dental Hospital or the Eye and Ear Hospital. Physical defects were rarer, though round shoulders were commonplace and in several cases below standard children with no organic disease were granted permission to work "for economic reasons". In all, only three severely disabled girls of the 800 were refused permits to work on health grounds.17

A second survey, that co-ordinated by Dr. Marion Ireland and assisted by Kate McKay, has already been cited (as A Survey of Women In Industry, Victoria 1928) in connection with establishing the marital state of the mills' women. Ireland's findings, summarized in appendix 17, are equally informative of the general levels of health of females already working in mills and how they compared with those employed in other industries. Most mill girls stood to work, but they recorded below average levels of fatigue, "respiratory affectations", dysmenorrhoea, chilblains and headaches while reporting above average instances of cold extremities, presumably feet. These ailments are very minor ills compared with those suffered by men and it is clear that the girls short tenure at work and their overall youthful years protected them from the grave risks run by the long serving-skilled men, mule spinner and weaving shed foreman particularly. For the girls, occupational diseases, infectious or cumulative would not be a statistically significant risk. The real danger would come from another source, sudden, swift and shocking: from the giant machines themselves.

## ACCIDENTS IN VICTORIAN MILLS 1913-1927, TOTALS BY DEPARTMENT.

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Source: Chief Inspector of Factories annual Reports, 1913-1927.
ii) Accidents on Power Machinery.

Injuries from power machinery and the belt and shaft systems which powered them killed one or more mill workers most years and injured about thirty more. Woollen mills were by no means Victoria's worst industrial accident arenas in the post-war years, this dubious honour being accorded to the bootmaking, wood-working and engineering trades, in that order. They were, however, usually fourth on the list of sixty-odd trades annually surveyed by the factory inspectors, and in common with the big three were places where process work was carried out on heavy power machinery in a factory situation, usually by semi-skilled workers, a number of whom were young or new to the trade—all ingredients for trouble. The main Factories and Shops Act (1890) had provided for fencing of hoists, flywheels, steam engines, wheel races and every part of the mill gearing, and had further empowered inspectors to order fencing of any other part of the power machinery which looked dangerous.\(^{18}\) Clearly, whatever factors were contributing to this high accident rate, lack of legislative muscle was not one of them. Factory inspectors reporting of accidents from 1900 to 1912 did not consistently separate out accidents in woollen mills, but for the remaining years to 1927 inclusive, the annual reports gave a breakdown by industry and cause of all notifiable accidents.\(^{19}\)

The table opposite sets out Victorian mill accidents for 1913 to 1927, and in the arrangement of the figures by work area and sex of the victims, we can begin to isolate the dangerous areas and processes within the mill, and thereafter look for causes. On departmental

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\(^{18}\) Factory and Shops Act 1890, ss.39 and 40. Machinery was deemed to include any driving strap or band. (s.40 (b)).

\(^{19}\) Such accidents were those caused by steam or power machinery and occasioning death or absence from work for more than 48 hours. Factory and Shops Act 1890, s.44. After 1920 the act was amended to make all accidents notifiable.
### Traumatic Accidents in Victorian Mills, 1913–1927.

**a) By sex of Victim.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>BOYS</th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
<th>GIRLS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>152</strong></td>
<td><strong>67</strong></td>
<td><strong>137</strong></td>
<td><strong>69</strong></td>
<td><strong>425</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**b) As % of Total Mill Population.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>MILL POP.</th>
<th>%MEN</th>
<th>%BOYS</th>
<th>%WOMEN</th>
<th>%GIRLS</th>
<th>%TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>1790</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>1817</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>2063</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>2049</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>2072</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>2197</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>2864</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>3342</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>3756</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>4061</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>4914</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>5077</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>5283</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>6717</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>6752</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AVGERS</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.30</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.15</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.26</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.13</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.73</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chief Inspector of Factories annual Reports, 1913–1927.

* Note. In 1920 all industrial accidents, not merely the serious ones, were made notifiable.
totals, the spinning room recorded the most accidents (94), followed by weaving (92) and carding (72), then combing (42) and finishing (32). On individual machines, the loom led with 89 accidents, followed by carding machines (66), gill boxes (35), and winding equipment (35). The large total of 100 for all "Other" injuries included a high but unspecified number of accidents involving power transmission, shafting and belting.

Considered by sex in the next table, the figures point out that in about half the years, the number of men and boys injured equalled or exceeded the number of females. Over the full fifteen years an average of .85 per cent of employees annually were injured at work; 0.15 per cent boys, 0.26 per cent women and 0.13 per cent girls. Another feature of these figures is the high number of children hurt. Based on the overall industry employment, there was usually a 1:10 ratio of children employed to adults, but in the spinning department particularly, the place where most new starters would be working, this balance was not reflected in accidents recorded. On spinning and twisting frames, as well as self-acting mules, children constituted a majority of the casualties. In other departments the child accident ratio was closer to 1:3 than 1:10. Accident rates for boys were usually higher than for girls, though they fell slightly from 1921/22 onwards when girls employed consistently outnumbered boys. As well as the spinning room, carding and finishing processes were responsible for injuring boys, while girls were hurt principally on frames, gill boxes and looms. People were hurt where they worked, and the figures illustrate the division of labour in woollen mills by the 1920's; men in the more dangerous card and finishing rooms and operating mules in the spinning area. Women as gilling and spinning frame attendants and in the weaving room. Children concentrated in the spinning rooms but working in all these areas, running errands, sweeping up and working as improvers. The occupation dictated the injury.
Shuttle Guards on Looms at Foy and Gibson, 1922. MUA.

