

P A R T I

IMPERIAL STATISTICS 1788-1855

THE EARLY YEARS 1788-1822

ARTHUR PHILLIP was the first Australian statistician. In 1787 he was appointed Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales and its dependencies with the widest powers: powers necessary to transport a fleet of convicts and to establish and maintain a settlement far beyond immediate supervision from London. With this freedom of action however went accountability. The settlement was seen as an economic means of disposing of felons, but only time and comprehensive accounting records would show whether the experiment was a success. More than economics was involved, with the British authorities requiring reports on social and legal matters. Accountability is implicit throughout the *Instructions* given to Phillip in April 1787, and this involved the collecting and collating of information in numerical form. Some tasks were specified. He was required to issue tools and utensils and

use every proper degree of economy, and be careful that the Commissary so transmit an account of the issues from time to time to the Commissioners of our Treasury, to enable them to judge of the propriety or expediency of granting further supplies. The clothing of the convicts and the provisions issued to them, and the civil and military establishments, must be accounted for in the same manner.¹

To the appropriate Secretary of State had to go 'an account of the numbers inhabiting the neighbourhood of the intended settlement'.² Land grants could be made to emancipated convicts, in which case 'you will cause copies of such grants as may be passed to be preserved, and make a regular return of the said grants'³, not only to Treasury but also to the Committee for Trade and Plantations.

The type of statistical material produced by Phillip can be seen in his early reports. On 9 July 1788 in his fourth dispatch to Lord Sydney at the Home Office, Phillip included, along with an account of population numbers, tables relating to livestock in the settlement, to a general return on the four companies of marines and to a return on the sick and the dead since the landing.⁴ The following day, reporting to the Admiralty, he referred to the inclusion with his dispatch of 'the weekly accounts'.⁵ On 28 September a Commissariat return was sent to the Home Office on the state of stores and the number of persons being victualled at Sydney and Norfolk Island.⁶ A detailed return of the whole population was included in Phillip's dispatch dated 25 July 1790; it was signed by the Commissary and numbered the population in categories of men, women and children classified as military, civil or convict.⁷ Phillip's first return with details of land grants was dated 5 November 1791; it listed the names of 87 settlers who had been granted land in New South Wales and Norfolk Island with details of their status, marital situation, date of settling, size and location of grant and area in actual cultivation.⁸ The following year on 16 October the return was able to indicate what crops were being grown on the cleared ground.⁹

On Phillip's departure in December 1792, Lieutenant-Governor Grose administered the settlement, and he was informed on 15 November 1793 that his duties

For notes pertaining to Parts I and II see pp. 35ff.

included 'a yearly return . . . signed by the Governor of the settlement . . . of all births and deaths within the settlement'.¹⁰ Grose was also reminded of the detail required in the Commissariat returns:

A like return should be transmitted of all provisions, clothing, and stores, annually received for the use of the settlement . . . [and] returns of their distribution, under separate heads, of clothing, stores, and provisions. The distribution of the provisions should appear in a victualling-book, which should be kept by the Commissary, in like manner as is usual with pursers in the Navy, bearing the persons on separate lists, where their rations differ, the title of each list expressing the ration; and the ready-made clothing should be distributed in the manner above mentioned; and a regular account, both as to the time and the numbers, mentioning their names to whom it is distributed, should appear in a yearly return of clothing.¹¹

In the years that followed, a flow of statistics was sent from New South Wales to Britain, while for their part the British colonial authorities, with varying success, ordered more types of information, more accurate information and more regular information. The Governors not only had the duty of reporting on the state of the colony, they had actually to administer the colony: a colony established as a large gaol in a wilderness, which grew rapidly and in which free settlement soon became important. For their own use the Governors required detailed information, and the very nature of the colony, the fact that it was under firm government control, meant that from its beginning the statistics created were basically official statistics. Four areas of statistics are now considered.

