THE SYDNEY HARBOUR TRUST: The Early Years

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Series Editors:
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This paper evaluates the role of the Sydney Harbour Trust in the first decade of its existence. Although the Trust was formed in the aftermath of the outbreak of bubonic plague in Sydney in 1900, the need for an overhaul of the facilities in the port had been recognised for some time. Shipping technology had been transformed in the last half century, mainly due to the adoption of steel and iron for ships. However, the port had not kept up with the changes occurring in shipping. The Harbour Trust, therefore, set about reconstructing the harbour in response to the new technology.

A significant feature of the Sydney Harbour Trust was that it had no ties whatsoever to the system of local government pertaining in Sydney at the time. Nor was it a government department, although it was seen as another arm of the state public works enterprise. The Sydney Harbour Trust was therefore the first of the ad hoc authorities without local government links formed in New South Wales.
Until the formation of the Sydney Harbour Trust in 1901, the responsibility for the upkeep of Sydney harbour lay in the hands of the municipal authorities. The new Trust, however, did not include any municipal representation. The Trust was the first public body created through a transfer of powers from local authorities to an *ad hoc* board in New South Wales. The first Commissioners were appointed solely by the government. Instead of being recruited from the realm of local politics, they were drawn from commercial and engineering backgrounds and their task was essentially the reconstruction of the wharfage, and the regulation of the harbour for shipping, including ferries.

The early years of the Trust were dominated by the reconstruction of the port wharfage, in particular, by Robert Hickson, the President of the Trust, and Henry Deane Walsh. Both men were engineers who previously belonged to the Department of Public Works. The appointment of Hickson and Walsh to the Trust is perhaps best understood as a transfer of men involved in one area of public works to another. They attest to the continuing interest of the state in the construction of the infrastructure of Sydney. This provides the key to the reluctance of the government to grant the powers of reconstruction to the local authorities. Since the Sydney Harbour Trust was in effect another arm of a public works programme, it had at all times to be under the control of the government. The government was not yet ready to hand over the control of 'public works' to local government as was the case in the United Kingdom at the time.  

It was understandable that engineers had such a significant role in the Trust as the need for a new port authority was strongly influenced by the advances in engineering technology. Due to the impact of steel and iron

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upon the shipping industry from the 1870's, Sydney harbour was becoming increasingly outdated as a major port. The use of steel in shipbuilding from the 1870's led to a massive increase in the size of ships on the world's seas, and to a corresponding growth in tonnage entering Sydney. The growth of seaborne trade was a worldwide phenomenon in large part due to the shift from timber-constructed ships to ships built of steel and iron. The use of timber had previously placed a limit on the size of ships, but far bigger ships could be built with steel and iron. The first large four masted ship, measuring 350 feet, to arrive in Sydney was an iron steamer, the *MacGregor*, in 1870. A rush of large ships in the years that followed led to the appointment of a Select Committee in June 1874 to inquire into the wharfage accommodation of Sydney port. Few people interested in shipping, however, fully expected the vast increase in the scale of ships that would occur over the next three or four decades. In 1870, 1,006 ships of an aggregate tonnage of 385,161 entered Sydney harbour. By 1900, the number of ships entering the harbour had risen to 1819 with an aggregate tonnage of 2,716,651.\footnote{Henry Deane Walsh, 'Notes on Wharf Construction, Sydney Harbour', *Royal Society of New South Wales, Journal and Proceedings*, Vol 11, 1906, pxxv.}

The arrival of the *Lusitania* in 1877 marked the beginning of a revolutionary increase in the size of ships entering the harbour. Vessels of three thousands tonnes were followed by vessels twice their size in the space of a decade. The first of the ships over 10,000 tonnes arrived in 1897. This was the *Barbarossa*, which belonged to the Norddeutscher Lloyd Company. Similar-sized steamers of the White Star line followed shortly afterwards. The increase in the size of ocean-going steamers was reflected in other coastal traders and ocean tramps. By 1900, it was obvious to everybody that the old, privately-owned, pre-1880 wharves which measured 300 feet long, with just 80 or 90 feet between them were no longer suitable for modern day shipping.

The formation of the Sydney Harbour Trust was not, however, the direct result of the concern of the state for the congested and unwieldy port. The establishment of the Sydney Harbour Trust in March 1901 was inspired by the outbreak of bubonic plague in the early months of 1900. Nevertheless, the impact of large ships is a factor in the outbreak of the
plague. As the size of ships increased it was necessary to dredge the berths ever deeper to accommodate them. As a result the lower part of the sea wall subsided, and this subsidence left cavities which allowed the rats to make their home under the wharves. This was in spite of the practice of driving down timber piling into the sea bed to prevent the soil from sliding.3

It is not surprising that the plague entered the city from the wharves of Darling Harbour and Dawes Point under which the infected rats accumulated. The disease spread among the waterside families, particularly along Sussex Street. Between January and August 1900, the period at which the plague was at its most intense, some 303 persons were infected, and of those 103 died.4 The outbreak prompted members of both sides of the Legislative Assembly to sign a petition calling for the resumption of the foreshores to Darling Harbour. The petition, signed by over 90 members, led to the immediate resumption of the foreshores by proclamation on the 3 May 1900.

The government had already assumed legal control of the area on the 23 March under the Quarantine Act of 1897. Just as the Premier, William Lyne, was pushed by the weight of the Assembly to proclaim the area for resumption, public opinion, indeed public concern, pushed Lyne towards a general quarantine. All over Sydney 'a great crusade of cleanliness' had been embarked upon in the month of March.5 Many suburban municipal councils ordered their staffs to clean all their lanes and roads and to disinfect drains and gutters. Garbage disposal was stepped up; horsedrawn omnibuses and cabs were disinfected daily as were many wharves and streets. Most of the fish in Darling Harbour were killed as a result of the enormous amount of disinfectant that flowed into the harbour.6

In spite of these efforts, the number of people stricken with the disease rose dramatically from the middle of March. The number of cases rose from two in the week ending 3 March, to five the following week and to

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4 J. Ashburton Thompson, Report on the Outbreak of Plague at Sydney, 1900, Department of Public Health, New South Wales, Sydney, 1900.
6 Ibid.
twelve the week after. Panic broke out on 21 March when the building where the Department of Public Health was carrying out inoculations drew a frightened crowd of thousands. The building was invaded and the staircases were completely packed. Hundreds more tried to force their way in, often through the windows. According to the Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Health, J. Ashburton Thompson, the 'popular excitement' threatened the control of the department in combating the disease. The need for a government-controlled quarantine was clear.