Pulley Belting on Noble Combs. Foy and Gibson 1922. MUA.
In many years over 60 per cent of the injuries were to hands and arms, and in every year these formed a majority. Foot and head injuries were less prevalent overall, but were endemic to mule spinning and weaving respectively. Machine gearing and belting and shafting were responsible for most of the hand injuries, and here women and children were found to be particularly at risk. The act specifically forbade major gears and shafts being left unguarded, but this was apparently loosely interpreted when safety on individual machines was being considered and few had emergency brakes or gear covers fitted before the war. Foot injuries were usual only in mule spinning, when the moving carriage of the self-acting mule in its drawing out or drafting motion occasionally caught the spinner or more commonly his boy piecer, whose job it was to scavenge waste from beneath the machine and join up loose threads as the ends broke.\textsuperscript{20} Injuries to the head were an occupational hazard of weaving. As well as being endangered by the exposed gearing of their power looms, weavers were at risk of being struck by flying shuttles, flung out at speed from faulty machines. Typically such a shuttle was 19" long, carved from solid persimmon wood and tipped at either end with blunt steel points. Weighting about two pounds, it was a deadly missile when shot out of a high speed loom. Wire mesh shuttle guards became usual after the war, and can be seen on the Foy and Gibson looms depicted opposite, but the danger was not totally avoided and this sort of peril was one of the causes cited for the Warmambool weaver's dispute of 1927.\textsuperscript{21}

Another type of head injury to females dominated accident reports of the pre-war period, and there was no doubt about the cause. A large

\textsuperscript{20} The practice of employing boys on mules was forbidden by s.43 of the Factories and Shops Act 1890, but seems to have continued in practice for some years.

\textsuperscript{21} AMRJ Papers 11/17- 27 item 11/23.
proportion of these accidents could be laid at the door of their owners’ crowning and unrestrained glory. Spinners and weavers with flowing hair or big floppy bows bending over their machines were caught and pulled into the gearing, with dreadful results. In 1904 a partial scalping in a woollen mill impelled the chief inspector to call for an amendment to the act which would compel women to put up their hair. No official action was taken and in 1907 another “frightful accident” caused by hair was reported and the proposed amendment again mooted. In 1909 three girls retrieving dropped bobbins were caught by revolving shafting under mill benches and dragged into their machines. Again in 1911 and 1912 similar accidents caused the chief inspector to call for regulation.

In the absence of compelling legislation, inspectors promoted safety by publicizing those mills where special efforts were made to protect staff. Thus of the Ballarat mill in 1903:

every precaution is taken by the manager and those in charge of the various departments throughout the mill to minimize the danger that might be caused by the large number of females working amongst the various classes of machinery, for strict supervision is kept, and it is a rare thing to see a girl with her hair hanging loose - for the instructions are to all to keep the hair tied up.22

Even so, close supervision of the tidy hair rule could not stop some girls letting it down before a quick get-away at lunchtime, and Ballarat was summoned by the local inspector in 1916 in exactly these circumstances. Finally in 1915 the act was amended to compel all women to cut, put up or confine their hair in a net (s.63), but as Lucy Wilson recalled even tidy hair was no protection from criminal negligence:

My first job was at the woollen mills at Geelong. I worked on them for seven years. Well he was a demon that boss there too! I used to work on the big ... comb ... I used to have long hair but I had it done up in a big bun at the back and I’m under the comb! tryin’ to pull the wool out and all of a sudden the machine went on. I yelled and crawled out backwards and the old boss, instead of lookin’ or waitin’, he just thought he’d catch me comin’ from out the toilets or somethin’. Instead of that I was


Guarding on Card Gearing, Foy and Gibson, 1922. MUA.
under ...csic] if my hair had got caught I'd have gone head first right through all this machinery. Oh, did we tell 'em off! I was shakin'! I couldn't work for a long while."^{33}

In clear contrast to the initiatives managers took to safeguard girls from the machines they ran, lay their apparent disinclination to worry about boys. One of the routine tasks of boys in 19th century woollen mills was to replace the slipped and worn leather drive belts running between the overhead power shafts and the machines. Because machines were not independently powered, the speed of the shafting could only be slowed not stopped once steam was up for the day and belts had to be replaced on moving shafts. The act of 1890 expressly forbade this practice to boys, \textsuperscript{24} but like the prohibition on employment of boys on miles it continued in many mills. In 1903 a lad at the Doveton mill was seriously injured attempting to put on a pulley belt, notwithstanding the speed being slowed "almost to stopping point." \textsuperscript{25} Discussing the recent advent of electricity as a motive force in industry, inspector Martin pointed out its virtues when used to power a separate motor for a machine: "this doing away with belting, so dangerous where young people are employed." Despite notices posted in the larger mills prohibiting anyone under twenty years from changing belts, the fatal affinity of belt and boy continued every year. In 1907 inspector Billingham called for guards on the bolts and set screws of transmission shafts and went on to say, "The principal invariably answers the order to guard projections of the kind named above! with 'nobody is allowed to go up there while the machinery is in motion', and even while the matter has been under discussion a youth has come up with a ladder and placed it against the shafting and gone up to put a belt on."\textsuperscript{26}


\textsuperscript{[24]} Factories and Shope Act 1890, s.43.