Population

A gaol requires the careful counting and identification of prisoners. This requirement was reinforced in New South Wales because prisoners were not only the workforce of the settlement but had to be supplied from the public stores, which themselves were wholly imported and were at critically low levels in the first years of settlement. Phillip's first report on population was in his dispatch of 9 July 1788:

Of the convicts, 36 men and 4 women died on the passage, 20 men and 8 women since landing—eleven men and one woman absconded; four have been executed, and three killed by the natives. The number of convicts now employed in erecting the necessary buildings and cultivating the lands only amounts to 320—and the whole number of people victualled amounts to 966—consequently we have only the labour of a part to provide for the whole.¹²

Convicts then were constantly being counted and often as part of the total population. These counts took the form of 'musters', actual assemblies of the population, which were commonly supervised by the Governor or his deputy. Records of population musters exist for almost every year between 1790 and 1825. The method of mustering took many forms and was clearly much easier to organise when the population was small, wholly dependent on government stores and the area of settlement was limited. An early form of general muster is suggested by an order of 23 September 1795:

A General Muster will be held on Saturday next, the 26th instant, at Sydney; on Thursday, the 1st of October, at Parramatta and Toongabbe; and on Saturday, the 3rd of October, at the settlement at the Hawkesbury,—at which places the Commissary will attend for the purpose of obtaining a correct account of the numbers and distribution of all persons (the military excepted) in the different afore-mentioned settlements, whether victualled or not victualled from the publick stores.¹³

With the order went the threat that those who failed to attend would 'be either confined to the cells, put to hard labor, or corporally punished'.¹⁴

For administrative convenience this muster took place over several days, but Governor Hunter ordered a simultaneous muster because the previous method

. . . gave good time for imposters and other villains to practise their tricks and ingenuity by answering the first call at Sydney, where they have receiv'd provisions and slops as one resident in that district; on the day of call at Parramatta they have appear'd there, have been enter'd in the muster list of that place, and have been again victual'd and sometimes clothed; the attempt has sometimes been made (and not always unsuccessfully) at the third muster.¹⁵

And in December 1796, in order to protect property when the population assembled at a muster, Hunter found it necessary to order that servants and labourers assemble one day and settlers the next.¹⁶ In 1801 Governor King summed up what he thought to be an unsatisfactory situation:

I have used every means to ascertain the numbers of every description of persons in the colony, which has not been done without much difficulty, owing to the scattered state they were in, the numbers who had obtained false certificates of their times being expired, and their being no general list whatever of the inhabitants . . .¹⁷

By 1809 the muster extended over a fortnight with different classes of people assigned different muster days.¹⁸ By 1812 the period of muster had extended to almost one month¹⁹, and in 1819 it took from 27 September to 12 November.²⁰ In 1820 expansion of settlement necessitated new methods: three new muster centres were added to the existing four and supervision was conducted by magistrates rather than the Governor and the Deputy Commissary-General.²¹ In 1823 there were sixteen muster-stations²² and 1825, twenty.²³ The accuracy of the picture of the population presented by the musters must vary between individual years, but in general they appear to be in significant error. The change to the counting by magistrates in 1820 was a failure. Governor Macquarie found the returns so inaccurate that he felt unable to send them to England²⁴, and even a second attempt by the magistrates was no more satisfactory.²⁵ As a result, in 1821, Macquarie reverted to his method of personal supervision of the muster. Not that his method would guarantee satisfactory results: in 1823 and 1825 the official population figures of 29,692 and 38,217 were made up partly from those who actually attended the musters, but also from an estimated 4,853 in 1823 and 5,203 in 1825 who were 'unaccounted for'.²⁶

The Commissariat

The key economic institution in the settlement was the Commissariat. It was established to provide the supply of stores for the penal colony. From the beginning the task was a demanding one. In 1796 Commissary Palmer complained that he had been required to keep accounts in the same manner as the 'purser of a man-of-war',

. . . but when the numbers to be accounted for are from three to four thousand persons, the books then required to be kept become very extensive, particularly those of the slop and victualling accounts.²⁷

Moreover, he went on, his duties were more than those of a purser since he was

obliged to keep a particular account of all kinds of stores received and expended in the colony, and to transmit accounts of all ordnance, naval, victualling, and hospital stores, that may be received and issued to the different Boards . . .²⁸

And he foresaw great difficulties as both the numbers in the colony and the area of settlement expanded.

Already, by 1796, the Commissariat had expanded beyond its original purpose of a store of issue. It developed as the main market for local produce and the main retail

outlet for supplies. Goods were sometimes bartered, but were more often sold on cash or credit. It was the most important source of foreign currency for the colony. It has been called 'Australia's first bank'.²⁹ The activities of the Commissariat were under the control of the Governors until 1813. Concern over misconduct in its administration then led to it being made directly responsible to the office of the Commissary General in London, itself a sub-department of the Treasury.

