Convict Settlers, Seamen’s Greens, and Imperial Designs at Port Jackson
A Maritime Perspective of British Settler Agriculture

ANGUS R. MCGILLIVREY

This article is a contribution to the debate over Australia’s convict beginnings and the nature of the British colonization of New South Wales. The early agriculture of the convict colony is set in the maritime context of imperial rivalries and visions of empire in the Pacific Ocean. When the Port Jackson settlement is viewed from this maritime perspective, it is apparent that agriculture was an imperial imperative of the Pitt administration. The design and early function of the settlement as a port of shelter and refreshment ensured that, despite initial despondency and drought, a bountiful and secure agricultural hinterland was in the making. Within five years after the planting of New South Wales, convict settlers, mixed agriculture, and imperial designs had transformed “a rude, wild country into a pleasant garden.” As a planned, self-sufficient, maritime settlement, Port Jackson rapidly developed its capacity to produce a surplus of antiscorbutic seamen’s greens essential for a distant port

ANGUS R. MCGILLIVREY is an arable and livestock farmer in Victoria’s Western District and an Associate Lecturer of History at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia. He combines his love of mixed farming with his passion for history by researching in the Antipodean field of British settler agriculture and teaching Australian history. The author wishes to thank colleagues and research scholars at La Trobe University where an earlier version of this article was presented to the History Programme Postgraduate Research Seminar. He also wishes to thank Richard Broome, Philip Bull, Janet Butler, John Cashmere, Kathryn Ferguson, Alan Frost, Tina Kalivas, Diane Kirkby, Jim Hammerton, Tim Healey, John Hirst, Katie Holmes, Rhys Issac, Adrian Jones, Phillip Lisle, Alex McDermont, Heather McGillivrey, Lotte Mulligan, Bill Murray, Judith Richards, Alex Tyrell, and three anonymous referees for the journal for their critical comments and scholarly support. The directors and trustees of the British Library, State Library of Victoria, and State Library of New South Wales have kindly given permission to reproduce the illustrations.

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and naval base to become an assured resource of refreshment, services, and supplies necessary for Britain to "effectively occupy" the oceanic territory of New South Wales and thereby integrate the development of a global empire.

In maritime terms, agricultural historians should stand windward of current historiography and beat back to port from the discourses and misleading notions of the colonization of New South Wales. Alan Atkinson's history of the first twenty-five years of white settlement in Australia is based on "Brian Fitzpatrick's suggestion . . . of the original plan for a 'community of peasant proprietors' in the Antipodes [emphasis added]." Atkinson envisages the founding of "a ragged but real commonwealth" where "the convicts would be peasants in a country of their own" and their "labour would serve no great imperial purpose." This concept of categorizing the British settlement at Port Jackson in New South Wales as a colonial peasant economy still influences current perspectives.¹

While the idea of convicts forming their own society was considered in the eighteenth century, it was also dismissed as serving no imperial purpose. In its 1785 report, the Beauchamp Select Committee of the House of Commons relative to the Transportation of Felons held the "decided Opinion" that the "Idea of composing an Entire Colony of Male & Female Convicts, without any other Government or Control but what they may from Necessity be led to Establish for themselves, can answer no good or rational Purpose." The committee pointed out that "such an Experiment has never been made in the History of Mankind." It accordingly recommended that if "his Majesty think fit to establish a new Settlement for Enlarging the Commerce of his Subjects, the labour of these Convicts may be employed to the most useful Purposes" for the establishment and "the defence [sic] of a new Settlement" and for "the Prosperity of the Settlement."²

A royal command issued two years later directed the formation of a settlement for seven hundred fifty convicts, equipped by the Treasury and administered using "some Military Establishment" of regular marines, by the Admiralty. The marines, with a complement of officers, were to defend the settlement and "enforce due subordination and obedience" of the convict settlers, who were the means, not the motive of colonization. Indeed, the Pitt administration considered the convicts' labor and residence an essential part of its imperial purpose and strategy in the Pacific.
As early as March 1790, the government instructed Governor Phillip in New South Wales to help equip an expedition of marines, seamen, and convicts to plant a settlement that would “lay the foundation of an establishment for the assistance of His Majesty’s subjects in the prosecution of the Fur trade from the Northwest Coast of America thereby enumerating the strategic nature of this colonial service.” Although the government terminated this scheme in the conclusion of the Nootka Sound crisis in October 1790, it demonstrated the strategic value of the convict colony in Britain’s challenge of Spain’s claim to exclusive navigation and colonization in the Pacific.³