For the shipowners, however, the outbreak of the plague and the public fear of it provided them with an opportunity to press for a general reconstruction of the harbour in line with the changes in shipping technology. When Premier Lyne, met the shipping companies before he made the order to quarantine the area, they urged the government not only to clean the wharves but to take one step further and resume the whole area for the purpose of reconstructing the wharves 'on a broad national basis'. They maintained this was the only sure way of ridding the city of the plague.

By passing the expense of the reconstruction of the wharves onto the state on the basis of public health, the shipping companies avoided the costs of harbour reconstruction themselves. This is somewhat ironic as the poor state of the harbour facilities was in many respects due to the shipowners themselves. For many years, they avoided paying wharfage rates to the City Council. This evasion was so widespread it was regarded as 'evidence of commercial astuteness' rather than as a breach of 'commercial morality' among the shipowners and merchants of Darling Harbour and Sussex Street. In addition, there was the practice, noted earlier, of dredging deeper berths without taking proper care of the harbour wall, thus providing ample space for the habitation of rats.

The area eventually proclaimed by the Governor on 3 May conforms to the distribution of the major port-using companies from Dawes Point

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8 Ibid, p.19; also W.M.Hughes, NSWPD, vol 103, p.208.
10 See Dan Coward, Out of Sight, p.209.
11 Wilks (Balmain), NSWPD, 4 July 1900, p.666.
across to Miller's Point, and down much of the length of Kent Street as far as Pyrmont Bridge. It included Sussex Street, perhaps the most congested street in the area, and the site of much of the plague in Sydney. A significant omission was that of the land belonging to the Australian Gaslight Company off Kent Street. The AGC apparently persuaded the government that they intended to move in the near future, and the government were better advised to avoid paying for the resumption at the present moment. At least, this was the reason Lyne gave to the Assembly.12

The introduction of the Darling Harbour Wharves Resumption Bill (64 Vic. No. 10), to 'validate' the quarantine and resumptions already carried out, gave the members of the Legislative Assembly an opportunity to debate the question of the Gas Works. George Reid, the leader of the opposition assured Lyne that there could be 'no contest about the main principle of this measure at all'.13 But why resume all the other property this side of Darling Harbour and not the Gas Works? According to George Reid, some of the cabinet ministers must have known that the Gas Company would have become a valuable tenant if their premises had been resumed. The rental on the property, he estimated, would cover the cost of resumption within two years.14 From the point of view of the state, there was simply no justification for the omission:

To tell us that the Gas Company would not go down on its knees to the Government to get a lease of this place is to say a thing no business man in Sydney would regard for an instant.15

The Company was in fact tied to the site for years to come, according to Reid, and it could leave only at an enormous loss. Reid's judgement on the question appears to be correct as the company did not move from Darling Harbour for some time. Its presence on the site continued to be controversial in 1909 when the interim report of the Improvement

12 NSWP, 28 June 1900, p.545.
14 NSWP, 5 July 1900, p.695.
15 Ibid.
Map 1: Darling Harbour Resumptions—Plan Showing the Proclaimed Areas

*Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 1900
Map 2: Harbour Resumption—The Areas Dealt With

*Daily Telegraph, 11 July 1900*
Commission dealt specifically with it. The Commissioners called upon the government to resume the site immediately. The Wade Liberal-Reform government, however, made it clear that it would not resume the site and the report of the Commission was shelved indefinitely. It was not until 1912 that the government finally resumed the site, at a cost of half a million pounds, and only then did the Company set in motion the process of removal.

Another aspect of the Darling Harbour Resumption Bill to cause concern was the inclusion of the area known as the 'Rocks'. At a cost of £800,000, the resumption of this area consumed one fifth of the budget allocated to the resumptions as a whole. Lyne had decided to include the area after making his first visit there in connection with the bill. What he saw appalled him:

> It is a place—practically in the heart of the city—which is really a disgrace to any city in the world. There are narrow lanes and crooked lanes, and until you get up near Fort-street, there is no thoroughfare which you can call a street.

Practically, certain parts of the 'Rocks' would have to be cleared to achieve a genuine renovation of the wharfage. The conglomeration of streets and alleyways barred an easy access to Miller's Point while Dawes Point was barred by the absence of a good through road from the Circular Quay area. In order to improve Dawes Point, and the area immediately behind it, the choice lay between widening and leveling Cumberland Street so that it could be connected with Sussex Street, or for the area between Dawes Point and Miller's Point to be cleared so that a major road could be laid to connect them. This could be continued, of course, to run down Darling Harbour. The second choice was eventually taken, and what became known as Hickson Road was constructed from Dawes Point, across to Miller's Point and down as far as the Australian Gas Light Company's

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18 NSWPD, 28 June 1900, p 546.
19 W.J. Spruson (Sydney-Gipps), Samuel Smith (Sydney-Pyrmont), 5 July, p.762-764.
works. When these were eventually removed, Hickson Road met the newly-widened Sussex Street.

The government argued however that one reason for the resumption of the 'Rocks' was to prevent the unjustifiable increase in the value of property as a result of the work of the new Harbour Trust. It was even possible to resume some properties without any compensation being paid whatsoever.\(^{20}\) It was commonly held that the 'Rocks' was a slum area, and that much of the property there was worthless. Many of the landlords were deemed to be negligent and Lyne argued that resumption would ensure that they did not profit unfairly from the work of the Trust.\(^ {21}\)

Not all members were convinced by these arguments. R.D. Meagher iconoclastically argued 'I will not support any attempt to improve that healthy locality in Sydney called "The Rocks".'\(^ {22}\) His subversive view of the area was supported by another member, J.C. Watson. Although he admitted that the area was 'unsightly and inconvenient', he claimed:

\[\text{[It] was not insanitary—at least a great portion of it was not. A few of the lanes were dirty, more particularly on account of the laxity of the authorities in allowing people of all colours, castes and creeds to live there in the way they did; but "The Rocks" was not insanitary because of the location of the houses or the lack of drainage. Whatever insanitary conditions prevailed there were preventable. Therefore "The Rocks" was not on the same plane as ill-kept wharflage, which on account of its construction it was impossible to improve, and for the resumption was the only remedy.}^{23}\]

There were some people, however, who insisted that the 'Rocks' was indeed a slum of the worst kind. One such was William Morris Hughes, Labour member for Lang. Hughes had recently emerged as the most powerful leader in the area, as head of the newly organised Wharf Labourers Union, and of the union representing carters and draymen.\(^ {24}\)

\(^{20}\) *NSWPD*, 28 June 1900, p.547-8. Parts of Sussex Street could also be resumed without compensation.

