

DOCKSIDE

Sydney's working waterfront
—1875

IN THE PICTURE GALLERY



State Library
of New South Wales

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from the State Library's collections.

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Cover: *Custom House & part of Circular Wharf, Sydney NSW* (detail), 1845,
George Edwards Peacock, DG 38

Inside cover: *Woolcott & Clarke's map of the City of Sydney: with the environs of Balmain
and Glebe, Chippendale, Redfern, Paddington &c.* (detail), 1854, ZM2 811.17/1854/1

Cover and inside cover images have been digitally altered

Foreword

That Sydney's character was shaped by its life as a busy working harbour is a well-known fact. Yet, surprisingly, images of this critical period of the city's history are disparate, often fleeting, details of a bigger picture. *Dockside: Sydney's working harbour, 1840–1875* is an intriguing selection of images from the collections of the State Library, providing an insight into Sydney's working foreshore.

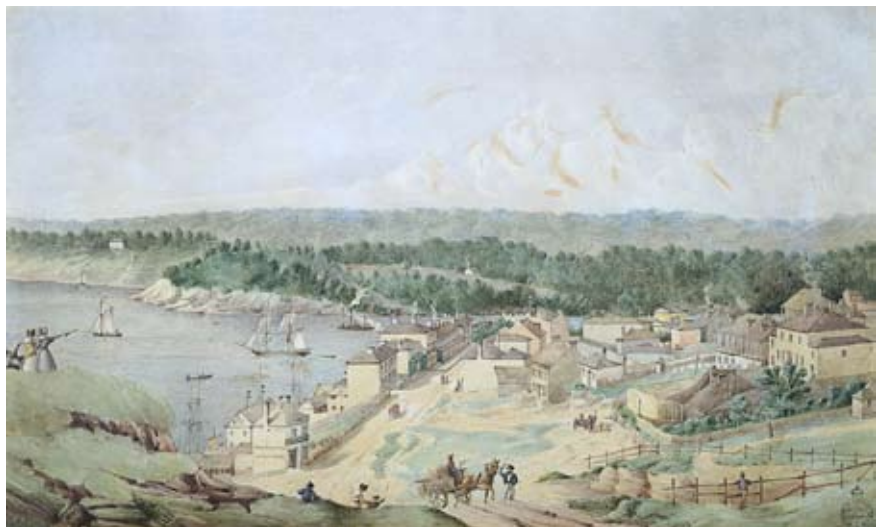


The docks and wharves which bristled around Sydney Harbour were fundamental to the commercial development of New South Wales. By 1854 more than 40 wharves lined Darling Harbour and Sydney Cove alone. *Dockside* focuses on the harbour during the mid-nineteenth century when the colony was beginning to assert itself economically and politically. The flow of goods and immigrants which crossed these wharves moved New South Wales from a convict settlement to a free colony and an integral part of the economic infrastructure of the British Empire.

By looking at both the big picture and the small details, and drawing on a range of images from the Library's collections, curator Clinton Johnston has revealed some fascinating and unexpected scenes of life on the waterfront. With Sydney's role as a working harbour almost over, *Dockside* reminds us of the accretions of history which lie beneath our contemporary city.

Regina A Sutton

NSW State Librarian & Chief Executive



Millers Point, Sydney
(or Sydney in the Forties),
c. 1845, Joseph Fowles,
watercolour, ML 66

Millers Point was an important centre for commercial expansion, as entrepreneurs such as Robert Towns and John Lamb set up private wharves. New South Wales flourished upon the efforts, and money, of these merchants.

DOCK

Dockside: Sydney's working harbour 1840–1875

The rise of Sydney's working harbour in the middle decades of the nineteenth century marks the colony's transformation from a remote penal settlement to an important commercial centre. After an economic downturn in the 1840s, New South Wales, along with the rest of Australia, underwent a long period of growth and development founded upon the import and export trade. As the colony's main port for ocean-going ships, Sydney was in many ways the nucleus of this growth.

The port was a hive of activity; drovers mixed with wharfies as merchants and sea captains determined the destination of goods. Although the British landscape tradition of the picturesque saw many colonial artists searching for the English countryside in the Australian bush, some views of Sydney's working harbour can be found in their watercolours and oils. Artists such as Frederick Garling, Samuel Elyard and Conrad Martens could hardly avoid this prominent feature of Sydney life. They, among others, offer a glimpse of dockside life in nineteenth-century Sydney.