Despite these instructions, historian David MacKay argues that “it requires some gifts of imagination to embody the foundation of the New South Wales colony into the substance of some wider imperial purpose.” This position, which calls into question the Pitt administration’s imperial capacity, distorts the understanding of British settler agriculture in the eighteenth-century maritime context of European exploration and imperial imperative in the Pacific. Brian Fletcher contends that “it requires too great a stretch of the imagination to believe that British officials consciously aimed at creating a peasant economy alongside the penal establishment.” Viewed from this perspective, British settler agriculture in New South Wales was not integral to an “extent of dominion” comprised of charted oceans, islands, and “Country contiguous to Port Jackson,” the boundaries of which gave legal “Possession . . . in form” to counter Spain’s claim to a mare clausum in the Pacific. Nor was this agriculture deemed vital to the development of a global empire, aimed at integrating and possessing overseas territory and commercial interests by settlement rather than conquest. Rather, this view reduces the oceanic territory of New South Wales to merely the first historical boundary of Australia—“a continent awaiting our conquest.”⁴

The perception of Australia as an “island with the oceanic space around it” still needs to be fostered. The Botany Bay venture was not a colonial peasant economy nor a convict dumping ground, but rather a strategically planted colony for “Ports of shelter, and refreshment for . . . ships” in the New World of the Pacific Ocean to fulfill the eighteenth-century maritime imperatives and visions of Pacific empires.⁵

The sight of ships being fitted out for lengthy sea passages was a characteristic feature of “Ports of Shelter, and Refreshment.” Consider the
early watercolor view of Sydney Cove, Port Jackson, painted in 1788 by William Bradley (see Figure 1). Evidently, Port Jackson performed this service even before the provision of docks and quayage. This was one reason why Commodore Phillip chose Sydney Cove as the site for the first settlement. It had “the best spring of water” and four fathoms of anchorage close to the shore for the unloading and careening—placing a vessel on its side to clean and repair the bottom—of “the largest ships.” Bradley painted this piece from a vantage point aloft a mast spar of a sailing vessel facing toward the settlement and HMS Sirius, the British naval flagship of the First Fleet, riding at anchor. To port, under the lee of land in deep water, are two raftsmen careening a square-rigged ship. In the background, the encampment of Port Jackson is represented in topographical relief as contiguous to an already operational “Port of Shelter, and Refreshment” for His Majesty’s ships, tenders, transports, and other vessels thousands of nautical miles away from their Mother Country. Such a view
portrays the British settlement as a planned, self-sufficient, maritime settlement, a port of shelter and refreshment in claimed oceanic territory.6

Such a concept was familiar to early European voyagers accustomed to lengthy sea passages, especially before the discovery in 1767 of the infamous Edenic “Island of Otaheite” in the midst of the Pacific Ocean. The site of such settlement, or its island paradise equivalent, could occasion “great joy in the ship, as if we had been in heaven,” as the Dutchman John van Linschoten recorded concerning the discovery of St. Helena. The Dutch East India Company’s garden at the Cape of Good Hope was another well-known European maritime settlement integral with a port of shelter and refreshment. The Cape’s vegetable garden mirrored the dual purpose of the settlement itself, being both a “garden of acclimatization” that could “act as a holding ground for the exchange and transmission of plants of all kinds between the four continents” and “as public as St. James park . . . much frequented by the fashionable and gay.” It was “an extensive garden,” both “usefully planted, and at the same time elegantly laid out” with “handsome, pleasant, and well-shaded walks” and the Cape governor’s “town residence” in its center. Nonetheless, it was still a maritime settlement garden, as John White, the surgeon-general to the First Fleet, remarked in his journal in 1787: “The governor’s family make what use they please of the produce of the garden, which is various and abundant; but the original intention of the company in appropriating so extensive a piece of ground to this purpose was that their hospital, which is generally pretty full when their ships arrive after long voyages, may be well supplied with fruits and vegetables, and likewise that their ships may receive a similar supply.”7

The Dutch settlement also supplied ships of other nations with refreshment and provisions. When the ships of the British First Fleet arrived at the Cape, they found American, British, Danish, French, and Portuguese ships in addition to Dutch Indiamen and the usual mail-packets and whalers anchored in Table Bay. It was here, after the voyage from Rio de Janeiro in 1787, that Commodore Arthur Phillip refreshed the entire First Fleet of two naval warships and nine converted merchantmen. The Prince of Wales transport, like the other ships of the First Fleet, received daily “for the Use of the Marines & Convicts Fresh Provision & Soft Bread, Beef and Mutton . . . with Greens” while moored in Table Bay. In addition, Commodore Phillip loaded “the supplies he stood in need of for the
expedition” to Botany Bay, and the ships with the sheep, goats, pigs, horses, a bull, six cows and a calf, along with the plant and seed transfers required to establish a European colony in the Antipodes of New South Wales.8