\textsuperscript{[25]} Report 1903, p.29. VPP 1904.

The causes of the majority of power machinery accidents in Victoria's woollen mills were fourfold, arising out of the factory environment and the nature of the work performed, of negligence by the employer, insufficiently guarded machinery and contributory negligence on the part of the employee. The factory environment was, and is, a potentially dangerous one, where the massive nature of the machinery and the by-products of its use - oil, steam, greasy water, heat and so on - left even the most careful operative at risk. Employers who put profit before commonsense, and who either deliberately evaded or were careless of the legal requirements of the act's safety provisions also caused their share of accidents, but these seem to have been the criminal exceptions. Most employers seem to have regarded injury to their people with concern, recording accidents in the company's minutes, as Castlemaine's secretary William Kerr did in 1914: "I also regret having to report an accident to a boy, Thos. Hayes, who had his left hand caught in a belt on one of the carding machines, which resulted in a fractured wrist." 27

Lack of safety guarding on shafts and gears was perceived by the inspectors to be the biggest cause of traumatic injury in factories. It was the major reform goal of the pre-war period. The power of inspectors to order guarding of dangerous machinery has already been mentioned, and the co-operation of employers was usually good enough to negate the need for an official prosecution compelling the work. There were however no guidelines set out for guarding the various machines and some of the local efforts left much to be desired. New, imported machinery was increasingly being landed already fitted with special

[27] Director's meeting, 17/7/1914 Castlemaine Woollen Co. Ltd Minutes, Sept. 1874 to Jan. 1932. MUA.
guards, but the bulk of Victorian plant was not new and plant in some of the older mills was as much as forty years old. The Department of Labour published the result of the inspectors work in June 1913 in a well-produced booklet summarizing the latest methods of safeguarding employees using power machinery. Lavishly illustrated with 157 photos of different safety rigs, the booklet set out and formalized the best in methods and equipment developed locally and overseas. Six years later, in 1919, the department followed up this work with the creation of the position of Inspector of Machinery whose job it was to enquire into the causes of all notifiable accidents and devise means of avoiding these.

Hand in hand with unsafe machinery went carelessness on the part of the employee, and the chief inspector’s reports mentioned it constantly. In 1912, for example, inspector Anderson wrote: "It is surprising to find how callous the operator becomes to the dangerous parts of his machine, also how strenuously he resists any attempt made to guard the dangerous parts." The greatest offenders in this regard again were teenagers between thirteen and sixteen years old, and inexperience, carelessness and inattention were thought by inspectors to be the chief causes of their injuries. A Ballarat girl employed as a card feeder had three fingers crushed while trying to pull a bit of waste off a moving card drum. The card, a very modern machine for its time (1911) was equipped with two brakes on either side, but the girl had them. To inexperience and carelessness other more mortal added disobedience. Commenting on a fatal accident infringement of the rules, the coroner remarked casually

[31] e.g in Reports of 1905, 1907, 1909, 1911, 1912 and 1928.
be boys in this regard and closed the case forthwith.32

It is axiomatic in today’s factory that every possible threat to the well-being of machine operators must be avoided. Machinery must be both fail-safe and idiot-proof, and one of the major responsibilities of the foreman is to nip in the bud any practice which might lead to the inattentive, careless or mischievous worker being injured. Historians of the mining industry have commented on the apparent indifference to danger by its employees, but modern commentators on occupational health tend to regard unsafe working systems as the main cause of accidents and view apparent employee negligence in this context.33 In the period under discussion, inspectors, managers and legislators all seem to have felt that while workers were entitled to adequate machine guarding, they were ultimately responsible for their own safety by behaving sensibly and exercising due caution on the job. If the worker, by continued exposure to danger, became indifferent to it and careless, it was no-one’s fault but his own. Children, especially girls, demanded different responses. Girls had to be directed out of dangerous jobs and to be kept closely supervised as to hair and dress around the machines they did run. Boys were junior men, presumed to know their way around machinery and if they did get into trouble, well, boys would be boys as the coroner had said.

By 1918 injuries to woollen mill employees from power machines had fallen from 13.4 per 1,000 to 7.3, and they stayed in single digits thereafter. The real improvement was even better considering that all notifiable accidents, whatever the cause, were reported from 1920 onwards and that in 1928 the length of absence from work which defined


such injuries was reduced to 24 from 48 hours. Injuries from power machinery to girls and women had also fallen dramatically: from 0.22 per cent in 1913 to 0.01 per cent in 1927 for girls, and from 0.56 per cent to 0.30 per cent for women. Much of the credit seems due to the Department of Labour, newly formed in 1916 and to its 37 full-time factory inspectors.\[34\] To employers too must go a measure of credit and cooperation with inspectors’ suggestions seem to have been the norm. The aged lunatic who nearly killed Lucy Wilson does not seem to have been typical of his kind and it seems probable that of the eleven or so mills operating in Victoria in 1919 only the smaller, older organizations had consistently low safety standards, probably due to old equipment and cramped buildings as much as anything. The larger mills like Ballarat and Yarra Falls seem to have been much stricter about safety, hair included (see for instance the 1919 photos of Excelsior’s combing and weaving sheds: hats on and hair up throughout) and to have, of their own accord, drawn up and enforced safety rules well in advance of compelling legislation. We have seen that Ballarat was in 1903 posting notices reminding staff to tie up loose hair, twelve years before the act of 1915 made the practice mandatory. Large organizations tended to be the innovators in safety, developing the rigs whose photos went into the department’s 1913 booklet on machine guarding. They also took the lead in the treatment of accidents, paying for employees to attend first aid classes run by the St. John’s Ambulance Brigade (albeit in their own time) and installing first aid chests in the mill well before the Factories and Shops Act of 1911 made them compulsory.\[35\]


\[35\] Report 1909, VFP 1910 vol. 2, p.84. Ballarat was still paying for St. John’s Ambulance courses for employees in 1924. See letter of 1/9/1924. BMW.
(iii) Reparation.