The activities of this institution were central to the functioning of the colony's economy for at least the first thirty or forty years. Its accounts and reports are the main source of economic statistics. These records would arise naturally in the circumstances of the operation of the business, but their extent, form and regularity of appearance were strongly influenced by a stream of complaints and instructions from London. The early Governors' dispatches regularly included such information as the stock of stores, rate of consumption, numbers and quantity of rations of those victualled at the store. The quarterly returns by the Commissariat of its accounts to the Treasury for auditing have been preserved.

Vital Statistics

Governors were required to report annually on the numbers of births and deaths. These reports, however, although headed births and deaths, record only some baptisms and burials. The position was summed up by the surgeon responsible for the returns in 1801:

The state of births and deaths in this report is accurate as far as comes within our knowledge, but people die and children are born without our being made acquainted therewith.³⁰

The various authorities deputed to record vital statistics—clergy, surgeons and magistrates—don't appear to have taken their duties very seriously, and difficulties became more pronounced as settlement spread. Moreover, the absence of Roman Catholic clergy until 1820 (except for 1803-08) seems to have meant the virtual exclusion of members of this sect from the returns. Indeed official figures for Roman Catholics do not appear until 1831.

Agricultural Statistics

Providing statistics of stock owned by the government in the early years of settlement was relatively straightforward. As agriculture expanded and increasingly was conducted in private hands, the collection of accurate statistics became much more difficult. One early method required military officers to put in a return on their own agricultural activities and constables to collect the information from settlers.³¹ Later, and more systematically, the collection of agricultural information was combined with the population musters. For example, a return in 1800 based on musters of 18 July and 15 August gave numbers for sheep, cattle, horses, goats, hogs, acres in wheat and acres of maize to be planted, according to ownership by government or individuals.³²

This discussion of types of statistics transmitted to Britain is not meant to be exhaustive. Returns on other areas such as customs revenue and land grants were also made. It is obvious that the reliability of the statistics varied greatly, as did the punctuality and regularity of their appearance; for instance, in 1821 the Colonial Office drew Macquarie's attention to the fact that there had been no land grant returns since 1812.³³ All these statistical reports may be regarded as official, but the relationship between the colonial and the British authorities meant that they were of the nature of documents reporting and accounting within government departments.

Although the contents of some would find occasional publication in a British parliamentary paper, they were never published on any regular basis.

There has been no discussion so far of the colony in Van Diemen's Land. Obviously it has its own story, but in terms of the nature, problems and significance of official statistics, it is broadly similar to that of New South Wales. After 1822 and to 1855 this type of statistical reporting by New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land continued, and they were joined by other Australian colonies, Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria, as they were established. Although these returns continued, their importance in representing Australian official statistics was greatly diminished when they were largely incorporated in a single, annual volume.

THE BLUE BOOKS 1822-1855

The mainstream of official statistics in Australia begins with the *Blue Books*, the annual statistical returns of the Australian colonies to the Colonial Office. When self-government was obtained in 1855, the *Blue Books* were transformed into the *Statistical Registers* of the second half of the nineteenth century. *Blue Books* were not limited to Australia: all British colonies had to make the same type of statistical returns. Their emergence reflected the new imperial situation following the loss of the American colonies and the end of the Napoleonic wars.

In 1788 colonial affairs centred in the hands of the Home Office, but were administered simply as part of the general business of that department. Moreover, other departments such as Treasury, Admiralty, Ordnance and Customs had their own officials in the colonies who were responsible directly to them. A significant change took place in 1801 when colonial administration was turned over to the recently-created office of Secretary of State for War. War precluded much attention being given to the colonies, until the appointment of Lord Bathurst in 1812 heralded a sustained period of reorganisation. Continuity in the office was maintained, since Bathurst retained his post until 1827 and his Under-Secretary, Goulburn, stayed with him until 1822. Their achievements have been highly rated:

[They] unquestionably created a Colonial Office where none existed before, and in so doing they performed a task which was essential if the British Empire was to survive. To build a central machinery which could furnish information for the ministry and parliament on colonial affairs was the first step toward the reorganization of the empire in the nineteenth century.³⁴

The continuing war probably delayed Bathurst from giving his full attention to the colonies until 1815, when the long-run overhaul of colonial administration began. Legal, economic, financial, social, military matters, all needed revision. Central to change and to efficient administration was the systematic gathering of information. Initially, the *Blue Books* were seen by Bathurst as supplying the financial data.