The Cape settlement continued to be important for the British endeavors in New South Wales. Later ships bound for Botany Bay loaded supplies from the iceberg-damaged HMS Guardian there. In mid-1790 four transports delivered to the new colony 222,374 pounds of flour, beef, and pork “Taken out of the Guardian at the Cape of Good Hope,” which also supplied an additional 156,746 pounds of pork and livestock about a year later. In August 1797 Captain Waterhouse of the HMS Reliance wrote to his father saying that he had left the Cape for Sydney with “a Ship most unpleasantly full having on board forty nine head of black cattle three Mares & one hundred & seven sheep.”9

Despite his colony’s use of the Cape settlement, Phillip’s based his planning of New South Wales on the strategic model of Rio de Janeiro. When Phillip viewed Port Jackson and saw that “here a Thousand Sail of the Line may ride in the most perfect Security,” he did so from an experience formed by seaports such as Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro. As governor of New South Wales, he planned Sydney Cove in terms of a naval base and way-station akin to the Rio de Janeiro settlement and other maritime considerations of eighteenth-century naval warfare and colonial rivalry. This design was evident in the settler activities and the spatial relations of the new colony. Clearing of the ground for the site; locating and erecting the portable hospital and the governor’s house; locating the marine and convict encampments; erecting their tents and building huts; unloading of provisions and supplies; clearing ground to cultivate a public farm; and the erection of an observatory were achieved using prevailing naval conventions. A convict’s sketch well represents the settlement pattern (see Figure 2), when it “was not quite 3 Months after Commodore Phillip’s Landing there”; and by Lieutenant William Bradley’s naval depiction of “The position of the encampment & buildings ... as they stood 1st March 1788” (see Figure 3).10

The performance of customary tasks integral to an established port of shelter and refreshment at Port Jackson also demonstrated the imperial, maritime purpose and function of the settlement’s design. According to Phillip, writing in the captain’s log of the HMS Sirius, settlers refitted
Figure 2. Sketch & Description of the Settlement at Sydney Cove Port Jackson in the County of Cumberland taken by a transported Convict on the 16th of April, 1788, which was not quite 3 Months after Commodore Phillips's Landing there. Engraved by Neele after "F. F. delineavit" [Francis Fowkes]. Published by R. Cribb, no. 288 High Holburn, July 24, 1789. By permission of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.
Figure 3. William Bradley, *Sydney Cove, Port Jackson*, ink and watercolor, inscribed, "The position of the encampment & buildings are as they stood 1st March 1788. The Transports are placed in the Cove as Moored on their arrival. Survey'd by Cap' Hunter." From Bradley's manuscript, "A Voyage to New South Wales: The Journal of Lieutenant William Bradley RN of HMS Sirius, 1786–1792," fp. 77. By permission of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.
ships and refreshed their crews during the first three months of New South Wales, even while constructing their own town.

1 February sent a party of Men to the north side of the Harbour to erect tents for the SailMakers and Coopers
6 February Employed getting the TopGallant Masts down upon the Deck and unreaving the Running Rigging
11 February another party [employed] on a Island clearing Ground for a Garden for the Ship
15 February Blacking the mast heads and Yards
27 February Rigged the topGallant masts, kept onboat the Men that had been employed at the Island to assist in refitting the Rigging
12 March sent a Party of Men on Shore to put up an Oven, and build a Shade for Baking Bread for the Ship
10 April Careened Ship to Repair the Copper on the Bow, Scrubbed between wind and Water, at Noon Righted Ship

The settlement grew rapidly. By July 1788, six months after the settlers’ disembarkation, Lieutenant Henry Waterhouse could inform his father of the development of the “Town” of this hinterland settlement, which he said, “now begins to cut a figure.” There “a number of Wooden houses are built & the Governor and Lieu’ Governor[’s] Stone Houses are almost built likewise the Hospitable & Store Houses; At a little distance from the Town their [sic] is a farm for the Cultivation of seed & Cattle for the Publlick [sic], there is a number of private Farms & Gardens about there is likewise a brick field & kiln at which some Thousands of excellent Bricks have been made.” The engraved “Sketch of Sydney Cove, Port Jackson, in the County of Cumberland, New South Wales” dated July 1788 (see Figure 4) depicts the naval base and hinterland design that Governor Phillip implemented at Port Jackson, and which Waterhouse described to his father. Seven months later Waterhouse wrote again to his father to say that the “Buildings and Tilling” had progressed to the point that “Sydney Cove now cuts a very respectable appearance.” Within three years Sydney Cove had developed “from the circumstance of its being the only
place where shipping anchored” to the extent that it “possessed all the evils and allurements of a sea port of some standing.”