It seems likely that a third factor operating to reduce the accident toll was the introduction in 1915 of Victoria's first Workers' Compensation Act, for it was inevitable that universal compulsory insurance of the work force with its corollary of increased premiums following high claim rates would enhance safety observation.

In the years before the introduction of the workers' compensation act, the factory hand injured at work had a variety of ways to claim compensation and safeguard his or her income, but none were readily accessible and most required some financial input from the injured party making them difficult or impossible for mill labourers and girls to utilize. An action in tort claiming negligence on the part of the employer was the only legal redress open to the victim. Given the legal difficulties inherent in proving such negligence, and the cost of a court action, not many working class people, and particularly females, could avail themselves of this option.

Workers injured so severely that they became unemployable could apply for the new Commonwealth Invalid Pension, enacted with the Old Age Pension in 1908, and in operation by 1910. To get this pension the worker had to be between sixteen and sixty-five years old (sixty in the case of women) and to have lived in Australia for five years or more. The pension was not to exceed £26 a year and this rate with other income sources was not to lift the pensioner's annual income over £52. Unlike the old age pension, invalid pensioners were not required to prove good moral character.

[36] Some attempt had been made to alter this situation with the 1886 Employer's Liability Act.

[37] Based on the innovative New South Wales act of the preceding year.
To safeguard the family income when the breadwinner was incapacitated, prudent workers often chose to join provident schemes like the friendly societies and Australian colonists had long been noted for the extent to which they joined these mutual benefit schemes. The friendly societies were co-operative associations of working men organized either as affiliated orders of lodges, or as single branch operations. For a weekly or monthly payment, members could ensure provision of medical attendance and medicine for themselves, their wives and children under eighteen years. For extended illness or accident, the society paid an average allowance of £1-0-0 a week, this decreasing as the period of illness extended. Life assurance and accident insurance were also available though a far less popular option, and the majority of the £185,206 premiums paid for Victorian industrial insurance in 1912 came from employers covering themselves against workers' claims.

Unions had an important benevolent role to play in some industries, although this was always dependent on the availability of union funds. AMWU Ballarat division papers include one example of an appeal for funds, for a Miss Trooth whose leg was amputated as a result of an accident at Sunnyside, but this seems to have occurred after the 1900-30 period, and there are no indications that the AMWU was active in this sort of fundraising before 1930.

Factory inspectors' reports included several cases of another


avenue of assistance to the injured worker and that was, voluntary payment of wages by the employer. The two recorded cases occurred in Ballarat in 1907 and while no names or industries are mentioned, it is noteworthy that both accidents were serious and that one employer paid full wages for the length of the time of incapacity and the other paid part wages. Irrespective of the motives - guilt or charity - the incidents are worthy of mention.

Finally, a number of larger institutions like banks, public companies and some of the biggest religious bodies operated joint contributory schemes on behalf of their employees, offering similar benefits to the friendly societies. Foy & Gibson was one of the earliest of the mills to start such an operation, documents from which appear in appendix 21, and its 1911 Employees Emergency Fund proved a model of its kind. The scheme was funded from management contributions and a levy of one penny a week from subscribers, and organized by a committee of eight management nominees which governed disbursements of up to £10 a year to contributing and needy members. In 1919 41 payments were made out to members.

It is apparent from all this, that provided a worker was in steady employment, was of sufficient foresight to take out insurance or join a friendly society, or was a financial unionist, some measure of relief was to be expected in case of accident. The itinerant, disorganized non-unionist on the other hand was in considerable difficulty in the same circumstances, particularly if he had a large family, £52 a year not being a fortune even in 1914. Workers' compensation demanded no financial contributions from the worker and its claim paperwork was all handled by the employer, so it was of particular significance to such people.

[40] Ley, 1914: 218.
This Company hereby holds 

The Ballarat Woollen Co. 

Insured against legal liability in the amounts mentioned at foot hereof (subject to the Conditions of the Company’s Policy) in terms of Policy No. 383547/11 until noon of 15 January 1925.

PARTICULARS OF COVER. 

Legal Liability under 

Workers Compensation Acts 1918 - 1922

Cancelling Ref. No. 14202

Deposit £

General Manager.