He first introduced the preparation of what were called the 'Blue Books', which name is now even adopted in Parliamentary documents; and when in my evidence before the Canada Committee in 1828 I stated my opinion 'that it was expedient that the most unqualified publicity should be given both in the Colonies and the mother country to all pecuniary accounts, appropriations and matters of finance,' I only stated the opinion which had led to the adoption of this Blue Book system, which system as far as I have been able to ascertain, has been approved by the most rigid economists.³⁵

The origin of the term 'Blue Book' appears to lie simply in the colour of the report cover. It was sufficiently institutionalised by 1829, that when, in a dispatch Governor Darling referred to the 'Crown Book'³⁶, Under-Secretary Hay replied that this had been noticed by the Secretary of State, and that 'I am directed to acquaint

you that the original name given to this compilation, that of the "Blue Book", is preferred'.³⁷ An early reference to the term was in 1817 when returns were made to a House of Commons Select Committee on Finances. The Committee had requested information from the responsible government departments concerning office holders in the colonies: office, possession or reversion, salary, name and date of appointment. Some departments were unable to provide this information in full. In its reply the Colonial Office named only fourteen officers in New South Wales (headed by the Governor) and four in Van Diemen's Land.³⁸ It was probably this request from the Finance Committee which brought home to the Colonial Office its lack of information. In the same month it dispatched to the colonies forms which were to be filled in by all office-holders and collected by the Governor.³⁹

The annual system of reporting by *Blue Book* was initiated with its dispatch from London in March 1822 to the Governors of the colonies. It was accompanied by a circular from Bathurst which began with a formal explanation:

I have had occasion to remark that a want of a regular form of transmission of detailed information respecting the financial resources of His Majesty's Colonies, and the several branches of their expenditure, is a deficiency which creates much inconvenience to the public Service.⁴⁰

Bathurst went on to list the five main divisions of the book and to discuss the sort of information required. The topics reflected British preoccupation with the cost of the colonies: 'Abstract of the Nett Revenue and Expenditure'; 'Schedule of Taxes, Duties, etc.'; 'Military Expenditure'; 'Establishment'; and 'Schedule of the Fees, etc.' The Governors were informed that in future the books should be returned 'as soon as possible to this department after the close of every year'. Further, more general, information was required in a circular of April 1823, relating to 'Population'; 'Exports and Imports'; and 'Currency'.⁴¹ In the event, the first *Blue Book* for New South Wales was completed for the year 1822.

The table of contents of the first *Blue Book* consisted of the eight subjects listed above and at the bottom of this page was printed 'This Book and the Duplicate of it must be returned to the Colonial Office'. The inside pages had printed headings indicating in more detail what contents were required; the entries made in New South Wales were entirely hand-written. In length it was made up of 77 folios, not all of them with entries, with almost a half being given over to 'Establishment'; details were there required relating to each office holder, beginning with the Governor. The importance of the West Indian Colonies at this time is suggested by the population section which has headings referring to 'Free Blacks' and 'Slaves'. In New South Wales these pages were ignored and there are later entries for the civil and military populations.

The birth of the *Blue Book* in New South Wales was difficult. Governor Brisbane was unable to complete a return for 1821, and in May 1823 was sent a reproof from the Colonial Office urging him to 'lose no time' sending a return for 1822⁴², for which fresh forms were enclosed. The timing was already late for 1822, because, as the Colonial Office later admitted, 'unfortunately, in consequence of accident, [they] were not sent to you as soon as to the other Colonies'.⁴³ In January 1824 Brisbane could reply only with a summary statement of finance, pleading that this 'altogether new' form of presentation of information was 'attended with so much labor'.⁴⁴

He was not able to dispatch the 1822 *Blue Book* until March 1825. He believed it 'to be as accurate as the time and the nature of so complicated an undertaking will admit of, for a first attempt'.⁴⁵ For its part, the Colonial Office had continued to be laggardly: it did not send the 1823 Book to New South Wales until April 1824.⁴⁶

There was no Book from New South Wales for 1824. After 1824 this annual report was always presented, but delays, recriminations and explanations continued.

