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Spirit of democracy, 1788–1900

When the First Fleet sailed into Botany Bay in January 1788, the British honours system was small in size and restricted in reach. Closely linked to military service, honours were rare, and determinedly aristocratic. The concept of merit was not entirely lacking in their bestowal, but it was understood quite differently to twenty-first-century definitions, and the idea that birth was an element was just beginning to fade. In continental Europe, ideas of merit had become more important within honours systems during the early 1700s, and this shift was likely also occurring in the British system, albeit slowly.¹ Unlike in the rest of Europe, where honours were increasingly a diplomatic instrument given to foreign dignitaries, and where orders could include thousands of members, the British orders remained strictly limited—the largest being the Bath, at 36 knights—and were rarely given to foreigners.² British honours were also almost entirely male, except in times of queens regnant, when a woman became the sovereign of the various orders.³ While a small number of women held peerages in their own right, European innovations such as Russia's Order of St Catherine, an order for ladies created in 1713, had not been copied.⁴

1 Antti Matikkala, *The Orders of Knighthood and the Formation of the British Honours System, 1660–1760* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 185.

2 Matikkala, *Orders of Knighthood*, 253.

3 The limited role that a few noble women had once had, as associates (though not formal members) of the Order of the Garter, had disappeared during the reign of Henry VIII (1509–1547). Raymond B. Waddington, 'Elizabeth I and the Order of the Garter', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 24, no. 1 (1993): 97–113. doi.org/10.2307/2541800.

4 Matikkala, *Orders of Knighthood*, 243, 253.

Neither had imperial expansion led to significant innovation. Although ideas for an American peerage were occasionally floated, none had eventuated.⁵ Honours were not in principle unavailable in the colonies, but the small size of the orders of knighthood made it unlikely that membership would be bestowed on their residents. There was also considerable resistance to the idea of creating hereditary titles in new and sometimes unruly societies, where the social order was not as firmly established as in the old country, and where it was by no means clear that a leading family would continue to hold its position down the generations. Knights bachelor and baronets were likewise rarely conferred. Honours came to the colonies most frequently only in the persons of British-born aristocratic governors or military men who had already been honoured, or who received honours for their administrative efforts or military service in the colonies. As were such men themselves, honours were mere sojourners in the outposts of empire.

Even if that had not been so, a penal colony was not an auspicious location to expect a lavish distribution of honours. New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land had been chosen as locations for the transportation of convicts after the loss of the North American colonies meant Britain could no longer exile prisoners there. While free settlers soon began to join the colonists, and emancipated convicts to build productive lives in their new home, the stain of being born in a penal settlement was not easily left behind. As honours were only likely to be granted to elite men of British descent, many other groups of people—including non-English-speaking immigrants, Indigenous Australians, women, and those of the lower classes—were unlikely to receive them. At least to begin with, then, the residents of these first Australasian colonies were unlikely to see honours conferred among their number. By the end of the nineteenth century and the coming of Federation, however, this situation had changed dramatically. Although women and those not of Anglo-Celtic descent remained almost entirely excluded from the system, the number of honours bestowed on Australians had increased sharply, sparking debates over the acceptability and role of imperial honours and titles in these New World colonies, where there had developed a powerful spirit of democracy and egalitarianism.

5 Ged Martin, *Bunyip Aristocracy: The New South Wales Constitution Debate of 1853 and Hereditary Institutions in the British Colonies* (Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), 16–17.

Making colonial honours, 1815–1868

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the British honours system would be transformed and expanded, eventually coming to encompass the entire empire. This slow process of expansion began in 1815 with the Order of the Bath, which was enlarged to three grades, and granted a much increased total membership, in order to meet the demand for recognition of military services created by the Peninsular War.⁶ Efforts to further reform it during the next 30 years, however, met with scant success, while several proposals to extend honours to the colonies were equally unsuccessful. In the 1820s Lord Bathurst thought to establish an order specifically for Canada, but the idea was not supported by King George IV. Creation of a colonial order was twice proposed in the 1830s, derailed on those occasions by the expense that would be incurred in producing regalia.⁷ But the idea of colonial honours would not go away. With the empire expanding, there was an increasing hunger for honours in the colonial service, which could not be satisfied within the limits of the existing highly restricted orders. Many colonies were advancing in wealth and importance, and beginning to look for more responsibility for their own governance, and greater recognition of their significance to the mother country. Moreover, to some British politicians and statesmen, honours seemed a bulwark against runaway democracy in these unruly New World settlements, for they might bring aspects of the established order and hierarchy of home to the far reaches of empire. As the secretary of state for war and the colonies Lord Glenelg expressed it, distributing honours would ‘draw more closely the bonds connecting the British colonies with the mother country, and ... keep alive in settlements so remote from the seat of government, the spirit of the institutions of Great Britain’.⁸

The matter of further reforming the Bath, and with it the question of colonial honours, began to receive more serious attention in the 1840s. Action was spurred by the growing need to be able to reward civil service,

6 Peter Galloway, *The Order of the Bath* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2006), 83–85, 116–118.

7 Bruce Knox, ‘Democracy, Aristocracy and Empire: The Provision of Colonial Honours, 1818–1870’, *Australian Historical Studies* 25, no. 99 (1992): 248. doi.org/10.1080/10314619208595909.

8 Public Record Office (hereafter PRO): CO/447/1, draft letter, approved by Lord Glenelg, to A. J. Spearman, 30 November 1839, cited by Peter Galloway, *The Order of St Michael and St George* ([London]: Third Millennium for the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, 2000), 61. Note that Glenelg had left office in February 1839; this letter may be incorrectly dated.

not only in the United Kingdom but across the empire. Continuing imperial expansion, along with moves toward self-government in the more established settler colonies, had made it clear that some way of rewarding civilian service throughout the empire was necessary.⁹ For their part, the Australasian colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land were growing in population, prosperity, and pride, and beginning to seek greater autonomy from the home authorities. Free settlers were arriving in increasing numbers, and beginning to outnumber those who had arrived as convicts; in New South Wales transportation had been suspended in 1840, while by the middle of the decade it had become the focus of sustained opposition in Van Diemen's Land.¹⁰ Meanwhile, European settlement was also growing at Moreton Bay in the north, and on the Swan River in the west, and new colonies without a convict past were being established in South Australia and New Zealand. As the Canadian and Australasian colonies developed, the contributions of their governors and officials gained in visibility at home, but it was no easy task to find room for them in the small and overloaded honours system.¹¹

Extending the Bath enough to allow it to fulfil the function of supplying colonial honours was not the answer. Such a large expansion, it was feared, might decrease the esteem in which the order was held.¹² Instead Lord Stanley, the secretary of state for war and the colonies from 1841 to 1845, proposed the creation of separate colonial honours. In early 1844 he raised the possibility of a new order of knighthood for the empire, which would not be as prestigious as the Bath, but would allow many more people to be honoured. In order to prevent an impression that colonial service was not equal to service at home, he advocated multiple new orders—for the West Indies, British North America, and Australasia—as well as the reservation of a number of places in the Bath for the colonies.¹³ A circular despatch to the colonial governors sought their opinions on the idea. Mixed responses were received. Sir George Gipps, in New South Wales, supported the idea of an order of knighthood for the whole empire as a means to 'strengthen the bonds' between the colonies and the 'Mother Country', suggesting it should have three classes to which colonists could be appointed according

9 Galloway, *Order of the Bath*, 169.

10 Transportation to New South Wales was briefly and controversially revived later in the decade, with the last convicts reaching the colony in 1850.