THIS COVER NOTE MUST BE RETURNED ON COMPLETION OF THE INSURANCE.
Harrison Ord must receive a lot of the credit for the introduction of this act, for in every report he made between 1901 and 1912, the lack of such an act was deplored and the major provisions of the British Workers' Compensation Act of 1897 carefully detailed. When the Victorian act appeared in its definitive form in 1915, its debt to the British scheme was immediately obvious. As in England, "workman" included clerical and manual labour, but excluded anyone paid over £250 in wages annually. Employers were liable for personal injury by accident arising out of and incurred during employment, and "injury" was defined as including a small number of industrial diseases, including anthrax.\[41\] The employer was not liable for injuries disabling the worker for less than a week, or injuries attributable to "serious and wilful misconduct" - including drunkenness.\[42\] For total or partial incapacity, compensation was made in weekly payments not exceeding 50 per cent of the average earnings of the last year. After six months, payments could be redeemed in a lump sum, and at any time the pensioner could be medically examined at the expense of the employer.\[43\]

The act seems to have done what it set out to do, though it generated an enormous amount of litigation as courts struggled with the wording of the legislation. It needed only slight amendment in 1921 and was consolidated in 1928 when the ceiling on claims was lifted. Total incapacity was now paid at 66 and 2/3 per cent of annual earnings, with liability fixed at £600 or £800 for claimants with dependants. In the case of fatalities, medical and burial expenses were set at £75 for single workers, with extra payments of £200 to £680 being made to bereaved dependants. Claims had to be instituted within four months of

\[41\] Worker's Compensation Act 1915, ss. 18-27.

\[42\] Act, s.5.

\[43\] Act, s.7 and Second Schedule.
the injury occurring.

In terms of injuries to woollen mill workers, the act of 1915 ensured that the foot injuries of the mule spinner would be compensated at a rate of 60 per cent of total incapacity, and hand injuries from power machinery on a sliding scale defined by the extent of the damage. Thus for a totally incapacitated right hand, compensation was set at 70 per cent of total, 20 per cent for a forefinger and 5 per cent for a finger joint. When Miss Myrtle Cartledge of Ballarat was injured at her work in 1924, she was awarded 13/8 compensation weekly until she returned to work, plus £20-1-9 for the loss of the top joint of one finger. Although the correspondence on the case, set out in appendix 22, does not say so, she may have been one of the two carder girls reported injured in 1924. There is a Cartledge listed as hand in the Ballarat card room of 1924.

Simultaneous with the introduction of workers' compensation and in fact created by the same first act of 1914, the State Government Accident Insurance Office opened its doors in November 1914. The office was set up to enable employers to ensure against workers' compensation claims, and in its first year issued £27,502 worth of premiums and handled 3,006 claims. By 1929/30 premiums had risen to £71,882 and claims had reached 50,475 per year. Insurance was compulsory but business was not confined to the state office. There were 69 approved insurers by 1929/30, including one operated by the Victorian Chamber of Manufacturers. The Warrnambool mill certainly insured with S.G.I.O., as did the Stawell, Sale and Wangaratta mills, but Ballarat preferred the

[46] VCM Minutes, meeting of 27.8.17. VCM.
old-established Colonial Mutual Insurance Co., which had a local office in Lydiard Street.

(iv) Industrial Hygiene.

Through the various Factories and Shops Acts, the Boiler Inspection, Lifts, Fire Brigades and Workers’ Compensation legislation, the state government had demonstrated a continuing concern that factory work should be as safe as it was possible to make it. Improvements to working conditions for factory women and girls became even more important than they had previously been to both the state and Federal governments just after the war, when quite suddenly the extent and expression of concern changed markedly; Industrial Hygiene became a catchphrase of the decade of the housewife.

Industrial hygiene, the division of preventative medicine specializing in the health of industrial workers, seems to have been seen by Australian authorities as an American innovation and it was to the United States that governments here turned for information and organizational models in the 1920’s. The 1915 Workers’ Compensation Act had enabled accurate estimation of the nature and extent of industrial accidents and occupational disease to be made for the first time and such a sound statistical base was a vital foundation for the new science. 47 In 1921 the Commonwealth Department of Health initiated the movement in this country by employing an American expert from the Rockefeller Foundation to establish a Division of Industrial Hygiene. The following year the department sponsored the first Industrial Hygiene Conference, where the Victorian Labour and Health departments plus

Commonwealth and New South Wales Health representatives discussed the parameters of the new profession. As a result of decisions taken at this conference, New South Wales appointed in 1923 its first medical officer of industrial hygiene. Victoria seconded a medical officer part-time to the Department of Labour "to investigate as required", also legislating to widen health act definitions of notifiable industrial diseases.\footnote{Report of the Royal Commission on Health 1926, CPP 1926/28, pt. 2, vol. 4, p42.} 1925 saw Victoria acknowledge its special interest in the welfare of the state’s female and child workers in industry by appointing its first female medical inspector, Kate McKay, and 1926 brought the report of the Commonwealth Royal Commission on Health. Its recommendations on industrial hygiene mostly centred on data collection and recording, but it also suggested a widespread survey of manufacturing industry which resulted in the Ireland report on the health of factory women already mentioned. Finally, in 1927, the first Australian Industrial Delegation to the U.S. took place and as might be expected from the inclusion as observer of Dr. Kate McKay, industrial hygiene and women workers occupied a central place in its report on the wages and conditions of American factory women.

Industrial hygiene also caught on in the industry’s own journal in the late 1920’s and most months editions included several pages on the subject.\footnote{e.g. TJA 15/7/1926, Dr. Ethel Osborne’s "Industrial Hygiene. Factors that Count", pp.212-4.} It is worth noting that none of the research material covered in these articles was Australian and that none of the authors seemed familiar with conditions prevailing in Australian mills; quite often the standards of ventilation, light and safety they advocated had been in place here for years and the occupational hazards mentioned, like anthrax, not a local problem. Managerial interest in industrial hygiene was, however, a good example of the changing nature of mill welfare in
the 1920's, a change as great as that which had occurred in government emphasis and which had a similar institutional flavour in the way in which it was expressed. Managers had applied factories and shops provisions and wages board determinations in the past and continued to do so, but their self-initiated actions in the workplace were also a continuing activity, and a definite change is evident in these private forms of industry welfare after the war.