In June 1828 the Secretary of State wrote firmly to Governor Darling:

It is impossible for me to imagine why so little care seems hitherto to have been taken to send home the Blue Book regularly and in due time . . . I anxiously hope that you will not render it necessary for me to remind you again of His Majesty's Pleasure upon this subject.⁴⁷

He went on to order that the New South Wales Colonial Secretary should take responsibility for the *Blue Book*. The Colonial Secretary's problem, apart from overwork, was that of obtaining satisfactory accounts on time from the various officers responsible. For the past three years, although the *Blue Book* was compiled in his office, 'I did not consider that I was answerable for the financial Statements which it contained, any further than as to the correctness of the transcription'.⁴⁸ Now that he was to be held personally responsible for their 'correctness', an immense amount of work was involved to 'put them into an intelligible form'. As a result, and because the 1828 *Blue Book* had to be printed, he could send only one incomplete copy in July 1829.⁴⁹

The complete book was dispatched ultimately in October, and on the last page the Colonial Secretary cautiously wrote:

I certify that this Book has been compiled under my immediate inspection; and that the several Statements and Returns contained in it are as accurate as the means in my power have enabled me to make them.⁵⁰

Delays continued. The 1829 *Blue Book* was not sent from New South Wales until February 1831. Again the Colonial Office had been late in sending the blank Book; again there was pressure of work on the Colonial Secretary; but on this occasion he also pointed out:

that the printed Books, which are sent to us to be filled up, are, in most of the Forms, not applicable to this Colony, and that our Returns must therefore be less perfect than they otherwise would have been.⁵¹

1833 brought copies of two circulars dispatched on the same date from the Colonial Office. One was a reminder of an increasing need for punctuality because of parliamentary interest; the other more positively made a contribution to punctuality since it was accompanied by six blank copies of *Blue Books* as a contingency reserve.⁵² However, in March 1840 the Colonial Office had still not received the 1838 *Blue Book* and the Secretary of State firmly reminded Governor Gipps of 'Chapter 5 of the Printed Book of Regulations, Page 51' which forbade him to pay 'the first Quarter of the year's Salary to the Colonial Secretary unless he shall have delivered the Blue Book for the previous year to the Governor for transmission to this Office'.⁵³ The Governor responded promptly but shifted the blame from the Colonial Secretary:

. . . finding every exertion which I have hitherto used ineffectual to expedite returns from the different Heads of Departments, which are required for the compilation of this Book, I have this day given an order that no salary shall be issued to any person whomsoever, from whom returns for the Blue Book may be due on the 1st of March in every year.⁵⁴

In January 1841, Lord Russell heartily commended Gipps' action⁵⁵, but several months later came the order that the Colonial Secretary should not escape the penalty if he was laggardly; if other public officers had not punctually submitted their returns then the Colonial Secretary, as a stopgap, should submit an incomplete *Blue Book* on time.⁵⁶ Punctuality was now even more pressing because henceforth the *Blue Book* and the Governor's Annual Report accompanying it were to be submitted together to

Parliament. To assist in meeting this timetable the accounting period was changed from the calendar year to the year ending 30 September, and a tight schedule was imposed on Governors to transmit the *Blue Book* by 30 November.⁵⁷

The Annual Report now put the Governor in the firing line. He was strongly reprimanded for not sending a report for 1839.⁵⁸ His 1840 report was 'not' of the character required:

The Report now before me describes merely the political and Judicial constitution of the Colony; whereas it was the object of the instruction to produce a review, retrospective and prospective, of the state and condition of the Colony, under each of the heads into which the *Blue Book* is divided.⁵⁹

Gipps may have drawn some solace from a significant rider to this criticism: 'At the same time, I have pleasure in acknowledging the very satisfactory manner in which the *Blue Book* itself is prepared'.⁶⁰ What the Colonial Office required in the Annual Report involved the presentation of a variety of statistical information, and a later Secretary of State (Earl Grey) was to refer to it as 'the Statistical report on the State of the Colony'.⁶¹

The change to the year ending 30 September was short-lived. Governors complained of difficulties and strict comparability with earlier returns was lost. From 1844 the calendar year was again used and three months grace was allowed for preparation and dispatch.⁶² This appears to have begun a period when the New South Wales returns were regarded as satisfactory. The fact that they were not dispatched until May rather than by 31 March was accepted apparently without comment by the Colonial Office.

New South Wales Blue Book: Size, Scope, Distribution and Accuracy

The changing size and composition of the New South Wales *Blue Book* between 1822 and 1855 reflects the increasing size and complexity of the New South Wales Government and economy, the changing British interest in New South Wales, and the production of statistics in response to local developments as well as British needs.

The 1822 Book consisted of 154 pages; it was 218 pages in 1830, 410 in 1840 and 803 in 1850. The inclusion of the census in the 1856 volume raised it to its peak of 1,020 pages.

The instruction for the contents of the 1821 *Blue Book* referred only to the establishment and to government financial matters. A broader coverage was indicated for 1822 with the addition of the topics of population, trade and currency. The 1825 Book had an appendix written in with results of the 1825 muster and some miscellaneous statistics.