11 Martin, *Bunyip Aristocracy*, 12.

12 Galloway, *Order of the Bath*, 170.

13 Martin, *Bunyip Aristocracy*, 33; Galloway, *Order of the Bath*, 170; Knox, 'Democracy, Aristocracy and Empire', 248–249.

to their standing.¹⁴ But while the South Australian governor, Sir George Grey, also backed the idea, Sir John Eardley Wilmot in Van Diemen's Land thought there would be few men in his colony who could merit appointment to such an order.¹⁵

In any case, Stanley left office in late 1845, and the idea was not pursued. Modest reforms were made to the Order of the Bath, opening it to civil appointments in the second and third classes and tidying up anomalies and anachronisms in the statutes, but pressure on it continued to build.¹⁶ The idea of colonial honours was ripe for revival. In 1851 the governor-general of all the Australian possessions, Sir Charles FitzRoy, proposed the creation of a colonial order to an unreceptive Colonial Office.¹⁷ Not long after, with the Colonial Office having agreed that New South Wales should have responsible government, a scheme of hereditary honours was championed by William Charles Wentworth, a key figure in the campaign seeking responsible government.¹⁸ Embodying an assumption that 'social hierarchy was essential to social stability', Wentworth's plan—which would eventually have seen the creation of an upper legislative house composed of local peers—promised to embed the existing social elite as a constitutionally enshrined aristocracy, both ensuring against loss of position stemming from decline in individual fortunes and encouraging among the populace 'habits of deference which would prevent the triumph of democracy'.¹⁹ Even with moderate conservatives, however, the scheme was unpopular, and it was lampooned by radicals. Famously, Daniel Deniehy ridiculed the idea of an Australian nobility

14 Knox, 'Democracy, Aristocracy and Empire', 250; Martin, *Bunyip Aristocracy*, 34–35; Jonathon Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour: Symbols, Rituals, and Conventions of Colonial Honours' (Master's thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1997), 105–6. See also Paul de Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees: The Upper Class in Victoria 1850–1880* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991), 207.

15 Martin, *Bunyip Aristocracy*, 35.

16 Galloway, *Order of the Bath*, 176. Previously, while civilians could be appointed to the top level of the Bath (knight grand cross, GCB), they could not be appointed knight commander (KCB) or companion (CB). Galloway, *Order of the Bath*, 118.

17 Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 84–85.

18 This was not the first time a colonial peerage had been considered. Creation of a local aristocracy that would supply such an upper house was debated for Quebec in 1791, and the idea was raised again in Canada in 1794–1795 and 1818–1819. In Australia, an upper house of hereditary title-holders had been suggested in South Australia in 1849, and Wentworth's scheme was very like a proposal for an hereditary upper house put forward by Supreme Court Justice John Dickinson in 1852. Martin, *Bunyip Aristocracy*, 21–30, 45–46, 76–80; Andrew Tink, *William Charles Wentworth: Australia's Greatest Native Son* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2009), 235.

19 C. N. Connolly, 'The Origins of the Nominated Upper House in New South Wales', *Historical Studies* 20, no. 78 (1982): 53. doi.org/10.1080/10314618208595671.

as a 'bunyip aristocracy', a phrase that would echo down the years in critiques of honours.²⁰ (A bunyip is a water-dwelling creature from Indigenous Australian mythology; the word came to mean 'humbug' or 'pretender'.²¹) Before long, the hereditary element of the Constitution Bill was dropped, leaving an upper house that was nominated, rather than elected, but not aristocratic.²²

While the creation of local colonial aristocracies appeared a faint possibility by the 1850s, the prospects for a systematic extension of some form of honours to the colonies soon began to seem brighter. With the advent of responsible government, Queen Victoria had warmed to the possibility, as a means to assert the unity of the colonies and the mother country. As well as appointing Canadians and Australians companions (CB) and knights commander (KCB) in the Order of the Bath, she supported the conferral of baronetcies on native-born colonists, albeit in small numbers.²³ Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, who became colonial secretary in June 1858, also supported the bestowal of honours in the colonies, seeing in them a way of promoting a form of aristocracy in these overseas territories, which might both join the colonies more closely to Britain and preserve them from the dangers of democracy.²⁴ In a confidential circular in January 1859, Lytton sought names of colonists who might receive CBs or baronetcies. Before replies had been received from all colonies, however, his party had left office. Lytton's successors did not pursue the plan, leaving honours to continue to be conferred idiosyncratically, as each colonial secretary considered most appropriate.²⁵

Thus by the middle of the century, despite numerous proposals, separate colonial honours remained merely an idea, and those resident or serving in the colonies rarely received appointment to either the orders of

20 John Hirst, *The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy: New South Wales 1848–1884* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988), 37; Martin, *Bunyip Aristocracy*, 114; Tink, *Wentworth*, 237–38.

21 Ann Curthoys and Jessie Mitchell, *Taking Liberty: Indigenous Rights and Settler Self-Government in Colonial Australia, 1830–1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 227–28, quotes on 228. doi.org/10.1017/9781316027035. As Curthoys and Mitchell have shown, John Dunmore Lang had also used the term 'bunyip' to ridicule the idea of a local nobility, in response to Dickenson's 1852 proposal. Curthoys and Mitchell, *Taking Liberty*, 228.

22 Connolly, 'Origins of the Nominated Upper House', 53; Hirst, *Strange Birth*, 35; Martin, *Bunyip Aristocracy*, 118–42.

23 Knox, 'Democracy, Aristocracy and Empire', 252–54. The prime minister, Lord Derby, preferred the idea of creating separate orders for the colonies, but Victoria considered that this might be divisive rather than unifying. Knox, 'Democracy, Aristocracy and Empire', 254.

24 Knox, 'Democracy, Aristocracy and Empire', 251–58.

25 Martin, *Bunyip Aristocracy*, 165; Knox, 'Democracy, Aristocracy and Empire', 258–60.

knighthood or the peerage. Hereditary honours, in particular, were never viewed favourably by officials in the Colonial Office, who tended to be sceptical that they could be supported in the colonies, where individuals might not maintain their wealth and status, or remain long in the colony in which the honour was bestowed. Appointments to the orders of knighthood, meanwhile, were bound to be rare because the numbers allowed by statute were tightly restricted, and because colonial service was seldom as highly regarded as that in the metropole. Moreover, the nature of colonial society itself seemed to imperial officials to be opposed to the extension of honours to the colonies in any systematic way. To those considering the possibility, there appeared considerable difficulties in introducing honours into the disordered world of the colonies, where assumptions about the natural order of society appeared not to apply, and where an egalitarian ideology frequently seemed to be in evidence. Such concerns continually influenced the decisions of imperial authorities to reject proposals for formal systems of colonial honours.²⁶

The colonial order: St Michael and St George

Nevertheless, after decades of relative inertia, Britain's honours system was about to enter a period of rapid transformation. Over the next 60 years it would be vastly increased in size, and remodelled into a truly imperial institution. The first sign of this metamorphosis was the creation in 1861 of a new order, to be called the Order of the Star of India, to provide a vehicle for recognition in the 'jewel in the crown' of the empire. The turn of the rest of the empire came in 1868, when the Order of St Michael and St George was revamped to become a general colonial honour. Created in 1818 to be given to the residents of Malta and the Ionian islands after they came under British jurisdiction, its rationale had disappeared in 1864, when the Ionian protectorate was abandoned.²⁷ The Duke of Newcastle, colonial secretary as the cession of the islands approached, sought advice on the feasibility of extending the order to the rest of the empire, but the idea was rejected by his successor, Edward Cardwell. After the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos became colonial secretary in 1867, the question of the order's future was revisited, and the Queen and the prime minister,

26 Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 93, 120–21.

27 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 59.