Employers' interest in maintaining the good health of their work force had earlier attracted the notice of inspector Miss Thear, who recorded in 1910 her approval of the unnamed employer who had organized tuberculosis examinations for all employees. Another health conscious employer was the firm of Laycock, Son and Nettleton, and hands at its Laconia mill in South Melbourne were inoculated against smallpox during the scare of 1913. Tact does not appear to have been Laycock's strong point and considerable resentment was generated within the ranks of its employees by the fact that vaccination was compulsory, dismissal being the only option. So unprecedented was the firm's action that Woollen Mills Operatives Union Melbourne secretary W. McFarlane had to write to the minister to ask for a ruling on whether the employer should pay "them that was off with a sore arm". Unfortunately, the correspondence does not include the reply. 50

Employer involvement in health matters after this date seems to have been confined to policing accident prevention rules and we have seen how the rate of power machine injuries dropped after 1918. The initiative thereafter lay with the various health departments and their inspectors. Increasingly managers were specializing in other forms of mill welfare.

[50] Letter of 6/9/1913. WEP 210. VPRO.
(v) Welfare at Work.

Until the war, mill welfare was usually directly financial, and it tended to be directed at the old majority of the mill work force, the men, particularly the long-serving skilled men. Payment of above-average wages was one example, since the mill which paid them operated at an immediate market disadvantage compared with less generous competitors. Ballarat's wages in 1900 were stated to be 20 to 30 per cent above those paid by the Geelong mills, and the mill's profitability was said to be suffering for it. Foy & Gibson also consistently paid above award, at least from 1913 and probably earlier. Bonuses as a reward for good work throughout the year were another option. In some cases a quarterly bonus was built into the employment agreement between a manager and the firm, but in several instances large bonuses were distributed amongst all employees, as happened at Castlemaine in 1915, Foy & Gibson in 1917 and the Commonwealth Mills in 1921. Foy & Gibson's management distributed a total of L7,000 to workers, being 5 per cent on wages during July 1915-16, and other mills, including Richmond Hosiery Mills, did likewise at this time in recognition of the employees' war efforts. Commonwealth mill workers were given their bonus in quarterly form based on 7 and 1/2 per cent of their ordinary earnings in the very profitable year of 1921. In that year, Commonwealth achieved record sales of L180,206 with a net profit of L26,000. Holidays with pay were also granted by employers, but not availed of much before the 1920s, and even the annual mill picnic was traditionally held on a Saturday thereby reducing down-time at some Geelong mills by

[51] Deputation of Woollen Trade Workers to Minister Peacock. 24 June 1900. WTB 210. VPRO.


only half a day. After 1920 paid holidays became more common. City mill operatives were given a day off for the visit of the Prince of Wales, and in March 1924 Gibsonia employees got three hours off and a lift into town in the company vans to see the march—past of the British sailors.

As mentioned, mill managers also supported with large cash donations the employee-operated Emergency Funds which ran in the larger factories, notably Ballarat, Yarra Falls, Foy & Gibson and Returned Soldiers. Foy & Gibson ran two of these, one for staff and one for mill workers, and they annually received nearly 20 per cent of their income from manager John Maclellan. By the mid and late 1920's these schemes spread to most Victorian mills, impelled by Federal and state income tax amendments making employer's deductions to such schemes tax deductible. These older forms of welfare were seen by this time to be in transition to more modern forms, but as this promotional letter from insurer Australian Mutual Provident Society made clear, those gains the employer sought in supporting the old schemes could not only be retained but enhanced under the new.

It is now recognized generally that it is not only in harmony with the spirit of the age for an employer to establish a superannuation and provident scheme for his employees and to subscribe liberally towards the funds required for that purpose, but that it is ultimately to his pecuniary interest to do so.

Apart from contented employees, relieved from anxiety and therefore healthier, two other desiderata were anticipated:

(1) Through reluctance to sacrifice their interest under such a scheme valued employees become permanently attached to their employer's service and render him more loyal and zealous work.

(2) The provision made for the dependants of those who die while in active work obviates the appeals (which cannot be ignored by a

[54] See appendix 21.
benevolent employer) frequently made on their behalf for charitable aid.55

As indicated by A.M.P's letter, managerial attitudes to welfare were by no means unselflessly philanthropic. Such "generosity" was part of the complicated network of rights and duties which bound the mill family and which we will investigate in depth in part three. Provident scheme donations by management were understood as a consideration which was expected to be met with extra effort on the part of the workers. When Gibsonia wages were once again raised above the levels of the current board determinations in July 1920, the notices setting out the rates for each department ended with this paragraph:

We trust that all in the Mills will, on their part, endeavour to increase the output both in quantity and quality and so enable the Mills to carry the increased wages and that call will do their best to further the progress and increase the success of the Mills.56

Holidays and amenities too were to be used for the company good. When Foy & Gibson granted an extra week's holiday with pay over Christmas in the same year, Maclellan's announcement concluded "We hope that all will make good use of the extra week, and return with renewed health and energy for the coming year."57 The beneficiaries responded in like terms:

Dear Sir
On behalf of the Clothing Factory employees, one desires to tender our thanks for your kindness in providing us with our own lunch room.
We feel the change will be one of great benefit to us and trust the time spent there, will be for the good of ourselves and the firm also.58

The "newness" of modern mill welfare lay in its institutional

Weaver's Hats Hang Near Their Owner's Looms at the Albion, 1906. MP 8/2/1906. SLV.
expression, compared with the more direct financial aspects of the old. A welfare concerned with material and social things rather than with cash, expressed in health care, dining rooms, concert halls, sportsgrounds, and in social clubs. A concern which was directed at females more than men. Factory inspectors were quick to report and praise the first examples of these new employer activities, and the reports from 1903 to 1912 remarked on the institution of incentive schemes for tidiness, attendance and general progress, the employment of cleaning ladies (1906) and the installation of new extractor fans for ventilation (1907). 1907 was also the year a cigarette manufacturer was reported to be conducting employee exercise classes on the flat roof of his new factory, and the year the Ballarat mill became the first woollen factory to install not only an employees’ dining room, but a women’s change room. Most mill employees worked all day in the same clothing in which they arrived in the morning and they ate their lunches at their machines, in a corner of the factory floor, or outside in the lanes and cartways around the mill. Ballarat’s new amenities endorsed its reputation as the state’s premier mill and complemented its generous wages policy as well.

The earliest and most spectacular of such employer initiatives was the building by Walter Gaunt of a substantial employees’ social centre in the grounds of the Alfred in 1906, fifteen years ahead of its closest competitor Foy & Gibson’s gymnasium and concert hall. Castlemaine, like the Alfred another of the state’s founding mills, introduced a steady stream of useful but less spectacular amenities; steam heating of the mill in winter (1912) establishment of an employees’ library (1913), employees’ social evenings (1913 and annually thereafter), purification plant for employees’ drinking water (1918), mill cricket club (1919), and paid holidays at Christmas time (1921). Commonwealth’s employees

[59] Castlemaine Woollen Mill Minutes books 1900-1930. CMH.
To Mr. Ashley, Manager, F & J. Wooden Mills

Dear Sir,

I must write to ask you if you could, try and get a room for the girls employed at the mill to have their lunch in. They sit amongst all the wood and grease and where ever they can to have their lunch. And another inconvenience there is no place to wash themselves and therefore they have to walk home dirty and not very presentable. I hope you will excuse my interference.

Yours Sincerely,
A Mother

Letter from "A Mother" to Ashley, Requesting a Girl's Lunchroom. Nov. 1919. EWW.
had a large dining room from 1915, with a canteen and in later years, even a nine-hole golf course. In 1927 as Federal Mills, it also introduced an employees' club and lounge room specifically for employees boarding away from home, that is, the younger mill girls.\textsuperscript{60}

By the early 1920's most mills had developed social clubs and provided meeting places and sportsgrounds of one kind or another for employees. The 1919 Factories and Shops Act, moreover, forced any mills which did not yet have dining rooms to install them. Ballarat, surprisingly, seems to have been one of these, as the letter opposite attests.\textsuperscript{61} Perhaps the mill's expansion had either taken over the little 1907 dining and change rooms, or resulted in new departments built without comparable facilities. The act, and those which followed it, further ensured that changing rooms and washing facilities were provided for females, though not for males. The legal requirements were not lavish: one basin for every twenty females, and none for males unless "essential". The changing room was to be provided only where females were required by their employers to change for work, as was increasingly the case in the larger mills like Foy & Gibson. Lockers, mirrors, soap, bins, towels, chairs and couches were contributed at the discretion of the employer and so in the dining rooms were the hot water, tea, sugar and milk, cutlery, crockery, soup and rolls, so enthusiastically recorded in the inspector's reports of the mid 1920's.

The mill workers of Ballarat told their M.L.A. Alexander Peacock in 1900 that "Since the industry had been built up largely in the interests

\textsuperscript{[60]} Federal Mills Finance Committee Welfare Scheme Papers 1927. CMH.

\textsuperscript{[61]} Letter is undated but filed alphabetically with November 1919's correspondence. BAW.
Female Locker Room at Foy and Gibson, 1922. MUA.

Women’s Dining Room at Foy and Gibson, 1922. MUA.
of females their interests should be safeguarded".\textsuperscript{62} and thirty-three years later when the arbitration court finally brought the 44-hour week to the mills, the three judges justified their decision on female grounds; "for female employees the general nature and conditions of the work are such as to make 44 hours a reasonable ordinary working week."\textsuperscript{63}

It is no coincidence that the first specialized mill amenities were built only a few years after the influx of 1903; Ballarat's dining room and female change room, and the Alfred's employees' social centre were built with the mills' girls foremost in mind. Acts, determination and award all worked in subsequent years to keep women away from the most dangerous areas of the mill and out of shift work. Men bore the brunt of accidents and long hours, and worked in the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs, and with the most primitive amenities. Female toilets contained wash basins where the men's had none. Females were entitled to changing rooms, as the men were not. The new dining rooms of the 1920's shown in mill photos of the period are always the female dining rooms, never the male. Could this be because the proud firm had spent more on furniture and canteen staff for its girls?

Why this favouritism towards mill girls on the part of legislators and industry leaders; this tendency to give them everything except a good wage and a career structure? Guilt suggests itself immediately. If society believed women and girls should not be working in factories, we could expect to find as we have, that wages were kept low, working time short, and conditions made as safe and comfortable as possible. That work should acquire aspects of the idealized home, dining rooms, gardens and so on. Expedience follows closely. Once females became a majority in the mills workforce, production costing became dependent on continuous low wages and therefore on sufficient supply of young, cheap

\textsuperscript{62} Deputation of 24/6/1900, NBP 210.