\(^{21}\) *NSWPD*, 5 July 1900, p.765.

\(^{22}\) *NSWPD*, 28 June 1900, p.558-9.

\(^{23}\) *NSWPD*, 5 July 1900, p.762.

Hughes exploited the popular perception of the 'Rocks' to launch a devastating attack on the City Council. In a debate on the municipal franchise, he appeared to suggest that the City Council were largely to blame for the plague because of the poor state of the area. He called for the abolition of the Council immediately. It was not a workable system, he believed, and while not all the councillors could be blamed for the state of this local government, they were powerless to effect real change:

_I have been, in the heart of Sydney, up to my knees in abominable filth in premises which are owned, or at least partly owned, by the municipal council, not the council as a whole, but by members of it. I have been in places where the floor was up, and where the stench was such that, standing upon the joists upon which the floor has rested, it was impossible to remain .... About five steps from the back door of a place in Steam-Mill street I came to an outhouse which was in such a condition that the inspector kindly indicated to me in which corner typhoid lay and in which corner diphtheria, for any person inclined that way, might be able to pick it up. That was within five steps of the back door of a house partly owned by these aldermen._

Members of the Legislative Assembly were adamant that the waterfront should always remain a state concern and never be returned to the local council. When Reid raised the possibility that the rebuilt 'Rocks' could be handed back to a 'reformed' City council, it was feared that the wharves would be handed over as well. Haynes made it clear that he would support the bill:

*_... on condition that they see that the whole of the management of the wharves becomes a state concern, and is not relegated to Greater Sydney as suggested by the leader of the opposition._*

At this point in the debate, a distinction is made between the resumption of the wharves as a state interest and the resumption of the 'Rocks' as an _ad hoc_ concession by the state to the city. When Reid replied that he was only referring to the area known as the 'Rocks', Haynes agreed

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25 A bill to abolish multiple voting had been introduced in the Legislative Assembly in June and it reached its second reading on the 26 June. What provoked its introduction was the supposed negligence of the City Council and its responsibility for the plague itself. _NSWPD_, 26 June 1900, p.408-9.


27 _NSWPD_, 28 June 1900, p.552.
that it should indeed be entrusted with the local authority, leaving any operations connected with the wharves to the state. This was a crucial distinction since it underlined the overriding authority of the state in the urban structure. The problem facing the state, in the form of the parliamentarians and the government, was to delineate those features of the urban structure which were of specific interest to the state.

The attack on the City Council was misplaced. The trend of legislation had left that body highly vulnerable and relatively powerless. Successive governments had removed powers from the City Council from the 1870's. In 1873, it lost the power to license public vehicles, the powers of water supply and drainage in 1888, and the powers of fire prevention in 1884.28 What is most significant is that the decision of each government to remove powers from the City Council was not based on their negligence in exercising these powers, but rather in the successful use of them. The powers of water supply were taken away only after the Sydney City water supply system began to be successfully installed in the suburbs. The City Council pioneered the licensing of public vehicles and it was only after the necessity for a similar system elsewhere in Sydney became obvious that the government created an ad hoc board to control licensing. These bodies had been created to pursue their own concerns and it could only be expected that in a time of crisis their response would be self-interested. At the height of the plague in 1900-01, the authorities responsible for sanitation, the City Council, the Health Board and the Water and Sewerage Board looked on impotently, 'each one blaming the other two for its inaction'.29 The negligence of the City Council was in fact a reflection of the confusion caused by a rearrangement of powers within Sydney by the state in the late nineteenth century. The establishment of the Trust was at least a decisive move on the part of the state to assign responsibility, and the necessary powers, to some form of authority capable of controlling the port. The City Council never had these powers.

It took the plague to bring about the required resolution to form the Trust. Lyne had previously attempted to establish a Harbour Trust in 1892

29 Daily Telegraph, 12 Dec 1901, Sydney City Council Library Newscuttings.
when he was Secretary for Public Works in the protectionist Dibbs ministry. The bill failed largely on account of the unease over coupling Sydney and Newcastle under the same legislation. There was no such opposition on this occasion. As discussed, Reid assured Lyne that he would not contest the main principles of the bill. Reid's major quibble was the decision to place both the functions of construction and of harbour maintenance under the same authority. Reid had been led to believe that not only was there to have been a Harbour Trust, but also a board responsible for the construction of the 'great works' as a consequence of the resumptions. The government replied that the Trust was to deal only with the area surrounding the harbour, where the bulk of the resumptions had taken place. For those resumptions not directly connected with the harbour, a general 'improvement board' would assume responsibility.

The Sydney Harbour Trust Act (64 Vic. No. 30) envisaged a commission of seven, to be appointed by the Governor, who were to remain in office for seven years. Four of the Commissioners would represent the government, leaving three to vouch for shipping interests. In this, the Harbour Trust differed from many other harbour authorities, such as those in England, where the shipping interests predominated. The reason for this difference was the degree of state involvement in the Sydney Harbour Trust. The millions of pounds expected to be spent by the Trust was provided largely by the state. In Britain, most of the harbour boards were local bodies, responsible for the raising and expenditure of their own funds. A somewhat similar situation operated in Melbourne where the 17 Commissioners of the Harbour Trust relied upon their powers to borrow money and upon money contributed by trade interests in the port. The Sydney Harbour Trust was not given the power to borrow money and its resources were derived from state revenue. The closest analogy to the Sydney Harbour Trust was the N.S.W. Railway Commissioners. Like the Harbour Trust, they were entrusted with an enormous amount of state revenue to spend, subject to the authority of the government.