In 1828 a wider range of subject matter was introduced into the *Blue Book*. Additional topics added to the printed table of contents, on which reports were required, included: Education; Agriculture; Manufactures; Mines and Fisheries; Grants of Land; and Gaols and Prisoners. These changes appear to stem from a new emphasis being given to the purpose of the compilation. In late 1828, the Secretary for State sent a circular to all Governors in which he made a very good case for the annual production of a wide range of official statistics. After referring to the importance of the *Blue Book*, he stated that an 'additional measure' would be for Governors to use their annual address to the legislature as a

fit occasion for exhibiting in detail a view of the existing state of the Colony, and of exhibiting in a clear and methodical form such statistical information as is most important to a correct understanding of its past progress and future prospects.⁶³

To this end he suggested a number of topics on which information should be gathered. The statement would then 'lead the mind of the governor himself to an exact scrutiny into all those circumstances which most affect the welfare'⁶⁴ of his settlement. For the Colonial Office, knowledge of this material would permit 'good government', because 'an exact summary of facts with a careful though brief enquiry into their causes and probable results will supply a deficiency which is daily felt'.⁶⁵ In 1836 a printed abstract of the 1836 census was included. What might be regarded as the first move towards the format of the *Statistical Register* was the inclusion in the 1841 *Blue Book* of a section headed 'Printed Returns' (pp. 384-395) which presented economic and demographic statistics over a period, often from the 1820s, to 1840. In 1843 this became a section of 13 pages headed 'New South Wales: Statistical Returns: From 1822 to 1842', and it was in fact a paper printed for the Legislative Council. These returns, normally covering ten years were included in each subsequent *Blue Book*, and by 1855 had reached 44 pages. They normally arose from annual figures entered in earlier *Blue Books*. Other printed matter entered the *Blue Book*: returns of New South Wales banks, exports and imports; in 1855 the large section relating to Taxes, Fees, Revenue and Expenditure was mainly printed. It should be emphasised that overwhelmingly the largest section of the *Blue Book* remained the civil establishment, which in 1851, for example, made up 274 pages, almost one-third of the total.

The *Blue Book* began, and essentially remained, a hand-written document. Initially the Colonial Office appears to have envisaged a production run of two. On the cover of the New South Wales Book for 1822 was printed: 'This Book and the Duplicate of it must be returned to the colonial Office'. But another copy was made and retained by the Governor. Following representation from colonial legislatures the Secretary for the Colonies agreed they should retain a copy. In the case of New South Wales he instructed Governor Bourke in January 1837

to lay [a copy] annually before the Legislative Council . . . It is highly proper that the Council should have access to these Returns, and the knowledge that they will be subjected to the scrutiny of that Body will serve as an additional motive to correctness, to those officers in the various Departments, to whom you must look for the details of which the Blue Book is composed.⁶⁶

At the bottom of the contents page of the 1836 Book was the additional statement: 'Triplicate to be retained for the Governor's information'. And added to this distribution in 1839 was: 'One for the Council, and the other for the Assembly'. An exception to the usual hand-written Book was the 1828 production. The Colonial Office wanted 30 printed copies to be prepared in New South Wales for a Parliamentary Committee. Printing posed problems and these were advanced by the Colonial Secretary as one reason for the lateness of the return:

I shall only observe on this subject that those, who have experienced the expedition with which such things are done in London, can form no idea of the difficulty of getting any printing containing what is called *Ruled-work*, or any thing out of the common way done in this Colony.⁶⁷

New South Wales had considerable difficulty in arranging its financial accounts in the manner required for the *Blue Book*. This reflects both the casual accounting which existed and the lack of trained and experienced officials to introduce and operate the new system. Specific areas like the Commissariat and customs required overhaul. But pressure from Britain, auditing requirements and the growth of experience meant that by the beginning of the 1830s the accounts appear to have been in reasonable shape. Giving evidence to a Select Committee on Colonial Accounts in 1837, G. R. Porter, head of the newly-formed Statistical Department of the Board of Trade, said of the *Blue Books* in general: 'at first they were found to be exceedingly inaccurate'⁶⁸, but

later he emphasised 'great and progressive improvement'⁶⁹ especially over the last two or three years. Among the returns which were 'very good' he included those of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land.⁷⁰