\textsuperscript{63} 32 C.A.R. 1933, p.472.
females to perform the work. Managers absolute requirements to attract and retain mill girls and weavers by all the means discussed, must also include the making of work conditions more comfortable and attractive. The post-war period with its market expansion and big profits provided the funds to give welfare its institutional form, as buildings for the majority instead of cash payments to the few.

Was this exploitation? Was this calculating welfare the real dark satanism of the mill? I do not believe so. It was neither the case objectively as compared to other contemporary industries here or in England, nor subjectively in the opinion of the girls themselves.

Blake might just as well have had iron foundries in mind as spinning mills when he wrote Milton in 1808, but "dark, satanic..." stuck with textiles. Indeed, the crowded nineteenth century British mills often justified its use, as Elizabeth Howell’s personal reminiscences of them, published in 1926, indicate. It was to English factory and compensation acts that Victoria’s legislators had turned for models to regulate their own growing manufactories, so English experiences became the benchmarks by which often dissimilar Australian conditions were measured. Anthrax and ten year old bobbin girls were as alien to the Australian mills as sweating turned out to be, despite predictions to the contrary. Mill girls were entitled to the highest minimum wages of all board trades in Victoria, were healthier than their peers in other factories and, despite being the majority of employees in a heavy industry, were injured less than the mills’ men and at a rate which declined consistently during 1900 to 1930. Females were protected from

[64] TJA 15/7/1926, p.230. See appendix 23a. for text.

[65] It goes without saying that a treadle sewing machine is far easier to operate and house in an unregistered outworker’s residence, much less power, than a 13 x 5 foot cast iron power loom drawing half to one B.H.P.
the most dangerous work and from multiple shifts or night work, and if they developed skills, could choose to remain at work after marriage or despite disability or age.

Compared with mill girls in Britain and the United States, those in Australia worked under approximately equivalent conditions as to hours of work and age of entry after the war, and decidedly better ones before it. Management style, the involvement of Australian managers with their employee’s welfare, was perceived to be an important departure from the British standard, differences particularly apparent to women who had first-hand experience of British mills. One such woman was Margaret Gelling, who wrote this letter to her ex-employer John Maclellan in 1925:

Dear Sir

I have often thought of writing to thank you for the many acts of kindness to you work people. It is over 3 years since I left the weaving mill on account of sickness (I am in domestic work now) - but can never never forget your kind interest for the welfare of your workers. May God bless you and give you health and strength and long life to see the fruits of your labours. I still keep in touch with the mill girls some that left to be married and we talk about the good old times and I never forget to ask about you. You see I came from Lancashire 14 years ago on my own as I have no relatives in the world and masters are not the same at home as they are in Australia. Thank God He led me out to this beautiful sunny land. Please except this grateful letter from one who tried to understand and appreciate your many acts of kindness. Yours sincerely

Margaret Ann Gelling.

"Do you ever feel downhearted?" she wrote at the top of this letter. "Do you ever feel your work is in vain?" "Never".

It might be argued that compared with today's factories the mills of 1900 to 1930 were indeed unacceptably dirty and dangerous for their female inhabitants, but quite apart from the irrelevance of such a comparison, it is wrong because it was not the way their work was

[66] see appendix 23b for a tabulation of conditions in Britain, the US and Australia in 1915-1921.

perceived by the girls themselves. Lucy Wilson’s memories of her Geelong mill days certainly include the dirt and the danger, but they are not given anywhere near the prominence that friends and a shared joke commanded.

There’s stuff what they call Noyle [noils]. It’s all the old greasy stuff, it used to come down off the machine and drop through this hole and then you had to go down these steps and into this big room thing and clear it away. So one day we’re down there clearin’ away and we thought it was one of the girls comin’ . . . we could hear somebody comin’ down the steps and there were two or three of us there and they said, ‘Keep quiet, here she comes, keep quiet’. So we did and when the legs got near us we all grabbed ‘em and dumped ‘er down, jumped on ‘er and then we smothered ‘er with all this old wool and when we got it off it was the old boss. It was the old boss and by the time he came out of it we were up at our machines killin’ ourselves laughin’ Yes, we almost killed ‘im.

May Hansford and Betty Driburgh, and indeed all of the people who spoke with me about their years in the mills, all felt the same way. The work could be dirty and noisy and it could be hard, but everyone worked and one made special friends and one’s own fun. Things were different then they said, and better.

The private world of the mill family had always been a paternal one. It adapted to the increased numbers of “daughters” without much problem; the complicated balance of duties and rights by which manager, men and girls operated their daily work lives shifted a little when young girls became the major category of employees, but only to the extent that they commanded a greater duty of care than the older men. More than merely being kept safe, the daughters were increasingly kept comfortable in circumstances and surroundings closely following those developing in domestic architecture. Mills developed separate dining areas, change and storage areas, social and cultural activities, libraries, picnics and gardens. This movement, this expression of

institutional welfare directed towards females was at its strongest in the 1920s, the decade of the housewife. As we will see in the next chapter, post-war mill buildings were the most modern of their time, made light filled, spacious and convenient to house proud modern Australians and to epitomise all that was best in mill culture.
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