Benjamin Disraeli, accepted Buckingham's proposal to use it to satisfy the need for recognition across the empire.²⁸ Reorganised, the order was restricted to 25 knights grand cross (GCMG), 60 knights commander (KCMG), and 100 commanders (CMG), the quotas chosen to avoid the charge that it was too freely given and therefore of little value.²⁹

The order's new role, according to the circular despatch that announced the changes, was an acknowledgement of the empire's importance to Victoria, and to Britain. Observing the 'constant progress' of the empire, which had provided 'increased opportunities' for service to Queen and country, Victoria had decided that 'a special form of distinction' was required for the colonies, as it had been for India. She believed, so the despatch said, that the move would supply

evidence of the importance which her Majesty attaches to her colonial dominions, as integral parts of the British Empire, of her constant interest in their progress, and of her desire that services of which they are the scene or the occasion, may not pass without adequate and appropriate recognition.³⁰

Others, however, would consider the whole idea of a colonial order flawed. William Gisborne, a civil servant and Cabinet minister in New Zealand, was one. Not only did the colonies differ greatly from each other, he was to observe in 1886, 'presenting no common ground of earning distinction', but '[t]he effect ... of creating such an order is to make many think that colonists are not treated on equal terms ... with their fellow-subjects in the United Kingdom', thus tending against rather than towards 'the closer union of all portions of the empire'.³¹

Among the first to be appointed to the newly enlarged order was Colonel Thomas Gore Browne, who was retiring as governor of Tasmania, and who had previously held the same post in St Helena and New Zealand. He became a KCMG, while a former premier of New South Wales, Charles Cowper, was made a CMG, as was the Victorian government botanist, Baron Ferdinand von Mueller. Over the following years, appointments were generally men who had given long and loyal service around the empire, either as residents of the colonies or during tours of

28 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 62–70.

29 Knox, 'Democracy, Aristocracy and Empire', 262.

30 'Order of Knighthood in the Colonies', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1869, 5.

31 William Gisborne, *New Zealand Rulers and Statesmen: 1840 to 1885* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1886), 145.

duty.³² Enlarged in 1877, the order also began to be given to members of the diplomatic service and others whose service was carried out abroad, as well as to eminent foreign nationals, with the Foreign Office receiving an allocation of awards in 1879.³³

So far as the Australasian colonies were concerned, the honours system had now reached essentially the shape it would retain for the rest of the century, and into the next. Regular enlargements of the statutory limits of the various orders, along with the creation of new ones designed to meet specific needs, continued to expand its size and reach incrementally. Two more Indian orders—the Order of the Indian Empire and the Order of the Crown of India—were created in 1877, when Victoria took the title of empress. The Distinguished Service Order was instituted in 1886 as a companion to the Order of the Bath, to provide for junior ranks. A decade later, in 1896, the Royal Victorian Order was created to be an honour given by the Queen personally, rather than on ministerial advice. Intended to reward personal service to the sovereign, it had five levels, and there was no restriction on the number of awards that could be made. None of this growth, however, extended or transformed the colonial experience of honours as greatly as had the reorganisation of the Order of St Michael and St George.

Conferring honours in Australasia, 1870–1900

Developing a system of colonial honours greatly increased the number of colonists and colonial officials who received honours, as contemporaries recognised. ‘Only a generation ago’, ran an article in the Perth *Daily News* in 1890, ‘no colonist would ever dream of receiving some titular distinction from his Queen’.³⁴ From the 1870s, however, this had begun to change, and before long it was a common refrain in the press that honours were being given too liberally, and were losing their value. But who were these multiplying recipients? Some patterns can be easily discerned. In a study of colonial honours during the nineteenth century, Jonathon Satherley-Peacocke identified the general trends: the GCMG ‘became

32 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 72, 77.

33 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 78–97.

34 ‘By Favour’, *Daily News* (Perth), 20 May 1890, 3; ‘By Favour’, *Inquirer and Commercial News* (Perth), 21 May 1890, 6.

the preserve of secretaries of state for the colonies, governors, and retired colonial politicians of considerable distinction and achievement'; the KCMG 'became associated with colonial ministerial office (particularly premierships) and scientific achievement'; and the CMG went to 'relatively minor colonial politicians, and a few leading civil servants'.³⁵ At times awards became almost automatic. By the end of the century, new colonial governors received KCMGs on appointment, while the chief justice of each colony could expect a knight bachelorship.³⁶ There is no doubt that many more colonists received honours after 1868, although to the eyes of a twenty-first-century viewer, accustomed to biannual lists containing several hundred names, the numbers remained relatively small. In June 1885, for instance, nine men with connections to the Australian colonies appeared in the Queen's Birthday list of appointments to, and promotions in, the Order of St Michael and St George; 10 years later, the six Australian colonies received a total of four KCMGs and one CMG.³⁷

Naturally, as time went on, increasing numbers of recipients were Australasian-born. The colonial honours system also displayed much greater social mobility than existed in its counterpart at home in Britain. Individuals in the colonies could more easily rise to positions where honours were likely—such as that of premier or parliamentary speaker—despite a background likely to have debarred them from such high office in Britain.³⁸ Perhaps the most famous example is Sir Henry Parkes. His 'erratic colonial career', observed Penny Russell, has 'often serve[d] as an emblem for social mobility in nineteenth-century Australia'. Enjoying a 'rapid rise from unemployed to labourer to toyshop owner, newspaper editor and at last successful politician', he became premier of New South Wales five times, and received both a KCMG (1877) and a GCMG (1888), even though he also went bankrupt three times.³⁹ Such social permeability caused some concern among British, and occasionally also colonial, commentators, who perceived a lack of dignity and order in the unruly colonial parliaments full of men of varied, and sometimes rough,

35 Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 131.

36 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 124; Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 164.

37 *Supplement to the London Gazette*, no. 25477, 6 June 1885, 2631–32; *Supplement to the London Gazette*, no. 26628, 25 May 1895, 3080.

38 See Hirst, *Strange Birth*, 176–78.

39 Penny Russell, 'The Brash Colonial: Class and Comportment in Nineteenth-Century Australia', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 12 (2002): 439. doi.org/10.1017/S008044010200018X.

backgrounds.⁴⁰ It must have seemed a topsy-turvy world indeed where such persons could receive royal honours and social precedence, perhaps even being placed above individuals of more genteel birth and upbringing on official occasions.

Nevertheless, there were limits to this social mobility, and one of them was gender. As Parkes's own wives experienced, it was much more difficult for women to rise in colonial society than for men. Men who had been knighted and received the title of 'Sir', stated Beverley Kingston, 'were treated with circumspection according to their place in the political system', but 'their ladies could be snubbed or ridiculed if their behaviour was unacceptable to the select inner circle of the governor's wife and her friends'.⁴¹ Two of Parkes's three wives, Clarinda and Eleanor, faced just this kind of social exclusion.⁴² According to Russell, 'the sort of economic or political power that could force social recognition' for men 'remained virtually unattainable' for women 'throughout the nineteenth century'.⁴³ Though women might gain a title along with their husbands, their opportunities for social mobility were powerfully limited by their gender and judgements about their respectability.

Selecting individuals for honours was not simply a matter of positions held, however, and over the last decades of the nineteenth century the process by which distinctions were conferred evolved as much as did the rest of the system. For many years, the practice had been somewhat haphazard. Rather than regular lists of awards at predetermined times, individuals negotiated honours through patronage relationships, and there was no 'uniformity, consistency, or clarity of procedure'.⁴⁴ Nor were there clear selection criteria. As Satherley-Peacocke noted, '[t]he individual views of successive secretaries of state on criteria of economic, political, and social standing [were] highly personalised and lack[ed] institutional permanence'.⁴⁵ Among the criteria he identified prior to the reinvention of the Order of St Michael and St George were 'a degree of dignified

40 See Hirst, *Strange Birth*, 174–78.

41 Beverley Kingston, 'The Lady and the Australian Girl: Some Thoughts on Nationalism and Class', in *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*, eds Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986), 31.