This was a remarkable development, as it was still less than five years since the colony’s establishment. Significantly, it also was less than five years since the appearance of the sails of “Two large Ships... off the Mouth of the Bay... Suppos’d to be Frenchmen,” as the First Fleet prepared to sail from Botany Bay to Port Jackson to establish the settlement. The ships proved to be Lapérouse’s frigates on a voyage of scientific...
discovery and French political reconnaissance. The occurrence dramatically highlighted the manifestations of eighteenth-century imperial rivalries to the British settlers. Phillip accordingly lost no time in shifting the First Fleet convoy to Port Jackson, implementing the colony’s imperial, maritime design, and dispatching Second Lieutenant Philip Gidley King on a secret commission to settle and govern Norfolk Island with its abundant naval resources of flax plants and pine trees. Already an “expectation which was formed when the design was projected” was being addressed.¹³

Moreover, when Phillip viewed Port Jackson and judged it as “the finest harbour in the world,” he added that it would offer “room for Ships of all Nations,” as did the ports of Rio de Janerio and Cape Town. This eighteenth-century metaphor encompassed the imperial “free trade” concept and expectation of “free Permission of Ingress and Regress for Ships of all Nations,” as well as the development and control of a vast commercial network of sailing routes to and from the Pacific. After attempts to solve initial difficulties in the establishment of New South Wales, Phillip had the satisfaction of witnessing the British settlement at Port Jackson begin to realize such imperial expectations before his departure in 1792 aboard the Atlantic. Port Jackson was well on its way to demonstrating the capability of its salubrious and secure situation and its bountiful hinterland to refresh mariners and voyagers and to supply and service merchantmen and whalers.¹⁴

The advantages of Port Jackson were evident even when the world experienced one of its strongest known El Niño occurrences during the severe 1790–92 global drought. In November 1791 Thomas Melville, a captain of one of the five whaling vessels sailing outward bound as Third Fleet transports, wrote: “If a Voyage can be got upon this Coast, it will make it shorter than going to Peru; And the Governor has been very attentive to sending Greens for refreshment to our crews.”¹⁵

Port Jackson became tremendously important to the South Whale Fishery. Captain Tench of the Marines records the “eager” response of the whalers “to push to sea” on learning from Captain Melville about the passage between Tasmania and Port Jackson, “I saw more whales, at one time, around my ship, than in the whole of six years, which I have fished on the coast of Brazil.” When he returned to Port Jackson within a month of fishing, Captain Melville “assured” Tench that “he had seen more
spermaceti whales, than in all his former life: they amounted he said to many thousands, most of them of enormous magnitude.” These South Whale Fishery vessels seeking shelter and refreshment at Port Jackson had huge agricultural implications during the early years of settlement. Despite legal restraints, the Pitt administration and the principals and masters of the whalers were very aware of the maritime advantages of the Port Jackson hinterland and the commercial opportunity of a fishery in the territory of New South Wales. They were also mindful that “our Vessels can supply New South Wales with many requir’d Articles from the Native Country—Thus a commercial Interest may be carried on to the mutual benefit of both.”

The number of vessels refreshing and refitting at Port Jackson during the early 1790s was small in terms of the total number of vessels employed in the southern fishery. Of the sixty-eight vessels that sailed in 1793, only four whalers fished from New South Wales, but these four were all ship-rigged vessels of over three-hundred tons. For the newly established colony to refit these whalers, refresh their crews, and outfit the ships to cruise for several months to fish off the coasts of New South Wales, New Zealand, and South America before lading home cargoes of valuable whale oil was no small task. Its hinterland must have produced a plentiful surplus of agricultural “Greens,” readily available fresh water, and firewood. The large whalers also would have required facilities to hospitalize sailors and whalemen debilitated from scurvy and supplies of new cordage, sail-cloth, and timber.

Historians deem 1798 as the year that “Sydney had become a regular port of call for whaling vessels.” This was the year in which the limits of the South Whale Fishery were extended to include the water of the Tasman Sea. However, the record of fourteen British whalers refreshing at Port Jackson by 1798 suggests an earlier significance of Port Jackson and its hinterland. Two of the Enderby and Sons vessels that returned from the South Whale Fishery in 1793 were the Britannia (301 tons) and Speedy (313 tons). Both whalers refreshed their crews, provisioned the ships with sailors’ “Greens,” and refitted at Port Jackson. The Britannia commanded by Captain Melville “returned from the South Whale Fishery in the Year 1793” with a cargo of “118 tons of sperm oil, New South Wales & Pacific Ocean.” After loading supplies at Port Jackson, it fished from New South Wales to “off the coasts of Chile and Peru” for nine months before
returning “to England in Aug. 1793.” Indeed, Enderby and Sons, one of the principal operations of the British southern whale fisheries, considered 1792 to be “The greatest Year of the [South Whale] Fishery.” That year 5,485 tons of oil was produced. This tonnage was nearly a thousand tons of oil more than that produced in 1797, although it had less monetary value.18