Over the next few months, the constitution of the Harbour Trust was moulded by parliamentary debate. The number of Commissioners was

30 NSWPD, 15 Aug 1900, p.1908.
31 Ibid.
reduced from seven to three, following the precedent of the Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board. This body had recently had its Commission of seven part-time officers reduced to three, including a full-time president.\textsuperscript{32} It had been found that a full-time officer was necessary for the position of president while it was not necessary to have six other part-time officers for the routine duties required of them. However, the original decision to have the commissioners of the Trust appointed by the Governor, rather than by the government, or the Public Service Board, was upheld. Also upheld was the virtually autonomous nature of the internal staffing of the Harbour Trust with control of promotion left to the Commissioners themselves.

The bill was finally passed in October, and towards the end of February 1901 the three commissioners were appointed. They were Thomas Francis Waller, Lachlan Beaton and Robert Hickson. As manager of the Howard Smith shipping line in Sydney and Melbourne, Beaton clearly represented shipping interests.\textsuperscript{33} Waller, an agent for a stock and station company, was a more prominent public figure. Based in Sydney, Waller had previously sat on two royal commissions; in 1897 for an enquiry into the Department of Public Works, and 1889 for an enquiry into casual labour.\textsuperscript{34} Robert Rowan Purdon Hickson, President of the Harbour Trust was undoubtedly the major force behind the new authority. An obvious choice for the position, Hickson had been for much of the previous year the chairman of an advisory board on the resumptions, having been the administrative head of the Department of Public Works since 1896.

Hickson was particularly suited to his new position since much of his early training and experience in engineering was in harbour maintenance. Trained in Ireland, Hickson was appointed at a relatively young age to the post of resident engineer and Harbour Master at Carlingford in the north. From there, he moved to England where he was made Harbour Engineer at Barrow-in-Furness. When Hickson arrived in Australia in 1876, he was amply qualified to work on harbours and their construction, firstly in South

\textsuperscript{32} W.V Aird, \textit{The Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage of Sydney}, Sydney, 1961, p.218. The President was made a permanent position in 1889 as a result of a Royal Commission in 1897 to enquire into the operation of the board.

\textsuperscript{33} H.J. Gibbney and Ann G. Smith, \textit{A Biographical Register 1788-1939}, Vol.1, A-K, p.44.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid}, Vol. 2, L-Z., p.325.
Australia and then in Newcastle. He entered the public service as Engineer-in-Chief for Public Works in New South Wales in 1895, responsible for all the major works in the state with the exception of the railways and tramways. The following year saw him elevated to the post of Under-Secretary for Public Works after J. Barling, the previous Under-Secretary, was moved to the new Public Service Board.35

Hickson was probably a considerable influence behind the appointment of Henry Deane Walsh as Engineer-in-Chief of the Trust fairly soon after its formation. Like Hickson, Walsh had been trained in Ireland where he worked for the Great Southern and Western Railway Company before emigrating to New South Wales in 1877. The following year, he entered the Public Works Department where he worked under Hickson after 1895.36 Together, Waller, Hickson and Walsh made up a triumvirate of Irishmen drawn from similar middle-class protestant backgrounds. Indeed, Waller and Hickson attended the same school in Dublin, while both Waller and Walsh graduated from Trinity College Dublin.37 It is difficult to be conclusive about the implications of this grouping of men from similar backgrounds, but one can surmise that their shared origins probably gave them a mutual understanding of each other's personal orientations and public aspirations.

The Sydney Harbour Trust lost little time in setting about a reform and renovation of the port of Sydney. The area it controlled was enormous, covering a foreshore some 200 miles in length.38 The Trust was expected not merely to reconstruct much of the port, but to operate it for public and commercial use. An idea of the task confronting it can be seen in the case of Sydney Cove. It was suggested that all overseas vessels ought to be removed from the Cove as the congestion was potentially dangerous. Mail steamers could not, however, be removed as there was not enough room for them

36 Ibid.
37 Robert Rowan Purdon Hickson, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol.4, 1851-1890, D-J, MUP, p.389; Thomas Francis Waller, Gibney and Smith, Biographical Register, Vol L It is quite possible that Hickson and Waller knew of each other since their school-going days as the age difference was slight. Waller was born in 1844, whereas Hickson was born in 1842.
elsewhere. Instead, the Commissioners decided to tighten up the regulations controlling traffic in the Cove. The speed limit was reduced, the types of vessels which could operate in the Cove and the hours in which the steamers and ferries could use the Cove were regulated. Rental for the berths was collected assiduously.

The advantage to the shipping companies was that new sheds were built, such as those for the Orient-Pacific Company on the eastern side of the quay. Here, shed accommodation was extended 50 feet to the south, the wharf was redecked and the floor resheathed. A new wharf on the western side of the Cove was constructed for the Nord-Deutscher Lloyd line. It eventually measured 1,000 feet in length, and 40 feet in width. Two large sheds, 300 feet in length, were constructed on top. The extension left little room for the steamers of the German-Australian Company located beside it. Instead, the steamers were brought to Woolloomooloo Bay to be berthed. The liners removed from the Cove included the White Star steamers. They were too large to be allowed to continue to berth at the southern wharf at the western corner of the Cove. Instead, it was arranged with the owners, Dalgety and Company, to build a new wharf at Miller's Point, 1,100 feet long, 40 feet wide, with four sheds, each of them 220 feet in length. Part of the deal was a huge wool store, 287 feet long, 132 feet wide and seven storeys high, facing the wharf. This was among the first major works undertaken by the Harbour Trust as it was hoped to remove the steamers from the Cove by September 1902.39 This was a rather optimistic plan as the first steamer to be berthed at the new wharf, the s.s. *Militades*, was not able to do so until December 1903.40 By the end of June 1902, 700 feet of the wharf had been erected, and 1,200 feet by September 1903. By 1904, the sheds had been completed as were offices and waiting rooms for the passengers.