42 Russell, 'Brash Colonial', 440–42.

43 Russell, 'Brash Colonial', 443.

44 Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 77.

45 Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 103.

wealth' sufficient to maintain the distinction, some form of Crown service or other services that had advanced the colony, and 'the vague criterion of social pre-eminence', as well as suitable conduct and character.⁴⁶

After 1868 more systematic policies and processes began gradually to take shape. Some indication of selection criteria for the new colonial order was provided by the statutes, which stipulated that those appointed would hold (or have held) 'High and Confidential Offices', or 'render Extraordinary and Important Services to Us as Sovereign ... in relation to any of Our Colonial Possessions', or 'become eminently Distinguished therein by their Talents, Merits, Virtues, Loyalty, or Services'.⁴⁷ Discussing the selection and appointment process in this period, Satherley-Peacocke observed both 'formal and informal criteria'. The formal related to 'exhibited qualities of eminence, loyalty, achievement, and performance in their service to the Crown'; the informal encompassed attributes such as

the high dignity of current office within the colony; some degree of individual political power or scientific knowledge; some degree of personal wealth to sustain the dignity of the honour; and the perception that the honour would prove 'gratifying' to the colony in general.⁴⁸

There were also obstacles to distinction, including lack of sufficient wealth to maintain one's new dignity, having previously declined an offered honour, or a wife deemed unfit to bear the title of 'Lady' and to gain precedence at Government House.⁴⁹

A key part of decisions was precedent. The Colonial Office was increasingly aware of, and careful about, the example that awards might set.⁵⁰ In part, this was out of necessity, for if honours were given without due regard to the precedent they might suggest, sticky situations could follow, especially in colonial settings believed to be marked by intense jealousies. Colonial hopefuls were quite willing to attempt to use precedent to their advantage. In 1893, for example, the president of the Victorian Legislative Council, William Zeal, declined the offer of a knight bachelorship and requested instead a KCMG, presumably aware that four other heads of colonial

46 Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 100–101.

47 Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 127–28.

48 Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 190.

49 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 117, 125–27; Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 239.

50 Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 151.

legislatures had received the higher award.⁵¹ Jealousies were not only individual; entire colonies could be slighted if care was not taken. The Colonial Office was thus also careful to distribute the Order of St Michael and St George as evenly across the empire as possible, bearing in mind not only geography but also population and level of responsibility.⁵² Even so, the Australasian colonies provide plenty of examples of injured dignity on behalf of particular locales. Sir Joseph Abbott, the speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, objected in 1894 to the bestowal of a KCMG upon Jenkin Coles, the South Australian speaker, for he himself was then only a knight bachelor:

I thought this was most unfair to me and also to the colony which I represent. I have had far greater responsibilities in public life ... and I have been now nearly four years Speaker and that over the Assembly of the Mother of the Australian colonies ... I do think that New South Wales ought to be at the top of the list, when honours are distributed.⁵³

Whether or not his protests were taken seriously in London, he must have thought them efficacious when, the very next year, he too received his KCMG.⁵⁴

Attempts to deal with these issues were part of a growing rationalisation and codification of process in relation to honours. Constitutional conventions developed as to who was to recommend whom, and what were the respective roles of colonial and imperial ministers, governors, and the Colonial Office. For honours in the Order of St Michael and St George, recommendations were made to the Queen by the secretary of state for the colonies, generally after being received from colonial governors and scrutinised by the registrar of the order, an office held by a member of the Colonial Office. Other distinctions, such as that of knight bachelor, were recommended to the sovereign by the British prime minister, who liaised over colonial appointments with the colonial secretary. In neither case did local colonial ministries have any formal role, except in the case of the title of 'Honourable', which premiers could request that retired

51 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 114.

52 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 110; Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 156.

53 PRO: CO/447/57, Sir Joseph Palmer Abbott to Sir Saul Samuel, 13 March 1894, cited in Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 114–15.

54 Bede Nairn, 'Abbott, Sir Joseph Palmer (1842–1901)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 4 September 2017, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/abbott-sir-joseph-palmer-2858/text4069.

executive members be permitted to hold for life. In practice, however, they were not wholly ignored, and by the end of the century it had become a tacit practice, if not a formal convention, that honours would not be given if a governor supported the nomination but his premier did not.⁵⁵ Announcements also became more regularised, with biannual lists at New Year and on the sovereign's official birthday (then in May) a standard feature of the calendar from 1888.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, 'a surprising degree of personalised and individualised informality survived', and would continue into the next century.⁵⁷

Elite, white, and male?

If trends may be detected in who received honours in the nineteenth century, it is equally possible to discern patterns regarding those who did not. For the first half of the century honours were overwhelmingly the preserve of men of Anglo-Celtic descent, and while innovations in the second half of the century went some way to transforming this situation, there were some important limits. The creation of the Indian orders was the most significant of these innovations, but there was also an increasing willingness to appoint high-ranking members of indigenous elites in other parts of the empire. British historian David Cannadine has characterised honours as a means by which to 'unify and merge different elites'. Just as the Order of St Patrick had been 'an instrument for the assimilation of the Irish colonial elite into the imperial metropolis', he argued, the various orders distributed across the empire were used 'to structure and unify this greater British world'.⁵⁸ A 'common lust for titles' thus 'brought together the British proconsular elite and the indigenous colonial elites into a unified, ranked, honorific body', creating 'one integrated, ordered, titular, transracial hierarchy'.⁵⁹ Understanding honours in this way

55 Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 139–57, 334; Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 126; Brian L. Blakeley, *The Colonial Office 1868–1892* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 131–33.

56 Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 317, 319; David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 300.

57 Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 369.

58 David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 86.

59 Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, 88, 90. On this coming together of elites, see also Jesse S. Palsetia, 'Honourable Machinations': The Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy Baronetcy and the Indian Response to the Honours System in India', *South Asia Research* 23, no. 1 (2003): 55–75. doi.org/10.1177/02627280030231003.

advances a somewhat different view of empire to that which emerges in scholarship about empire focused on ideas of difference. As a ‘vehicle for the extension of British social structures’ and ‘the setting for the projection of British social perceptions’ around the world, the empire was in Cannadine’s conception as much concerned with ‘the “construction of affinities”’ as with ‘the creation of “otherness”’; ‘it was in large part about the domestication of the exotic’.⁶⁰

Cannadine’s emphasis on similarities, rather than differences, and his characterisation of empire as being about ‘the construction of affinities’ is a useful corrective. Clearly, honours did perform this role within the empire, not only in the nineteenth century but well into the twentieth. The Indian orders were central in creating this new role for the honours system. In the settler colonies, however, honours performed this assimilationist role in a somewhat different way. It was not indigenous elites who were appointed to the orders of knighthood in the Australasian colonies or Canada, but white settlers.⁶¹ This is not surprising, since by the time of the widespread extension of honours to the colonies, and especially in the six Australian colonies, indigenous peoples were outnumbered and marginalised, and for many colonists posed no more than a minor nuisance to the project of developing the colony. In such a situation, if the possibility was considered at all, it must have seemed that there was little use in spending any of the small numbers of honours available to assimilate or conciliate such marginalised peoples.

Here it is illuminating to compare the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian colonies and Māori in New Zealand. Although both experienced great suffering and loss under colonisation, Māori were not marginalised and oppressed to the extent Aboriginal groups were. As far as can be ascertained, no Māori person was appointed to any of the orders of knighthood during the nineteenth century, but Māori were not entirely excluded from honours, and the possibility of such appointments was at least raised. When a New Zealand Cross was created by the governor, Sir George Bowen, to recognise service during the New Zealand wars of the 1840s–1860s, Māori men were

60 Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, xix.