In two areas the New South Wales returns were admitted to be in significant error. One was vital statistics where no attempt for complete coverage was made until the middle 1850s. The other was agriculture. There are numerous warnings as to the usefulness of the agricultural statistics; a very strong assessment was made as late as 1859:

It is much to be regretted that information of so much importance . . . should be left to the casual and unchecked collection of the constabulary . . . It would be a mere waste of time to enter upon an analysis of figures in which no one believes . . .⁷¹

Blue Book: Other Colonies

Van Diemen's Land produced its first Book for 1822, the same year as New South Wales, and maintained annual delivery without a break. Two other colonies began completing their Books once they had overcome early settlement problems. Western Australia began in 1834 and South Australia in 1840. Victoria began in 1851, immediately after separation from New South Wales. As with New South Wales, these *Blue Books* reflected growing local concern with statistics, and small volumes of official statistical returns began to appear semi-independently of the *Blue Book* themselves. Possibly the earliest such volume was in Van Diemen's Land. In response to a request from Governor Arthur for a statistical coverage of his period of office, the Colonial Secretary produced the *Statistical Return of Van Diemen's Land for the Years 1824 to 1835*. It contained forty-six tables.

CENSUSES

New South Wales

The first formal census of the modern type in Australia was held in New South Wales in 1828. It had been recognised that the previous proclamations by the Governor calling free citizens to muster had no legal force, and this census was authorised by Act of the New South Wales Legislative Council (9 Geo. IV., No. 4) dated 30 June 1828. It was described as 'An Act for ascertaining the number, names, and conditions of the Inhabitants of the Colony of New South Wales; and the number of Cattle; and the quantities of located, cleared, and cultivated Land within the said Colony'.⁷² In framing their first census New South Wales administrators were of course aware of the English model of 1821, but in fact they appear to have been more influenced by Australian conditions and to have followed in the tradition of the musters. Information was obtained for New South Wales relating to age, sex, occupation and religion and for housing in Sydney. Details of 'class' were also required.

The Column for the 'Class' is to be filled up with one of the following Abbreviations, according to the Circumstances, viz., B.C., for Born in the Colony; C.F., for Came Free; F.S., for Free by Servitude; A.P., for Holding an Absolute Pardon; C.P. for holding a Conditional Pardon; T.L., for Holding a Ticket of Leave; C., for Convict; C.S., for Colonial Sentence; and G.S., for Government (or Assigned) Servant.⁷³

This concern with civil status reflected the continuing penal aspect of the colony: of a civil population of 30,827 over 12 years of age registered at the census, roughly three-quarters had been or were convicts. Other information obtained in the census related to numbers of stock and the area of cultivated land.

What was distinctively new in this census was the distribution of printed forms by responsible persons 'by whom, as well as by the respective Householders, who can write, each Form is to be signed when duly filled up'.⁷⁴

How accurate was this first census? One observation in 1836 noted that all population enumerations in New South Wales 'are considered very inaccurate by those who know the colony well, especially that of 1828, when the settlers were apprehensive of the establishment of a poll tax'.⁷⁵ This assessment of the 1828 census was repeated, perhaps not independently, in a paper read to the Statistical Society of London in 1849.⁷⁶ An official recognition of inaccuracy in the total count is in a note appended to the 1828 return in the *Blue Book*. It declared that account should be taken of 'Runaway Convicts in the Bush', 'Persons who have no fixed Place of Residence' and 'Omissions that may have occurred', but that in total these 'do not exceed 2,000 persons'.⁷⁷

Censuses in New South Wales were carried out in 1833 and then after only three years in 1836, presumably to adapt planned five-year periods to the British decennial census dates which began in 1801. The five-year interval was maintained in New South Wales from 1836 to 1861. After 1828 the agricultural section of the census was dropped, and in 1833 and 1836, possibly because the Governor was sympathetic to public sensitivity, civil condition was simply distinguished as free or convict. Between 1841 and 1851, when the question was put for the last time, ex-convicts were identified. The census of 1841 was said by a contemporary to have been 'taken from the principle laid down in the former Census Acts of England, with such alterations as the nature of our society and our circumstances rendered expedient'.⁷⁸ Supervised by the Colonial Secretary, E. Deas-Thomson, this census showed 'a marked advance over all preceding enumerations'.⁷⁹ As well as a more detailed population census there was an enumeration of housing in New South Wales. In the 1846 census two new lines of inquiry, education and birthplace, were added to the seven of 1841; results were now presented in fifty-six tables instead of five.⁸⁰ The 1851 and 1856 censuses were very similar to that of 1846; the 1856 census, the first after self-government, was introduced by a report analysing the returns.