At Darling Harbour, the Commissioners took over many works of reconstruction already begun or planned by the Department of Public Works. A new jetty for Huddart Parker and Company had already been completed, but the Commissioners had this extended by another 50 feet.41

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41 *Ibid, First Report*, p.17
Extensive renovations were made to the sheds of the Howard Smith Company and new sheds and wharves had already been constructed by the Darling Harbour Resumptions Advisory Board before the advent of the Sydney Harbour Trust. In spite of the work of the earlier board, the Commissioners sanctioned repairs to a total of 54 wharves in their first year of office.

By far the largest project undertaken by the Advisory Board was the reconstruction of Darling Island. This work was started in 1897 by the Public Works Department and was then continued by the Advisory Board. It involved the construction of concrete wharves, the eastern one 1,300 feet in length, and the western, completed by the Harbour Trust, some 903 feet. The total cost of the work was in the range of 450,000 pounds and was completed by the Harbour Trust early in 1902. For four months of the year, the eastern side of the island was wholly taken up with handling wheat. This product was not liable to normal harbour dues and there was little financial return on these works. It was arranged with the Railway Commissioners, therefore, to use the sheds and facilities for other produce during the year. This was still not enough. A boom in the wheat trade in the years that followed compelled the Commissioners to sanction the construction of a new wharf at Pyrmont Bay in 1906. This new grain jetty eventually measured 1,000 feet in length and included a grain shed and three lines of rails given by the Railway Commissioners.

An additional responsibility of the Harbour Trust was the construction of sea walls to prevent the accumulation of rats. As mentioned, most of the sea walls in Sydney Harbour consisted of timber piles driven into the sea bed. To replace all these with reinforced concrete as in many other parts of the world would involve an enormous cost. Walsh came up with the ingenious solution of covering the sheet piling with a flat surface impenetrable by the rats, and reaching below the low-water mark. For this purpose, 'Monier Plates', hung in close contact along the face of the sheet piling, were ideal. The length of the sheets, ranging from 9 feet to 12 feet 6 inches, reached down far enough into the water to prevent rats from making their way under the wharves.

The work of the Trust along the foreshores in its first few years of existence was indeed impressive. In June 1906 the Commissioners reported that they had erected 63 buildings, altered 20 and demolished 139. It had erected 21 wharves, altered 11 and had 12 demolished. Over seven thousand feet of new berthing space was provided, 4,000 feet of rat-proof wall laid down and 3000 feet of new streets opened.44

A unique feature of the wharf construction was the continued use of timber. Reinforced concrete was now used commonly in Europe in particular, and America was following this lead. It had also been used for wharf construction in New Zealand and in Brisbane and Adelaide, all of pile and deck design. Both Melbourne and Sydney were reluctant, however, to use the material for wharves. As far as they were concerned, timber was still the most suitable material, particularly for piles. Walsh was especially impressed with the durability of the unsheathed turpentine in the old wharves. When Smith's wharf, at Miller's Point was being dismantled, he found that 80 per cent of the piles were still in good shape after 30 years of service. For as long as timber was available at reasonable cost, he saw no reason to change to concrete. He warned in 1910, however, that unless 'drastic action' was taken in connection with reafforestation and exportation, timber might run out of supply. The volume of timber used in the Sydney Harbour wharves is staggering. In 1909 alone, over 4,000 acres of forests had been denuded to provide ironbark and turpentine for the works carried out by the Trust.45

Future plans included the widening of Sussex Street and a new low-level road from Dawes Point to the Gas Works. The biggest task was the demolition of the wharves from the Gas Works up to Miller's Point and across to Dawes Point. These obsolete wharves would be replaced by new wharves with access to the new roadway. The wharves stretching from the Gas Works up to the new Dalgety's wharf would be approached by a widened Argyle Street, and would have double-decked sheds, with the upper decks being connected with a high level road way running from Argyle Street, parallel to Kent Street. The new jetties running from

Miller's Point to Dawes Point, on the other hand, would need only single-decked sheds since they had immediate access to Circular Quay through the proposed new roadway. When they were completed in 1922, however, they each had a concrete bridge running over Hickson road onto the street above it.

The Commissioners were understandably proud of their achievements. Hickson reported in 1908:

*Today the Port stands out as the first south of the Equator in clean lines; in the accommodation it affords to the magnificent fleets which enter the Heads; in the aids to navigation; and in the moderate charges made for the services rendered.... The Commissioners have practically remodeled the whole of the wharves.... Many streets have been improved and widened....*46

There was nothing particularly revolutionary about these plans. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, the Commissioners were 'sober minded' men. They did 'not pretend to have any far reaching premeditated plan of reconstruction',47 but sought instead to introduce changes piecemeal. If the scale of the works appeared monumental, it was the monumentality of bureaucratic and technical expertise, rather than human vanity.

The Institute of Architects of N.S.W. found little to criticise when they were brought on a sea-borne tour of the port in 1913. They witnessed the construction of the enormous new Woolloomooloo wharf, built on piers of turpentine timber protected by Monier cylinders. This wharf eventually measured 1,150 feet in length and 208 feet in width. It was planned to have a roadway 53 feet wide run up the centre of the wharf, with double-decked stores on either side. The whole wharf would then be covered in a concrete floor. From there, they were taken to see the new reinforced concrete wharfs of Dawes Point, where the Trust had built rooms and offices for the large steamers. The editor of the journal of the institute thought the architects and engineers were to be

47 *Daily Telegraph*, 8 Jan 1902.
... congratulated on the splendid scheme they had laid down to make Darling Harbour one of the finest in wharf accommodation for shipping in the world. There will be a beautiful broad road right round this great basin, in close proximity to Sussex-street and all the business streets and centres of Sydney. From Dawes' Point we inspected all the wharves and stores right round to Miller's wharf and Dalgethy's wharf, at which stores are built of brick and stone, in excellent design.48

How far the work of the Commissioners fitted into an overall plan for the city is, however, a more complicated task to discern. Certainly, Hickson, in his capacity as under-secretary in the Department of Public Works would have been aware of the need for integrated development, and his later experience as Commissioner for the enquiries into city improvement and the city railways would have complemented this awareness. Nonetheless, the Harbour Trust held no brief for the planning of the city except in so far as it directly affected the work of the Trust. When Hickson gave evidence to the Improvement Commission as the President of the Trust, it was primarily to draw attention to the desire of the Trust to remove the Gas Works.49 It was hoped to erect three jetties there, each 400 feet long. More importantly, the Gas Works obstructed the construction of the low-level road from Dawes Point to connect up with Sussex Street. It was 'absolutely necessary', Hickson believed,