61 See Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, 27–28, 87.

among the recipients.⁶² It was not impossible to imagine a Māori man being knighted, especially after four designated parliamentary seats were created for Māori in 1867. In 1892 one correspondent to a newspaper asked why a knighthood should not be bestowed on a leading Māori man, given that Indian princes had received baronetcies.⁶³ The closest Aboriginal Australians came to receiving honours in the nineteenth century, on the other hand, were so-called ‘king plates’, engraved metal plaques which hung around the neck, similar to the gorgets worn by infantry officers. These were given both to individuals identified as chiefs (‘kings’ or ‘queens’), and for a range of other reasons, such as to reward a service or to acknowledge someone considered to be the ‘last’ of a people.⁶⁴

If non-Anglo-Celtic men were incorporated into the honours system only in limited ways, women were even more thoroughly excluded. Two distinctions specifically for women were established in the second half of the nineteenth century—the Order of the Crown of India, which was generally given to the wives of governors and other officials, and the Royal Red Cross, a military nursing decoration—and occasionally a woman was appointed in her own right to one of the Indian orders.⁶⁵ A few women also held peerages in their own right. For the most part, however, women were ineligible for honours, and no way was open for them to receive titles, besides sharing in a husband’s knighthood, baronetcy, or peerage by way of the courtesy title ‘Lady’. Despite her own sex, Queen Victoria had refused to allow women to be eligible for the Royal Victorian Order, when it was begun in 1896.⁶⁶

62 Ministry for Culture and Heritage, ‘New Zealand Cross Created’, updated 12 April 2017, *New Zealand History*, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, accessed 4 September 2017, nzhistory.govt.nz/the-new-zealand-cross-is-instituted-by-order-in-council; Birkenhead Returned Services Association, ‘The New Zealand Cross (1869)’, Birkenhead Returned Services Association, accessed 6 June 2019, www.birkenheadrsa.com/gallantry-bravery-awards/new-zealand-cross-1869/.

63 *Manawatu Herald* (Foxton), 21 June 1892, 2.

64 Jakelin Troy, *King Plates: A History of Aboriginal Gorgets* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1993). Robert Aldrich and Cindy McCreery also remark on the use of king plates in colonial Australia, noting it as an example of ‘British ambivalence about the conferment of honors on “native” subjects’. Robert Aldrich and Cindy McCreery, ‘European Royals and Their Colonial Realms: Honors and Decorations’, in *Realms of Royalty: New Directions in Researching Contemporary European Monarchies*, eds Christina Jordan and Imke Polland (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2020), 73. doi.org/10.14361/9783839445839-005.

65 Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, 89–90; Ivan de la Bere, *The Queen’s Orders of Chivalry* (London: Spring Books, 1964), 83.

66 Peter Galloway, *The Order of the British Empire* ([London]: Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, 1996), 15.

Yet for all their exclusion from titles of honour, women were frequently assumed to long for them. Popular commentary portrayed women as hungrier for titular distinctions than men, so eager for social elevation that they would push their reluctant husbands to accept knighthoods even where the idea was repugnant to them. Discussing speculation that George Reid might be knighted in the birthday honours for 1895, for example, the *Clarence and Richmond Examiner* remarked that while Reid had said in the past that he would not accept, he was now married, and ‘with hardly any exception, women have an insatiable craving for titles’.⁶⁷ Rhetorical exaggeration this may be, or an expedient fiction allowing men to affect reluctance while accepting supposedly for the pleasure of their wives. Yet it is not inconceivable that titles did indeed hold more allure for women than for their menfolk. In her exploration of gender and gentility in the colonies, Russell suggested that ‘association with titles’ through attendance at ‘select parties’ appealed more to women than to men, who ‘had greater access to a diversity of social occasions, and enjoyed social intercourse at many levels’, as well as being ‘less conscious of the pressing need to establish respectability’.⁶⁸ The idea that a longing for titles was feminine underwrote some of the opposition to them found in the colonies. Real manliness, as it was depicted by such critics, was a simple and straightforward thing, which required adornment in the form of decorations or titles no more than it did the fussy fashions of the aristocratic male, himself portrayed as effeminate and weak.⁶⁹ A correspondent to the Sydney *Evening News* in 1881 implicitly drew this comparison between the frivolity of both women and aristocrats when he wrote of ‘those hollow distinctions, which men of real grit are beginning to despise’.⁷⁰

Whatever the truth of women’s attitudes to their husbands’ titles, the last years of the nineteenth century saw the first stirrings of agitation for women to be eligible for titles and other honours in their own right. The women’s movement had begun to achieve successes, among

67 ‘Political & Social Notes’, *Clarence and Richmond Examiner* (Grafton), 25 May 1895, 4.

68 Penny Russell, *A Wish of Distinction: Colonial Gentility and Femininity* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 76.

69 Such a contrast between unadorned manliness and effete aristocracy would be drawn by Prime Minister Andrew Fisher in the early years of the twentieth century. Bethany Phillips-Peddlesden, “A Stronger Man and a More Virile Character”: Australian Prime Ministers, Embodied Manhood and Political Authority in the Early Twentieth Century’, *Australian Historical Studies* 48, no. 4 (2017): 517. doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2017.1323932.

70 Thomas Courtney, letter to the editor, *Evening News* (Sydney), 20 January 1881, 3.

them reforms to laws regarding divorce and married women's property rights, and the winning of the franchise in New Zealand (1893) and South Australia (1894); Western Australia would follow in 1899. In this climate of campaigning for greater rights and equality for women, it is not surprising that some began to include the honours system in their critiques. In New Zealand in 1894, less than a year after the vote had been won, Napier's liberal *Daily Telegraph* asked why there were not 'titles of honour for women'. '[H]onourable women' had never been lacking, the paper argued, 'but ... the stronger sex, with the selfishness characteristic of them, [had] monopolised all titular honours'. The writer went on to suggest the establishment of an order especially for women, noting the 'peculiar appropriateness' of such an honour being created by Queen Victoria, 'one of the most illustrious of female sovereigns'.⁷¹ A few years later, in early 1899 the Australasian press reported on a paper given by Mrs Alec K. Morrison at the Grosvenor Crescent (Ladies) Club in London, discussing the question 'Should Women Have Titles?' Morrison argued that women 'had raised themselves to prominent positions in the scientific and medical world', but were 'without the honours conferred upon men'. Why should there not be dames, she asked, as well as knights?⁷²

A 'passion for distinction'?

Honours were not always a source of desire or envy. A wide range of attitudes toward them was expressed in the Australasian colonies during the nineteenth century, especially as they came to be conferred in increasing numbers. One positive view, found in both the imperial centre and the colonies, was that they could help to bind the colonies to the mother country, by creating a mirror of metropolitan society in these far-flung outposts of empire. Governors of colonies, for example, seem often to have perceived titles of honour in this way, as instruments for rendering colonial society more like that of Britain, with a hierarchically ordered range of social classes, thereby encouraging the political and social development of the colonies, and, perhaps, counteracting any dangerous

71 'Odds and Ends', *Daily Telegraph* (Napier), 2 June 1894, 2; 'Bound to Come', *Waikato Times* (Hamilton), 14 July 1894, 5.

72 'Should Women Have Titles?' *West Australian* (Perth), 25 January 1899, 6.

tendencies towards too great an embrace of democracy.⁷³ Launceston's *Daily Telegraph* too saw titles as a form of imperial glue, with or without the social engineering function, suggesting that:

to recognise the faithful services of old colonists is a sure way of cementing the bond of union which, it is hoped, will ever exist between the colonies and the mother country.⁷⁴

It was, of course, such views of titles that had lain behind many arguments for the extension of honours to the colonies in the first place, and these stances took for granted that both the retention of the bonds of empire and the recreation of a British social order were ends to be desired.