The Enderbys were not alone in their praise of Port Jackson. Other British southern fishery operators and their seamen also benefited from the provisions and services of the Port Jackson hinterland. Robert Murray, who sailed with Captain Raven in the St. Barbe and Company’s Britannia, recorded in his journal during the winter of 1793 that “During our stay at Port Jackson we have been employed delivering the cargo and rigging and refitting the ship. . . . At the time of our leaving the colony for the Straits of Malacca, we left the Harbour with every refreshment we stood in need of, we had overhauled the rigging, caulked the ship, and repaired her where it was found necessary.”19

Thus, the making of this maritime settlement was not a protracted process. In just over three years after landing, Phillip wrote confidently that, even though the colony “is not immediately in the state in which I would wish to leave it,” it was well enough established, both physically and socially, for him to leave without a dereliction of duty. He wrote in November 1791 to Lord Sydney, “that we get on slowly, but we do get on, and much better than I would have expected, with such instruments as have been put into my hands.” In April 1792, with the experience of the colony’s first drought behind him, Phillip wrote home to say that, despite the country being “most infamously misrepresented . . . we have now vegetables in abundance. At Parramatta they are now served daily to the Convicts, still you may be told that the Country will not produce a Cabbage.” By the time of the governor’s departure in December 1792 on board the Atlantic, David Collins, the deputy judge-advocate of the colony, wrote that Phillip “had the satisfaction . . . of seeing the public grounds wear every appearance of a productive harvest.” A bountiful and a secure agricultural hinterland was in the making.20

As the early colonists first confronted the landscape of their new environment, they were despondent. The surgeon-general condemned it as “a country and place so forbidding and so hateful as only to merit execration and curses.” Major Ross pronounced doom: “Here nature is reversed—
and if not so—she is nearly worn out,” he wrote in private to Evan Nepean, the undersecretary of state. It would, he lamented, prove to “be fatally felt by some of the present Inhabitants.” The first cleric appointed to the colony, the Rev. Richard Johnson, wrote home in November 1788 to say dejectedly to Henry Fricker that, “As to the Country in general, I confess I have no very great opinion of nor expectation from it. The greatest part of it . . . requires a great deal of labour to clear it of trees, roots, etc., and to cultivate it . . . all almost . . . are heartily sick of the expedition, and wish themselves back safe in old England.” Yet, even at this stage, the situation was improving. Johnson preceded his remarks about the country with a telling comment. He wrote: “My little Garden also begins to flourish & supplies us daily with either one kind of vegetables or other.” He had achieved this horticultural success in just ten months, and by October 1791 he wrote to Henry Fricker again to say that he “may reasonably suppose that by this time we have become more settled . . . My garden, too, is in a flourishing state.”

It was flourishing gardens like Rev. Johnson’s cottage garden that provided a supply of food for those in a “wretched situation” like the convict who wrote home in December 1790 saying “All our improvements, except our gardens, have lately been quite at a stand [emphasis added].” Earlier that year an officer who had “one of the best gardens,” also wrote home to describe the “industry” by which his garden was able to “afford something in these days of scarcity.” At that most anxious time, when the new colony waited for HMS Supply to arrive from Batavia with emergency supplies after the loss of HMS Guardian and HMS Sirius, it was these newly-planted gardens that sustained the colony. As Captain Waterhouse explained to an English friend, “We have reason to pray for the arrival of ships from England . . . for if we have to wait for the arrival of the Supply God only knows what allowance we shall be at[,] the proportion at the present for Man or Woman for a week is 2½ pounds of pork[,] at present the Gardens supply pretty well those who have been at any labour [emphasis added].” This was at the end of the drought that had made circumstances very grave for the new colony.

The settlement was also developing its maritime, imperial potential. In a letter to his father, Newton Fowell, a second lieutenant on board HMS Supply, described the condition of Rose Hill settlement at the head of the harbor at Parramatta. Prior to sailing for Batavia in April 1790 for
emergency supplies, Fowell wrote that, “The Greatest Part of this last Year was Sown in Grain & Yielded about 4 fold. . . . Good Gardens have been made thire, [sic] & Vegetables grow very fine[.] Cabbages grow to a large Size . . . but it is a General Opinion Potatoes Degenerate very much Melons & Pumkins [sic] thrive astonishingly At Rose Hill.” It is important to read Fowell’s comments about potatoes and pumpkins in their maritime context. As a naval officer Fowell was mindful of a hinterland’s capacity to supply essential seamen’s greens. Potatoes and pumpkins were important foods for refreshment. Captain Melville’s surgeon, who supervised his crew’s refreshment at Port Jackson in October 1791 and again between June and September 1794, wrote in his “Medical hints on the Sea Scurvey [sic]” that “The Eating of raw Pumpkins has been greatly recommended & possibly they are superior to the Potatole [sic].”