... that the wharfs that I have described between Miller's Point and Dawes' Point, and Miller's Point and the Gas Works, should have communication with the city, and, if we could not get the site of the Gas Works, there would be no alternative but to take a tunnel round under Kent-street and back again into Sussex-street, and so miss the Gas Works. The cost of that would be about £160,000, and we would get no return from it whatsoever; it would be dead money. If the Gas Works were resumed we would get 720 feet of valuable frontage.50

The success of the new road depended on its value as a through road from the city, meaning the Circular Quay area, and George street, around to Darling Harbour and its business and trading communities. The

50 Ibid.
continued presence of the Gas Works, however, meant that this idea was impossible to carry out. Another advantage of the scheme was that it would relieve Sussex street of much of the traffic that had no business there. Traffic heading southwards in the direction of Redfern, and which would normally take the tortuous route through congested Sussex Street, would be diverted by a newly widened Napoleon Street up onto Kent Street and removing from Sussex Street up to 50 per cent of its present traffic.

This is not to say that the Harbour Trust paid no attention to the needs of structural developments other than their own. According to Hickson, the newly-constructed wharves had been made so that they would not interfere with a bridge to the North Shore, while the tunnel under Windmill street being constructed for the new road had a width of 79 feet, purposely to allow for two railway lines, if they were ever needed. Yet even in this case it must be noted that the construction of railway lines along the new road would necessitate the resumption of the Gas Works, a fact which the the Harbour Trust were happy to highlight. As Hickson told the Improvement Commission:

_The Commissioners are watching with great interest the proceedings of the City Improvement Committee, and they desire to express the hope not only that the construction of a railway along these water frontages will be one of the recommendations of the Committee, but that such recommendation will reach fruition in the near future._

The Harbour Trust may not have seen any merit in the railway itself. Walsh, was specifically opposed to much of the railway scheme. When asked if he proposed a railway along the eastern side of Darling Harbour, he replied that he did not think it would be of much use. Furthermore, if a line was placed from the head of the harbour up to the Gas Works, it would be a 'positive disadvantage'. The chief companies along that strip of the harbour

... trade along the coast to bring food to the people of Sydney. Not an ounce of that trade would be put on a railway line if it were there tomorrow. The same remark applies to Jones Brothers and all the coal

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid, p.52.
companies. I am informed by the A.U.S.N. Company, the Melbourne Company, and the Union Company, that they would not ship if they had a railway there. Their trade is of such a nature that they do not want railway facilities.53

There was a case for a railway line at the northern end of the harbour, Walsh conceded, but even in this case, the railway line need only be extended as far as the Gas Works and then around to Dawes' Point and eventually to Circular Quay.

His evidence was completely at odds with the evidence of Henry Deane, the ex-Engineer-in-Chief of the Railway Construction branch of the Department of Public Works. Deane was now a private engineering consultant. When Deane was recalled after Walsh had left the stand, he was adamant that a railway should be connected with the southern end of Darling Harbour, that is, below the Gas Works.54 He believed this railway ought to be linked with the new deepwater wharves the Harbour Trust intended to build between Miller's Point and Dawes Point. He did not see any necessity for the goods railway to be connected with Circular Quay.

Confronted with these conflicting views, the Improvement Commissioners opted for a compromise. Their report did not oppose the construction of the railway 'assuming that our recommendation to resume the Gas Company's works be adopted'.55 It was a vague recommendation which stressed that the railway could be built 'when the needs of traffic demand it', a proposal which seems to hint at the possibility that such a demand did not exist.

It seems likely that a deciding factor in the support of the Harbour Trust for the Darling Harbour goods railway was the knowledge that the Railway Commissioners were anxious to have the line built. In his evidence to the Improvement Commission, the Chief Commissioner of the railways, Thomas Johnson, outlined the plans for a new goods line, diverted from Redfern, running into Glebe Island, where most of the export cargoes would be unloaded, then on to Darling Island to deal with coal and wheat,

53 Ibid.
55 Ibid, p.xxxv.
and after continuing to the head of Darling Harbour where it would finally terminate in the area of the Gas Works.\textsuperscript{56} The Harbour Trust was no doubt aware of these plans before Johnson revealed them to the Improvement Commission. The fact that both bodies of commissioners awaited the resumption of the Gas Works added to the case for resumption. The original assurance of Lyne that the Gas Works was not an impediment to any prospective railway was now irrelevant as the pressure mounted on the government to resume the site.\textsuperscript{57} The interim report of the Improvement Commission dealt entirely with the matter, and unanimously recommended that the site be resumed without delay, whether or not the railway went ahead.\textsuperscript{58}

It is difficult to say if there was a conspiracy on the part of both sets of Commissioners to press for the resumption of the Gas Works. The two bodies certainly cooperated with each other from time to time. In May 1901, the Harbour Trust made known their support of the proposals of the Railway Commissioners to have the government vote £100,000 to the Department of Agriculture in order to increase facilities for the handling of agricultural produce at Darling Island.\textsuperscript{59} The major facilities under consideration were wheat sheds, which would normally only be used for four months of the year, during the wheat export season. The two sets of commissioners agreed to have them used for other purposes for the rest of the year. The development of Glebe Island appears to have been largely inspired by the Railway Commissioners rather than by the Harbour Trust, although the latter were the rightful occupiers of the area.\textsuperscript{60} The later construction of new jetties, railway and tram lines in this area reflected the

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, p.4-6. See plan No.16.
\textsuperscript{57} NSWPD, 5 July 1900, 728. Lyne stated that such was the contour of the land, a railway would need to go by tunnel through the area.
\textsuperscript{58} Interim Report, Royal Commission on the Improvement of Sydney, xviii.
\textsuperscript{59} Sydney Harbour Trust Commissioners' First Report, p.18.
\textsuperscript{60} Royal Commission on the Improvement of Sydney, Henry Deane Walsh, 1393, p.54. A Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in 1910 produced a report on the proposals of the Railway Commissioners to lay out a goods railway from Flemington to Glebe Island. It was proposed to continue the line by bridge over Johnstones Bay to Pyrmont and do away with the need to carry livestock in the city by the main suburban line. As it happened, the final scheme went behind Blackwattle and on to Darling Harbour. It was extended to Glebe Island which was then developed from 1912. See P.R. Proudfoot unpublished PhD thesis, UNSW, The Port of Sydney as it has Engendered City Growth and Urban Construction, (1973) Vol 1. p.61-62.
value to the railways of the coal trade, which had been previously carried out at the Pyrmont Bay/Darling Island complex, alongside the wheat cargoes.