But another side to these views of honours was that they were nothing more than tawdry bribes, distributed by cunning imperial authorities in an effort to prevent the colonies from forging their own way and to create in them an oppressive aristocratic order of the kind that existed in Britain. In 1882, for example, the bestowal of a KCMG upon the Queensland premier, Thomas McIlwraith, prompted 'Faugh-a-Ballagh' in the *Northern Miner* to denounce honours as an instrument in an imperial attempt to avert separationist ambitions and create feelings of loyalty in Australasia, and as a reward for abandoning democratic goals and pursuing policies that pleased the imperial government.⁷⁵ With such 'gewgaws' had the champions of democracy and the people been 'nobbled', the author contended, induced 'to forsake the popular cause' and 'become renegades from democracy and recruits to Conservatism, friends to the Imperial policy to transplant in Australia the class distinctions and social grades of the old world, fortified with a monied, landed, and titled aristocracy' and supported by a system of unfree coloured labour.⁷⁶ Making the situation worse, the titles being given to colonists were the least prestigious, part of a newly founded order restricted to the colonies and ranking below those

73 See, for example, Satherley-Peacocke, 'Victoria's Gentlemen of Honour', 90–91, 111–12; Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, 28–32; Knox, 'Democracy, Aristocracy and Empire', 244–47.

74 *Daily Telegraph* (Launceston), 13 May 1884, 2.

75 'Faugh-a-Ballagh', 'Sir Thomas McIlwraith, K.C.M.G.', *Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 5 December 1882, 2; 'Faugh-a-Ballagh', 'Sir Thomas McIlwraith, K.C.M.G.', *Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 12 December 1882, 2.

76 'Faugh-a-Ballagh', 'Sir Thomas McIlwraith, K.C.M.G.', *Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 12 December 1882, 2.

used in the imperial centre. As the *Maryborough Chronicle* disdainfully described them, colonial honours were 'cheap-jack knighthoods invented purposely as a bait for colonials'.⁷⁷

A milder version of this argument worried that honours might be used as a means of controlling colonial politicians, especially as they were conferred not on the advice of colonial ministers, but of imperial advisers. As the *Melbourne Age* put it in 1888:

There is some risk of a colonial Minister, aspiring to a knighthood, being lukewarm in a local cause when he knows that cause to be frowned upon by his prospective patrons.⁷⁸

Many suggested it was invidious, in colonies with responsible government, for the Colonial Office to recommend the grant of honours to the monarch, rather than the colony's own responsible ministers. In New Zealand, Sir George Grey had protested to the colonial secretary about this while premier, after two knighthoods were conferred upon his political opponents without consulting the colonial government. In a colony with representative government, he had argued, surely it was not constitutional to confer awards for services given in that colony 'in regard to its internal management or its internal political affairs ... without the advice of Ministers, who are responsible to the people of that colony'.⁷⁹ Commenting on this incident in a lengthy article about colonial honours in 1881, New Zealand politician (Sir) Robert Stout asserted that it was 'time ... that this phase of Imperial dominion was at an end'.⁸⁰

Another set of attitudes expressed by many commentators was that titles were inappropriate in young and vibrant democracies, nothing but worn-out remnants of an old-world class structure. Scholars have noted an egalitarian and democratic spirit in the New World, and posited that it encouraged opposition to titles of honour in the settler colonies. Peter Galloway, for example, suggested that colonial attitudes to the Order of St Michael and St George were shaped by 'the levelling spirit' of individuals who had emigrated to the colonies in the hope of making 'a new life away from such things as titles and honours', in a 'free and classless society'.⁸¹

77 *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser*, 6 December 1887, 2.

78 *Age* (Melbourne), 26 March 1888, 4.

79 George Grey, letter to Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, quoted in Robert Stout, 'Titles for Colonists', *Melbourne Review* 6, no. 23 (1881): 228.

80 Stout, 'Titles for Colonists', 230–31; quotes on 231.

81 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 113. See also Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, 144–45.

In his analysis of egalitarianism in the Australian colonies, John Hirst identified several forms of egalitarianism—including those of outcome, opportunity, and manners—and suggested that, paradoxically, the broadening of democracy in the colonies had provoked, in some quarters at least, a hunger for honours, as political office no longer carried with it elite status.⁸² It was perhaps in response to this eagerness that ‘egalitarian forces’ such as J. F. Archibald’s *Bulletin* inveighed against imperial honours and those who ‘scrambled after’ them.⁸³ At least rhetorically, diatribes against titles on the grounds of egalitarianism and democracy were remarkably common in the newspapers of the nineteenth century, across the seven Australasian colonies.

Referring to the knighting of Henry Parkes and John Robertson in 1877, for instance, the *Clarence and Richmond Examiner and New England Advertiser* remarked that ‘we regard the bestowal of a barren title upon the public men of a democratic community as reflecting little honour either on the recipients or the colony’. The paper recalled the ‘derision’ that had greeted Wentworth’s scheme for hereditary titles, arguing that ‘the democratic spirit of this country’ had only continued to grow, and that while titles were acceptable in Britain they were ‘utterly out of place here’. ‘The essential spirit of a country like our own,’ the writer proclaimed, ‘demands the social equality of its citizens, and deprecates any adventitious aids to social distinction.’⁸⁴ A letter to the editor of Sydney’s *Evening News* in 1881 referred to titles as ‘pseudo suckers from the butt of a decaying old aristocratic tree’ that were being ‘grafted upon the sturdy young democratic plant springing up in Australia’.⁸⁵ And in 1895, having criticised a recent award—on the basis that there was no discernible reason for distinguishing the hapless recipient from any of ‘the other political mediocrities in the country’—Melbourne’s *Age* argued that ‘[t]itles which confer no powers and impose no duties are not in accordance with the democratic instincts of a colonial population’.⁸⁶

Indeed, a number of men were believed to have declined titles on these grounds, although it is difficult in many cases to determine the precise motives for a refusal. One who was identified as having turned the

82 John Hirst, ‘Egalitarianism’, *Australian Cultural History*, no. 5 (1986): especially 22–23. See also Hirst, *Strange Birth*, 106–17.

83 Hirst, ‘Egalitarianism’, 24–26.

84 *Clarence and Richmond Examiner and New England Advertiser* (Grafton), 5 June 1877, 2.

85 Thomas Courtney, letter to the editor, *Evening News* (Sydney), 20 January 1881, 3.

86 *Age* (Melbourne), 2 January 1895, 4.

distinction down for ideological reasons was George Higinbotham, the Victorian radical politician and then chief justice, whom the *Otago Daily Times* stated had ‘distinctly insisted that it is incompatible with the attitude of a democratic statesman to accept one’.⁸⁷ Higinbotham’s objection was not necessarily to titles per se, however, but to titles bestowed through the Colonial Office, rather than by the local governor after nomination by the colonial parliament.⁸⁸ Victorian government minister and later federal prime minister Alfred Deakin also famously declined titles and honours, including a KCMG in 1887 and several times a privy councillorship. Like Higinbotham, whom he admired, he was opposed to the involvement of British politicians in Australian matters, and despite his desire to retain the British connection, refused to accept any distinction that might place him in a position of obligation to anyone at the Colonial Office.⁸⁹ Although such arguments usually spoke of titles, it appears the term was often understood as encompassing any appointment to an order of knighthood, including to its non-titular ranks; for many in the colonies, becoming a CMG and gaining the title of ‘Sir’ seem to have carried a similar connotation of ascension to the nobility.