Other Colonies

Beginning in 1841 the Port Phillip district was distinguished in the New South Wales censuses; by then the population was 11,738 compared with the 224 of 1836. Legal separation from New South Wales was accomplished in 1851, and the only census conducted by the Victorian authorities before self-government was in 1854—in the middle of a population explosion brought on by the gold discoveries. Formally it was in the hands of the Registrar General, and the British example was drawn upon heavily. British schedules were adapted by W. H. Archer, the Assistant Registrar General, 'to the circumstances and requirements of the Colonial Census'⁸¹, and the information was published in the British form 'to comply with the expressed desire of scientific men at home, that the statistics of every part of the Empire should be drawn up on one uniform plan'.⁸² There was little time for preparation for this census, and the Registrar General emphasised the difficulties he faced.⁸³ In the event, the census showed a growth of population from 77,345 in 1851 to 236,798 in 1854. There is further discussion of this census in a later section.

There were censuses in 1841, 1844, 1846 and 1851 in South Australia. The 1841 census appears to have classified the population by age and district only. The later censuses added conjugal condition, religion, occupation and housing.

In this period the population of Western Australia was very small. The Registrar General in 1848 claimed that the count of that year was the first 'systematic census', although earlier, almost annual enumerations existed.⁸⁴ In 1848 the total non-Aborig-

inal population was 4,622 and was classified in districts by age, conjugal condition, religion and occupation. Agricultural information was also obtained. By the next census in 1854, convicts had been introduced and the population was 11,976. At both censuses some information was collected on Aboriginal numbers.

Censuses began in Van Diemen's Land at a date considerably later than in New South Wales. They were held in 1842, 1843, 1848 and 1851. In 1842 the population of 57,420 was classified for each district by age, conjugal condition, civil condition, religion, occupation and housing. There was little change in the schedule over the four censuses. Like New South Wales, Tasmania was a convict colony and 'civil condition' specified whether 'free' or 'bond', and within the free group ex-convicts were distinguished. An assessment of these censuses describes them as being 'of doubtful accuracy'.⁸⁵

CONCLUSION

Three main vehicles of official statistics have been identified for the period from the foundation of Australia to 1855. Up to 1822 attention was directed to a wide range of reports for the British authorities, a large proportion of which came directly from the Governor's office. From 1822 annual *Blue Books* of statistical information, designed by the Colonial Office, were the most important means of reporting. Local influences increasingly affected the character of these books, and the practice developed of retaining copies in the colonies for local use. The Governor remained formally responsible for their production, but the actual statistical collating devolved on to a public servant, usually the Colonial Secretary. The third type of official statistic was the census, the first being held in 1828 in New South Wales. The form and the timing of the censuses were decided in the colonies.

What was achieved in the Australian colonies must be seen in the context of developments in British official statistics. Although decennial population censuses began in 1801, it was not until the 1830s that attention was directed towards making some general use of the statistical material generated by individual government departments. For this purpose the Statistical Department of the Board of Trade was formed in 1832. Its head was G. R. Porter, a distinguished statistician, and it is claimed that under him 'the incoherent mass of periodical tables then prepared was for the first time reduced to orderly and comprehensive returns, accompanied by lucid explanations of the meaning and limitations of the figures . . . and giving to it a comparative character by including the figures for a series of years'.⁸⁶ Further evidence of the growing interest in the social usefulness of statistics was the formation of the Statistical Society of London (later Royal Statistical Society) in 1834, the function of which, according to its prospectus, was to 'procure, arrange and publish facts calculated to illustrate the condition and prospects of society'.⁸⁷

It was easier to impose the collection of such statistics on the colonies, than to negotiate their introduction into Britain. The annual production of statistical material in some thirty colonies throughout the world, required by the *Blue Book*, was a significant statistical achievement. Colonial practice was ahead of Britain's. Not until 1854 was the first Statistical Abstract produced for the United Kingdom: it covered the years 1840 to 1853 and was a mere 27 pages in length.⁸⁸ The Statistical Returns prepared for the Legislative Council in New South Wales in the 1840s stand comparison with it.

At the beginning of the 1850s the five small Australian colonies, with a total population of some 400,000, were producing statistics relating to their societies which were impressive in quality and range. Their small bureaucracies had become accustomed to the discipline of the annual production of statistical material to meet the standards of an outside authority. The impact of self-government remained to be seen.