At the outset, some of the parliamentarians were unsure of the eventual outcome of the relationship between the Trust and the Railway Commissioners. The representative of the Gipps division, W.J. Spruson, took a gloomy view of the combined interests of the Harbour Trust and the Railway Commissioners in Pyrmont Bay.61 Both these bodies had virtually unlimited authority over this area and, he believed, there was no means of settling differences if the interests were in conflict. Lyne replied that the Minister was the ultimate arbitrator of the interests of the two sets of commissioners.62 Indeed, Lyne could have gone further and asserted the right of the government to override the interests of either authority if it so wished. As he pointed out, the Harbour Trust commissioners had 'no power to interfere with the Government in carrying out a railway in any direction they like.' He speculated, in any case, that in the event of a North Shore bridge 'a railway in that connection will probably run down the eastern side of Darling Harbour'.63

Lyne did not however consider his government to be responsible for the preparation of that contingency. The site of the Fresh Food and Ice Company, at the head of the harbour in the southeastern corner was not resumed by the government in Darling Harbour in 1900. Lyne considered that the resumption of this site had more to do with railway matters than with the question of the plague and the maintenance of the harbour. His view on this was understandable, but the decision meant that it was impossible to bring a goods line from Pyrmont Bay or Darling Island around to the other side of the harbour because of the acute angle at the head of the harbour. More than one politician raised the matter. When discussing the *Darling Harbour Wharves Resumption Bill*, James Gormly (Wagga Wagga) did not consider the bill 'suitable' unless provisions were made for the railway, including 'extensive reclamations of the shallow

61 NSWPD, W.J. Spruson, 5 Aug 1900, p.1924.
62 Ibid.
After looking at the plans showing the resumed lands, Thomas Waddell (Cowra) also suggested resuming more land at the head of the harbour as there was 'scarcely sufficient room to allow of the connection' of the railway systems on either side. When Spruson suggested an amendment to the bill extending the resumed area to include an area of land around the head of the harbour, he was given a sympathetic, although ultimately negative, response.

Lyne admitted that he had been pressed to include this area in the bill but had not done so for two main reasons. Firstly, heavy costs were involved, with the area valued at £160,000. Secondly, he considered it 'had more to do with an extension of the railway than with anything else'. Spruson was supported by another representative for the area, Samuel Smith, who warned against the failure to resume the head of the harbour. Unless this resumption took place, a future government might have to resume land up to George Street and Hay Street if they ever wanted a railway extension to the eastern side of the harbour, thus making the clearance of the land for the railway a much more expensive procedure. To refuse to entertain the proposal to resume land at the head of the harbour, he claimed, and to spend another £300,000, was like 'straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel'. To what extent Spruson and Smith represented the interests of property owners and others in the area who stood to gain from the resumptions has not been determined, but it is an aspect of their lobbying that ought to be borne in mind.

Finally, we must deal with a less fortunate and more complicated feature of the work of the Harbour Trust—the remodeling of the 'Rocks'. When the *Sydney Harbour Trust Act* was passed in February 1901, the area it controlled contained very few dwelling houses, hotels or what could be termed residential property. There were 32 shops, five hotels and 29 houses. The bulk of the area known as the 'Rocks', most of which had been resumed, was placed under the jurisdiction of the City Improvement

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64 Ibid, J. Gormly, 28 June 1900, p.545.
65 Ibid, T. Waddell, 5 July 1900, p.689.
66 Ibid, 5 July 1900, p.767.
67 Ibid, p.768.
68 Ibid.
Advisory Board, consisting of Varney Parkes, MLA for Canterbury, George Barlow, President of the Institute of Architects, and George McCredie, a contractor responsible for the cleansing of the quarantine area. This area was, however, passed over to the Harbour Trust in June 1901 at the request of the Trust.69 The area they took over consisted of 401 houses, 82 shops, 23 hotels, 70 bonds and stores, as well as 45 factories, workshops and offices, bringing a total of 803 separate properties of this sort under the control of the Trust.70 It was a major responsibility for the Trust which now assumed the role of residential landlord as well as that of port administrator and construction authority. Immediately upon obtaining the properties, the Trust condemned 71, of which 40 were houses in Day Street, and 14 in Clyde Street. It considered that 35 per cent of the property was in 'bad repair', and up to December 1901, just six months after the Trust were placed in charge, repairs and alterations were carried out on 364 houses, 33 stores, and 21 hotels. It was clear that the area needed to be remodeled as soon as possible.

The City Improvement Advisory Board had already drawn up a scheme by the end of 1901.71 Several streets were to be regraded, while George, Harrington and Cumberland Streets were to be widened. Furthermore, a railway line was to be carried along Princes Street at an elevation of 25 feet in anticipation of a North Shore bridge over the harbour. By far the most significant feature of the scheme was the proposal to build two or three huge tenement blocks 'on a scale more elaborate and complete than has perhaps been attempted in any other part of the world'.72 The principal tenement block to be proposed was bounded by Windmill, Fort, Argyle and Kent Streets. The frontage of the Windmill Street side would measure 705 feet, that of the Kent Street side, 249 feet, and Lower Fort Street, 225 feet. It was estimated that this enormous building would house 700 families, or possibly 4,000 people. The building was to be served by lifts and electricity. The tenements ranged from two to five rooms, each with a bathroom, and the top rate of rent was struck at 12/6 per week.