Opposition to the conferral of titles in the colonies extended beyond rhetoric and personal publicised refusals. One inveterate opponent of titular honours was David Buchanan, a member of the New South Wales House of Assembly who tried several times to get the House to resolve against titles. First elected in 1860, Buchanan had early in his parliamentary career earned a reputation as ‘a demagogue with dangerous republican leanings’.⁹⁰ One of his attempts to move against titles took place in April 1884, when he moved that the grant of titles was ‘inconsistent with the spirit of our democratic institutions, and ought to be discontinued’, and that a resolution to that effect should be sent to the Queen. He argued that ‘a society based on the principles of pure democracy’ was being formed in the colony, and that the conferral of titles was an insulting attempt by the English Government ‘to introduce a spirit

87 *Otago Daily Times* (Dunedin), 28 May 1892, 2.

88 J. M. Bennett, *George Higinbotham: Third Chief Justice of Victoria 1886–1892* (Sydney: Federation, 2006), 202–3; Geraldine Moore, *George Higinbotham and Eureka: The Struggle for Democracy in Colonial Victoria* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly, 2018), 277.

89 J. A. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin: A Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1965), vol. 1: 91, 202–3, vol. 2: 635.

90 Martha Rutledge, ‘Buchanan, David (1823–1890)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 24 February 2015, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/buchanan-david-3099.

of aristocracy'.⁹¹ Although basing his argument on support for democracy rather than freedom from English oversight, Buchanan also supported the separationist cause, which he saw as linked, stating that he thought the distribution of titles would continue 'until separation from the mother country takes place'.⁹² The motion was easily defeated, however, with Buchanan 'alone on the side of the ayes'.⁹³

While not all who held such opinions about titles and honours wished to see the colonies separate from the mother country, or were supporters of republicanism, the two viewpoints did at times coincide, since the ideal republic was imagined as egalitarian and democratic, a system of governance by the people that was not only independent and free, but also lacked hierarchies and distinctions, in contrast to monarchical systems that were imagined as pitting the interests of the aristocracy and the monarchy against the people. In 1886, for example, in a letter to the editor of the *Darling Downs Gazette* in Queensland, a writer using the pen name 'Young Australian' expressed surprise that Samuel Griffith, 'the democratic leader of this fair, sunny, and prosperous colony', would 'inthal [sic] himself to "monarchy" and aristocracy [sic]' by accepting a title. 'Young Australian' wished to see knighthoods abolished, and argued that '[w]e want to be governed by the people, not by a worthless despotic aristocracy'.⁹⁴ Such views of titles, opposed to them on republican grounds or considering them as an issue linked to the republican cause, may be located within what Luke Trainor and Antony Taylor have called a 'flowering of republican advocacy in the newspapers [in] the late 1880s and early 1890s'. As they observed, in this period '[a]nti-monarchism was a part of the received opinions of ... radical and working-class organs' in the press, the most famous being the *Bulletin*. It was also a useful spectre, even for those who were not generally of a republican bent: even in the more conservative parts of the press, 'the hint of separation, independence and republicanism was a standby of leader writers fulminating against the British Colonial Office or the general failure of the British government to meet Australian demands'.⁹⁵

91 New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates*, 29 April 1884 (David Buchanan).

92 New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates*, 29 April 1884 (David Buchanan).

93 'Parliament of New South Wales', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 April 1884, 4; New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates*, 29 April 1884.

94 'Young Australian', letter to the editor, *Darling Downs Gazette* (Toowoomba), 2 August 1886, 3.

95 Antony Taylor and Luke Trainor, 'Monarchism and Anti-Monarchism: Anglo-Australian Comparisons c. 1870–1901', *Social History* 24, no. 2 (1999): 168. doi.org/10.1080/03071029908568060.

For those who did advocate the superiority of the republican form of government, titles were often considered inimical to it. This view perhaps derived from a knowledge of the United States of America's firm opposition to titles of nobility, which was frequently referenced. In section 9 of article I, the constitution of the United States avowed that '[n]o Title of Nobility shall be granted by the United States', and nor should any official accept one 'from any King, Prince, or foreign State', without the approval of Congress. Section 10 extended the prohibition against granting such titles to State governments.⁹⁶ Numerous commentators in the Australasian colonies contrasted this stance, assumed to be part of a manly republicanism under which individuals were content to be adorned only with their own innate worth, with a degenerate British system of gaudy decorations, greedily sought by individuals too weak to stand on their own merits. In April 1881, in the regular column 'Our American Letter' in the *Otago Daily Times* and the *Otago Witness*, the author, Jacob Terry, contrasted republicanism, as 'the highest and noblest form of government, because it is really and truly self-government', with monarchy, which was 'government by cajolery, force, and fraud'. Among the characteristics of a republic, according to Terry, was that 'men seek for no higher distinction, know no higher honour, than that of citizen'. 'Titles and honours are the strong points of the monarchical system', he wrote:

To suit the fastidious tastes of a Monarchist he must derive his patent of nobility from another mortal; the Republican holds his direct from God Almighty, and believes he cannot improve upon his Maker's work.⁹⁷

Others, however, were sceptical of such depictions of the United States. Politician John Burns—who would himself later decline a CMG—took up this point in a rebuttal of Buchanan's 1884 motion in the New South Wales House of Assembly. There 'is no country in the world', he said, 'in which titles are more sought after than in the United States'.⁹⁸

In any case, having made pronouncements against titles, however cautiously, a man could find himself in an awkward position if he later decided to accept one. After Robert Stout accepted a KCMG in 1886,

96 'The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription', *America's Founding Documents*, U. S. National Archives and Records Administration, accessed 3 August 2021, www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript.

97 Jacob Terry, 'Our American Letter', *Otago Daily Times* (Dunedin), 16 April 1881, 1 (supplement); [Jacob Terry], 'Our American Letter', *Otago Witness* (Dunedin), 23 April 1881, 8.

98 New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates*, 29 April 1884 (John Burns).

he was reminded of his former remarks suggesting that perhaps titles were out of place in the democratic, egalitarian arena of the colonies. Although the majority of newspaper commentary seems to have been congratulatory, the apparent contrast with his avowed opinions was noted.⁹⁹ Even several years later, the *Tuapeka Times* would report the comments of ‘a contemporary’ that he had:

used to rail in the most offensive language against the tinselled glory of knighthood, and yet, when the honor ... was proffered to him, he grabbed it as eagerly as a donkey does a bunch of carrots.¹⁰⁰

On the other side of the Tasman, in 1892 the premier of New South Wales, George Dibbs, was censured not only for his acceptance, but even more for his explanation of the decision. An article in the British *Daily Chronicle*, reported in the colonies, was said to have declared that his decision had ‘greatly displeased the people of New South Wales, who consider that his Republican views do not harmonise with his title’.¹⁰¹ The *Pall Mall Gazette*, likewise covered in the colonies, reportedly remarked on ‘the conversion and capture of Mr. Dibbs, an avowed Separatist and supposed Republican’.¹⁰² Dibbs’s reasoning was reported to have been that since the Queen would personally invest him with the honour, it would be ungrateful to refuse. This, thought the *Daily Chronicle*, was ‘the worst possible kind of apology’, and his ‘acceptance ... a worse humiliation to the Crown than if [he] had refused it with rudeness’.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, the *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* doubted Dibbs had ever been a republican, since ‘[n]o genuine republican would have been afforded an opportunity of either accepting or refusing’, and the Hobart *Mercury* exclaimed, ‘What

99 Satherley-Peacocke, ‘Victoria’s Gentlemen of Honour’, 303–4.

100 ‘Local and General News’, *Tuapeka Times* (Lawrence), 6 June 1891, 2. In the case of Stout, such criticisms were perhaps not entirely fair. The frequently cited diatribe against titles he had authored five years before accepting his own was more measured and nuanced than most critiques recognised. His main objection then had been to the awarding of titles without the advice of the responsible ministers in the colonial government, and he had only suggested that it might be time to reconsider their use in the colonies if a change to that practice could not be made. Stout, ‘Titles for Colonists’, 221–32. See also Jonathon Satherley-Peacocke’s detailed discussion of Stout’s shifting opinions regarding titles. Satherley-Peacocke, ‘Victoria’s Gentlemen of Honour’, 297–305.