Others also observed the gardens from a seaman’s perspective. Just prior to leaving the colony in December 1791, Captain Tench of the Marines revisited the public and private farms at Rose Hill after the drought had broken and wrote that “Vines of every sort seem to flourish; melons, cucumbers, and pumpkins run with unbounded luxuriancy.” Tench also mentioned the important antiscorbutic citrus fruits associated with a seaman’s experience of maritime refreshment: “Other fruits are yet in their infancy; but oranges, lemons, and figs . . . will, I dare believe, in a few years become plentiful.” For those accustomed to long sea voyages, these fruits were just as important as fresh beef. Indeed, it is evident in journals and log books that beef, fruit, and vegetables or “Greens” were the essential seamen’s foods supplied at ports of shelter and refreshment. Sergeant of Marines James Scott records in his “Remarks on a Passage to Botany Bay,” that, while the First Fleet was moored at Rio de Janeiro “Wee [sic] had 1. lb ¼ of fresh beef P[er] Day Oringes [sic] Sold, one hundred for. 7d ½. Beef 1d ¾ P[er] 1 lb.” Six years later William Wilson wrote that the HMS Swift while moored at “Rio Jenerio [sic] Harbour Received 300 lbs fresh Beef, served Vegetable & Oranges to the Ship’s Company.” The ship obtained vegetables and oranges and served them daily until weighing anchor. Such essential fresh foods were regarded as integral staples of a port of shelter and refreshment. A seaman’s life depended upon them.

Tench also noticed intermingling of agricultural and horticultural crops in gardens and cultivated plots. In his account of the settlement he wrote that, “In passing through the main street I was pleased to observe the
gardens of the convicts look better than I had expected to find them. The vegetables in general are not mean, but the stalks of maize, with which they are interspersed, appear green and flourishing.” In continuing his walk, Tench observed, “a little patch of wheat in the governor’s garden,” which was sown in drills into soil that had been marled, and he learned that the Rose Hill marl was an experiment to improve the light, loamy soil at the public settlements. Settlers sowed turnips in expectation that they “would help to meliorate and prepare it [recently cleared and cultivated ground] for next year.” Such practices and plants were characteristic of an improved husbandry consisting of a mixed system of arable and livestock farming generally known in England as the “Norfolk system.”

The improved husbandry of mixed farming included row crops, the spade and hand-hoe culture of commercial and market garden crops, and the general cottage and kitchen garden supply of seasonal flowers, fruits, herbs, and vegetables. Convicts and others put this garden-culture of “diggings, hoeing, and planting” associated with intensive agriculture to good use in the Antipodean colony where, as in England, “improved agriculture was in some sense the result of the application of garden methods to the arable.”

Hand-hoeing was especially associated with the improved husbandry of cultivating poorer “turnip soils” in a “four years’ course” of crop rotation. Deployed by convicts equipped with English spades and hoes and supplied with European roots and seeds, the improved methods of agriculture transformed sods of a “middling” sandy-loam soil into productive seed-beds of mixed farms and gardens. Gardeners required manure to sustain the production of an improved husbandry. Tench wrote that, “With it a supply of common vegetables might be procured by diligence in all seasons.” When Lieutenant-Governor Grose disembarked in the autumn of 1792, he beheld to his “great astonishment” the implications of mixed farming. He found himself “surrounded with gardens that flourish and produce fruit of every description” and realized that, “All that is wanting to put this colony into an independent state is one ship freighted with corn and black cattle.”

The gardens that astonished Grose formed a vital part of the cultivated ground that was integral to the colony’s capacity to refresh voyagers, seafarers, and whalers as well as its settlers (see Figure 5). All of the gardens and cultivated plots were not situated in ideal locations. Spanish voyagers,
who inspected the colony during 1793, remarked on the “pains” that the “industrious colonists” take in cultivating and watering gardens that grew “Every kind of greens and vegetable” and “as much cabbages, pumpkins, and turnips as they need.” They also observed “Several colonists with wheelbarrows carrying fertile soil for considerable distances in order to cover the bare rocky outcrops to make small gardens” in the “outskirts of Port Jackson.”