69 The Sydney Harbour Trust Commissioners’ First Report, 1902, p.28.
70 Ibid.
71 Daily Telegraph, 7 Jan 1902.
72 Ibid.
Map 3: Re-modelling "The Rocks"

Daily Telegraph, 7 January 1902
The cost of the scheme, at half a million pounds, was prohibitive to the incoming Commissioners. A new committee consisting of Hickson, Walter Vernon, the Government Architect, and Joseph Davis, Under-Secretary to the Department of Public Works, shelved the plans in favour of a far more modest scheme estimated to cost £60,000, utilising the existing streets as far as possible. They decided nonetheless to go ahead with the construction of tenement blocks, in spite of the condemnation of the plans. A commonly held point of view was proclaimed by R.D. Meagher, who believed 'what was wanted was the essence of home life, and I think that a terrace house would tend to that ideal to a far greater degree than a tenement building ... rapid and cheaper transit was more essential to the workers'.73 According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the tenement system was 'irresistibly associated with the barracks' in the minds of the working class, while the *Evening News* charged Hickson and his colleagues with

> but a very slight acquaintance with the man they are attempting to cater for, if they do not know that he would prefer his own little cottage, with its "bit o' back yard" and its front verandah, to all the tenements with "all the most modern sanitary and other appliances" that ever were built. The cottage at least, is a home; the other never could by any possibility be made to resemble more than a mere human hive.74

Almost alone in the world of labour politics, John D. Fitzgerald supported the plans, on the basis that there was a 'tendency in all parts of the world to keep the workmen close to their work'.75

When a series of the tenement buildings were completed in early 1911 in Lower Fort Street, the public response was generally negative. The nine series of blocks, each three storeys high with a flat on each level appealed to very few:

> The rooms are very small. In some cases too small to erect a double bed in, if any dressing room is required in addition. The light is bad. Although the general fittings are good, yet when one is told that the

73 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 Feb 1902.
74 *Evening News*, 31 Jan 1902.
75 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 Feb 1902.
coal bins are inside the pantries underneath where the shelves for keeping food are fixed, an idea of the arrangements can be gleaned.76

A deputation of the Labour Council of N.S.W. and of the Coal Lumpers Union was also less than impressed with the new tenements. One stevedore complained they drive 'men to the public house parlours. They destroy the family life. They strain the marriage-tie'. The new buildings of Munn Street were considered to be little better than 'kennels'.

The Trust was never entirely happy with the prospect of collecting rents from the four to five hundred tenants it inherited, but it felt matters were made more difficult by the tendency of many of the tenants to strain their new landlords to the utmost.

It has been evident that a number of tenants of the resumed properties, having the Government for a landlord, had no intention of paying rental if they could help doing so.77

The 'Rocks' became a battleground between the inhabitants of the area and the government. In 1911, the Premier, James McGowen, felt compelled to inspect some of the properties as a result of the outcry over the new tenements, but also as a result of consistent complaints about the 'administration of the officers who had the management of the Government property, and transacted the business with the Government tenants'.78

What exactly the administration was guilty of was never fully described, although the Sydney Morning Herald suggested that 'the evidences of mismanagement in the administration of the area' had been made clear to the Premier. Certainly the conditions of many of the houses were appalling. McGowen had only to ascend to the first floor of Dyers' buildings, in Harrington Street, before he cried 'enough' to the delegation that accompanied him. The point had been made. 'Vile odours winded the stairway' according to the correspondent of the Daily Telegraph. 'I'm getting a roasting', said the Premier, running in retreat from the women who pulled him every way to to get him to look at the state of the flats they

76 Daily Telegraph, 15 Feb 1911.
77 Sydney Harbour Trust Commissioners' First Report, 1902, p.28.
78 Daily Telegraph, 14 Mar 1911.
were expected to live in. In May 1911, the management of the 'Rocks' was transferred to the newly formed Housing Board in the hope that it might be better managed in future. This was not the end of the matter, however, for later in the year the administration of the area was subject to a select committee of the Legislative Assembly as a result of continued allegations of maladministration.

Thus, the Sydney Harbour Trust proved itself to be more able as an administrator of the port of Sydney than as a residential landlord. The intricacies of managing property for statutory and commercial purposes was a far different matter to that of managing tenements and houses for people to live in. The complexity of coping with demands of home life was simply beyond the scope of the engineers, trained and experienced in the construction of harbours and bridges. What the engineers were most suited for was the reconstruction of the harbour in line with advances in their own profession. The role played by engineers in the Harbour Trust is a response to the impact of the adaptation of steel and iron to the shipping industry, and the enormous increase in the size of the wharves, decks and sheds are a recognition of a new era in shipping.

To this extent, the work of the Trust is part of a general process of urban construction set in motion by the state in the first quarter of the century. As in the case of the Trust, the process was partly owing to the outbreak of the plague, but also to technological advances. In addition to steel and iron, electricity and concrete had an irretrievable effect on Sydney. Buildings became bigger and higher, traffic greatly increased, and plans were actively made for a city railway and a bridge to span the harbour. The concern over these changes, and these possibilities is exemplified by the 1909 Royal Commission on Improvement, when men and women from all walks of life suggested improvements to the metropolis.

79 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 Mar 1911; *Daily Telegraph*, 14 Mar 1911.
80 *NSWPD*, Vol 43, 14 Nov 1911, p.1660. The target of many of the accusations was the manager of the area, Mr F.F. Hall, who had been in charge when it was under the control of the Harbour Trust.
The Trust did not see itself, however, as responsible for the overall 'improvement' of the city. It had fairly clearly defined functions to do with Sydney Harbour, and it fulfilled those functions to the best of its ability. The Trust may be put into the context of the creation of various *ad hoc* bodies to provide well-defined services in the metropolis. In this way, the state distanced itself from the day to day running of Sydney, but at the same time, eroded the powers of the municipal councils, in particular, those of the City Council. Once formed, the Harbour Trust consistently opposed the transfer of powers to local councils. The Harbour Trust was a state-supported body, similar to the Railway Commissioners, and it reconstructed the harbour in order to serve the state as a whole. This is particularly evident in hindsight, when the Trust was eventually superseded by the statewide Maritime Services Board in 1935. The process makes clear the colonial nature of the state, which first established its authority and infrastructure in the capital city and then moved out to the rest of New South Wales. The work of the Trust is, therefore, part of a colonial intention, confident of its future.


No 19. Smith, Susan J. *Gender Differences in the Attainment and Experience of Owner-Occupation in Australia.* Forthcoming.