101 ‘Sir George Dibbs’, *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 27 October 1892, 5; ‘General Cable News’, *Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill), 27 October 1892, 4; ‘Sir George Dibbs’s Knighthood’, *Age* (Melbourne), 28 October 1892, 5.

102 ‘Mr. Dibbs in London’, *North Queensland Register* (Townsville), 27 July 1892, 9; ‘Mr. Dibbs in England’, *Brisbane Courier*, 25 July 1892, 5.

103 ‘Sir George Dibbs’s Knighthood’, *Age* (Melbourne), 28 October 1892, 5.

a poor, shadowy, personification of republicanism must be that George Richard Dibbs, who has gone down on his knees because fanned by the slightest breeze of Royal favour!’¹⁰⁴

Not all Australasian sentiment was against titles of honour, however, and another view was that titles and awards were simply merited rewards for worthy service or high achievement, useful as a means to inspire emulation, and in no way inimical to either democracy or republicanism. The Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin*, for example, thought it perfectly reasonable, and even desirable, ‘[t]o mark out a man who has distinguished himself above his fellows in the public service ... because it provokes emulation’.¹⁰⁵ The Melbourne *Argus* too defended titles, arguing that ‘[a] democratic country should be the first to encourage the idea that titles should be earned by merit, and not inherited through the accident of birth’. ‘Some honour must be conferred upon the man who, in any department, deserves well of the state,’ the paper continued, ‘and the honour is most easily conveyed through a title, which will mark him as having achieved something.’¹⁰⁶ Responding to Buchanan’s motion in the New South Wales House of Assembly in 1884, Henry Copeland thought ‘most men desire to have conferred upon them a title of distinction, and while human nature remains as it is that feeling will last’. He saw no harm in ‘conferring patents of nobility on men who have done good service to their country’.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, many considered it human nature to hope for reward or seek renown. In 1874, observing that James Frances, the Victorian chief secretary, had declined knighthood, the *Sydney Morning Herald* remarked that while some ‘democratic prints’ pontificated on ‘the impropriety of introducing titular distinctions among us’, evidence seemed to suggest that ‘we can never overcome the passion for distinction’ that existed in all levels of society.¹⁰⁸ Besides being natural, this desire could be beneficial, if it led to individuals working for the benefit of society or devoting themselves to public service. As the *Argus* saw the case, ‘if a man is inspired to achieve distinction in statesmanship, art, letters, science, or war by the hope of such a reward, the ambition is not altogether an ignoble one’; if nothing else, it was better than

104 *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, 26 July 1892, 2; *Mercury* (Hobart), 26 July 1892, 2.

105 ‘Imperial Honours’, *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 25 June 1887, 4.

106 *Argus* (Melbourne), 11 April 1887, 4.

107 New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates*, 29 April 1884 (Henry Copeland).

108 ‘Our Melbourne Letter’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 May 1874, 2.

being motivated by the pursuit of money.¹⁰⁹ Or, as the *Christchurch Press* put it rather less flatteringly: ‘Public men, like donkeys, work best under the stimulus of expected reward.’¹¹⁰

Some corollaries, however, often accompanied these arguments in support of titles of honour. First, those who defended them often confined their support to those that were not hereditary. As South Australian premier Thomas Playford put it in 1890:

I do not object to any man taking a title if he has worked hard and done good service for the country, and likes to take it; but to take a title to hand down to his children and his children’s children, who may be idiots, or drunkards, or fools, or cowards, is something that these colonies ought not to countenance.¹¹¹

Such views of titles allowed the reconciling of titular distinctions with a commitment to egalitarianism and democracy. Understood as being about equality of opportunity or manners rather than outcome, egalitarianism was no barrier to embracing titles of honour.¹¹² Second, some commentators were willing to accept titles given for non-political service—in the military, for instance, or the arts and sciences—while opposing those given for political service or to reward the friends of a particular government or party. Finally, titles and honours must be bestowed wisely. Such provisos were, perhaps, prompted by what seems to have been a widespread recognition that not all recipients of honours had fully merited them. The *West Australian* in 1885, for example, stated that while honours were given ‘for good service ... at times’, they were equally often bestowed ‘as a matter of policy or as a result of intrigue and favouritism’. As a reward for personal achievement, the paper thought, knighthood ‘ought to be ... a sort of guaranty [sic] that its recipient has done something which deserves recognition’.¹¹³

109 *Argus* (Melbourne), 31 May 1877, 4.

110 ‘Democrats and Titles’, *Press* (Christchurch), 14 June 1895, 4.

111 South Australia, House of Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates*, 19 August 1890 (Thomas Playford). In fact, Playford was personally opposed to non-hereditary distinctions as well, asserting that he did not think anyone need wish for such titles, and that he himself would decline knighthood if it were ever offered—which he did, more than once. John Playford, ‘Playford, Thomas (1837–1915)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 22 August 2016, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/playford-thomas-8064/text14071; South Australia, House of Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates*, 19 August 1890 (Thomas Playford).

112 On such understandings of egalitarianism in the Australian colonies, and their relation to ideas about titles and honours, see Hirst, ‘Egalitarianism’, 12–31; Karen Fox, ‘“A Pernicious System of Caste and Privilege”: Egalitarianism and Official Honours in Australia, New Zealand and Canada’, *History Australia* 10, no. 2 (2013): 202–26. doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2013.11668468.

113 *West Australian* (Perth), 1 June 1885, 3.

Conclusion

Penny Russell has argued that in nineteenth-century Australia ‘English manners’ were understood differently by different social groups, seeming ‘a last bastion of civilisation in a wilderness of social disintegration’ to those among ‘the elite’, and ‘absurd remnants of a class-ridden “Old World”’ to ‘self-made Australians’.¹¹⁴ Much the same might be said of titles of honour, and thus, like manners, this system of awards offers an intriguing lens onto wider matters of political and social life, and identity, in the colonies. In the case of manners, Russell goes on to contend that responsibility for maintaining this crucial aspect of colonial society was given to women, and thus ‘relegated to the feminine sphere’.¹¹⁵ Here too one might discern a parallel with colonial views of titles, not only in the snide suggestion that it was women who were most hungry for such distinctions, but also in the subtle equivalence sometimes drawn between aristocracy—in the form of titles—and effeminacy. Right from the earliest extension of honours to the colonies, a significant strand of thought in Australasia despised titles as unmanly, effeminate, associated with Old World class privilege and aristocracy, and tied to the institution of monarchy. At the same time, there existed support for titles as markers of individual merit, mechanisms for deepening the bonds of empire, and expressions of appreciation from an admired sovereign. None of these views were unique to the Australasian colonies, being found both in other colonies and, if perhaps weaker, at home in Britain. But they were to develop in unique ways in the coming nation of Australia, and the history of how honours were used, transformed, and understood in this country can reveal much about the nation’s political life, its social and cultural formations, and its shifting identity. To explore this history is the task of the rest of this book. The next chapter begins that story, starting at the moment of Federation, and examining how this creating of ‘a nation for a continent’ shaped the history of the honours system in Australia for years to come.

114 Russell, ‘Brash Colonial’, 431.

115 Russell, ‘Brash Colonial’, 448–53, quote on 453. Beverley Kingston has argued something similar—‘that it was by relegating some of the essential responsibility for differentiating status and maintaining social distances to women that male-dominated Australia was able to project itself as egalitarian’. Kingston, ‘Lady and the Australian Girl’, 40.

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