By October 1792 “Garden ground” comprised a substantial number of acres. Private garden plots and allotments of “different people, including convict’s gardens” comprised 85 percent of this acreage. Gardens of settlers at the various settlements amounted to thirteen and a quarter acres (11 percent). The governor’s garden accounted for four acres (3 percent) of this area, three acres of which were in vines. In terms of the total area of the settlement, cultivated “Garden ground” was small, but not insignificant. It was more than half the acreage in wheat and more than five times the acreage in barley. In terms of size and the expected yield of a cottager’s plot, “Garden ground” was capable of yielding more than half a million cabbages.
When the Spanish voyagers arrived, they witnessed a bountiful and secure hinterland in the making (see Figures 6 and 7). Antonio Cavanilles, an officer with the Spanish explorer, Alejandro Malaspina, observed that:

As we approached Parramatta the land changed in appearance: the view was delightful because of the number of cultivated fields. It delights the soul to contemplate the happy change of conduct in men who, if they had been harmful to their homeland, were today useful because of their application to work and because of the constant efforts by which they were transforming a rude, wild country into a pleasant garden. Hardly having been in existence for five years, it had the appearance of an old establishment. What agreeable changes agriculture causes! And what important results a wise Government may produce! [emphasis added].

The following year when the whaler, Speedy, returned to refresh and refit at Port Jackson, Captain Melville's surgeon also remarked on the changes he saw since his last visit. He noticed "a variety of Farms, scatter'd thro' the Country, and belonging to the different Settlers." Like Cavanilles, he observed the agricultural transformation of the landscape, especially toward the head of the harbor, where he saw that "the Country begins to assume a more favourable prospect, and from the Field of Mars, to Rose Hill, we have one continued view of Meadow cover'd with grass, and fields of Corn—It is indeed pleasing to observe the progressive Improvement of this Country, and to remark the great difference that has taken place, for the better, since 1791." Subsequent adventurers, voyagers, seafarers, and whalers who refreshed at Port Jackson ate the fruit of that planting, which the early Spanish voyagers and English whalers saw.

Within a decade after Governor Phillip's departure, the emergence of an Antipodean port of shelter and refreshment with specialized quayage of European standing and imperial scale was evident. The neo-European economy associated with this maritime activity and function was also "firmly established" by 1805. Members of Nicolas Baudin's French expedition of exploration and scientific research spent five months at Port Jackson from June to November 1802 and were "completely astonished at the flourishing state in which we found this singular, and distant establishment" (see Figure 8). Like other late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century explorers and voyagers who dropped anchor and
Figure 6. Fernando Brambila,-view of Sydney from the South-West towards Bennelong Point from behind the Lieutenant-Governor’s House, Apr.
1793, pen, ink, and wash on paper, 31 by 60 cm. British Library, K. Top. 124 (supp.), 45. By permission of the British Library Board.
Figure 7. Fernando Brambilla, [View of Parwanana from near Rose Hill, Apr. 1793], pen, ink, and wash on paper, 38 by 47 cm. British Library, K. Top. 124 (suppl.) 44, by permission of the British Library Board.
Figure 8. *A View of Sydney Cove, New South Wales*. A copy of the drawing by Edward Dayes from a picture painted at the colony, c. 1802. Mitchell Library, V1/1802/1. By permission of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.
disembarked at Port Jackson, the harbor's beauty and security impressed the Frenchmen. In recording their astonishment they also described this Antipodean port as experienced European seafarers accustomed to refreshing their crews, as well as refitting and loading their ships for long voyages at ports of shelter and refreshment.\textsuperscript{32}

On their arrival, the French voyagers observed fortifications, specialized quayage, and facilities of a major port with "several private docks." There were a great number of "vessels . . . from different parts of the world" being careened or refitted for voyages, discharging cargo into warehouses, or being loaded from the magazines, store-houses, and manufactories of the colony. They saw a hospital "capable of containing two or three hundred sick" so that, "in a few days after the arrival" of a squadron, it would be "ready to receive such of the crew as were sick" with scurvy. They also viewed the many and varied hinterland activities that sustained Port Jackson and its "Sydney Town." They saw brick-fields that furnished "a considerable quantity of bricks and tiles for the public and private buildings of the colony." They also inspected the "vast garden" of Captain William Patterson, the lieutenant-governor-general, which contained a "great number of useful vegetables . . . procured from every part of the globe." On the hill behind the governor's house and its "fine garden, that extends to the sea-shore," they noted "the windmill, the bakehouse, and the state ovens, that are used for making ship biscuit . . . [and are] capable of furnishing from fifteen, to eighteen hundred pounds per day," some of which they obtained to replenish their "exhausted" supplies. François Péron, one of the naturalists on the expedition, remarked that "All these great maritime operations gave to the place a character of importance and activity far beyond what we expected to meet with on shores, scarcely known to Europeans, even by name, and the interest we took in the scene, was only equalled [sic] by our admiration."\textsuperscript{33}

It was not simply as interested observers that the French voyagers admired these hinterland activities and services but also as beneficiaries. These "great maritime operations" brought them skillfully to a safe anchorage, restored their scurvy-ridden crew to health, and refitted their ships to proceed on their expedition. As Péron said: "we were enabled to reclothe our crews, who were in want of every thing [sic]; repair our ships, purchase one, instead of that we had lost; and be completely prepared for continuing our voyage."\textsuperscript{34}
A few years later William Kent, who first voyaged to New South Wales in the 1790s as commander of HMS Reliance, presented a memorial to the Grenville administration “for sending forth a Squadron against the Spaniards on the Coast of Chile and Peru.” Kent’s proposal to use the convict colony as a naval base entailed the awesome prospects for the Spanish that Malaspina perceived when his expedition visited the colony in 1793. The resulting Grenville administration plan to use Port Jackson as a fully operational port of shelter and refreshment was diverted. Nevertheless, it highlighted the continuity and scale of British imperial designs and visions of empire, which had underpinned the Pitt administration’s mounting, equipping, and establishment of the convict colony in the 1780s. The British government expected such ports and their hinterlands to refresh and provide “for the maintenance of squadrons, or corsairs” for offensive operations.35

Neither William Kent nor Captain Melville and his surgeon, nor Governor Arthur Phillip of the British Royal Navy, viewed the “Botany Bay” penal settlement at Port Jackson as a peasant economy or as a convict dumping ground; nor did other European voyagers, sailors, or whalers. Rather, they witnessed a maritime settlement in the making at a British port of shelter and refreshment that was designed to produce an assured Antipodean resource of refreshment, services, and supplies essential to a distant seaport and forward operational base linking Great Britain to the Pacific Rim. Without such a port in the Antipodes, Britain could not ensure the development of her maritime self-sufficiency and supremacy in the New World of the Pacific. Viewing the convict colony from such an imperial, maritime perspective, cultivates anew the colonial landscape of agricultural imperialism in the British territory of New South Wales and aligns the stories of convict settlers, early agriculture, and imperial designs at Port Jackson as part of the transformation of “a rude, wild country into a pleasant garden.”36

NOTES


17. The vessels sailing in 1793 and fishing in New South Wales were listed as William (302 tons), Speedy (313 tons), Resolution (317 tons), and Britannia (305 tons). The average size of ships in the southern whale fishery was 233 tons in 1786–7 and 296 tons in 1796. The optimum size for large ship-rigged (square) whalers was 300 tons. S. Enderby and Sons, “Vessels employ’d in the Southern Whale Fishery Sailed in the Year 1793,” Jan. 10, 1794, MS. A 322: 535–36, ML; A. G. E. Jones, “The British Southern Whale and Seal Fisheries,” The Great Circle 3 (Apr. 1981): 20–29, part 1, “A General Overview,” Table 5 at p. 25.


name were clearly distinguished in the table compiled by Enderby and Sons, "Vessels employ'd in the Southern Whale Fishery Sailed in the Year 1793."


21. Chief-Surgeon White to Mr. Skill, Apr. 17, 1790, Historical Records of New South Wales, I, Part 2, 332–34; Ross to Nepean, Nov. 16, 1788, CO 201/3: 191–92, 191r and 191v, PRO; Ross to Nepean, July 18, 1788, CO 201/3, 173, PRO; Iain H. Murray, Australian Christian Life from 1788: An Introduction and an Anthology (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 8, 15. Governor Phillip's personal servant, Henry Dodd, who was in charge of the government farm at Rose Hill, estimated for Captain Tench that the "Roots and stumps... account for a tenth part of surface in every acre"; Fitzhardinge, Sydney's First Four Years, 194; George Mackaness, ed., Some Private Correspondence of the Rev. Samuel Marsden and Family, 1794–1824 (Sydney: George Mackaness, 1942), 23–5.

22. Anon. convict at Port Jackson to Mr. Thomas Olds, of James-street, Oxford Road, Dec. 29, 1790 and letter from an Officer, Port Jackson, Apr. 14, 1790, Historical Records of New South Wales, II: 758–62; Henry Waterhouse to James Luttrel, Apr. 14, 1790, MS. 6544: 405–10, ML.


24. Fitzhardinge, Sydney's First Four Years, 264; James Scott, Remarks on a Passage to Botany Bay 1787–1792, 14; July 5–11, 1794, "Proceedings of a Log on Board HMS Swift from the 9th Day of Dec' 1793 to the 16th Day of Sept' 1794 Kept by me (William) Wilson Master," Adm. 52/3474, PRO.