Supply and demand



General view of Sydney from North Shore, 1861, Samuel Thomas Gill, watercolour, DG XV*/Sp.Coll/Gill/1

Bullocks, horses, carts and drays dominated the landscape of New South Wales in the mid-nineteenth century, delivering cargo for export and collecting supplies for the rural population.

Goods arrived at Sydney's docks by road or water from all over the colony to await further dispatch. The colony's biggest export was wool, its demand driven by the increasing mechanisation of the British textile industry. By 1851 Australia accounted for 53% of Britain's wool imports, with a third — over 6000 tonnes — coming from New South Wales. Early on, Australian merchants operated within tight markets protected by the British Navigation Laws. These laws made it illegal for colonies to trade with non-British ships, although some merchants flouted the laws, trading with American and Asian ships. Even when the Navigation Laws were lifted in 1849, British political, economic and military dominance continued to safeguard Sydney's trade and provide secure markets for goods.

However, Britain was not the only market, and wool was not the only export. Robert Towns, who owned a number of whaling and trading ships, as well as a private dock in Sydney, made excellent money exporting sandalwood and timber to China. Other exports included horses (principally to India), whale oil, vegetable oil, copper, lead and wine.

Most of the necessities of life for an increasingly wealthy colony — such as soap, candles, clothing and glassware — arrived in Sydney by sea. Local industries could not compete with the relatively cheap mass-produced items from England. The growing colony's human cargo also arrived at Sydney's docks.

Government assistance made passenger transport a lucrative industry, with great numbers of new settlers reaching Sydney. Conditions for immigrants improved over the period, with alterations to the British Passengers Act in 1852 enforcing cleanliness and proper ventilation on ships. Although infants and children still suffered at sea, by the mid-1850s adults travelled to Sydney at little risk to life.¹



The Great Britain before leaving Liverpool for Australia, c. 1860, artist unknown, oil on canvas, ML 81

When the *Great Britain* was constructed in 1843 it was the largest ship in the world. Originally built as a passenger ship for the Atlantic voyage, under the ownership of Gibbs Bright & Co in the 1850s it primarily carried immigrants to Australia. After a new deck was added, the *Great Britain* could carry 720 passengers to the colony.

Location of artwork



1. Custom House & part of Circular Wharf, Sydney N.S.W.
2. Sydney Harbour N.S. Wales [Cremorne Point in foreground]
3. Queen's Wharf [Circular Quay]
4. Mr Campbell's Wharf [Campbells Cove]
5. View of Miller's Point and Darling Harbour
6. Mosman's Bay
7. Albion Mills (Darling Harbour) property of J. Terry Hughes. Destroyed by fire, March 2, 1841
8. Millers Point, Sydney (or Sydney in the Forties)
9. Grafton Wharf, Darling Harbour, Sydney
10. Towns' Wharf [Millers Point] & North Shore
11. Downing St circular, 25 February 1856 (not on map)
12. View in Sydney Cove, N.S.W.
13. La Hogue, sailing ship, outside Sydney Heads (not on map)
14. The Great Britain before leaving Liverpool for Australia (not on map)
15. Flyer for the voyage of the Great Britain from Liverpool to Australia, 30 January 1854 (not on map)



16. *The Shamrock speaking the packet ship St George off Cape Dromedary (not on map)*
17. *Woolcott & Clarke's map of the City of Sydney: with the environs of Balmain and Glebe, Chippendale, Redfern, Paddington &c. (not on map)*
18. *General view of Sydney from North Shore*
19. *Moore's Wharf and warehouses, Millers Point*
20. *Custom House and Circular Quay*
21. *Circular Quay*
22. *Sugar Co.'s Works, North Sydney*
23. *Circular Quay*
24. *Gas Works, Millers Point*
25. *Patent slip belonging to the Australasian Steam Navigation Co. [Pymont]*
26. *The Custom House, Circular Quay*
27. *Campbell's Wharf and Sydney Cove from Dawes Point*
28. *Wilkinson Bros & Co sawmill, Liverpool St, Sydney*
29. *Australasian Steam Navigation Company's Wharf, Darling Harbour, Sydney*
30. *Mort's Stores, Circular Quay*
31. *Australian Gas Works, Jenkins St, Sydney*
32. *Grafton Wharf [Darling Harbour]*

Commerce and customs

Queen's Wharf [Circular Quay], 1873, Samuel Elyard, watercolour, DG D5 f. 9

As a public wharf, Queen's Wharf saw large quantities of goods enter the colony. By providing docking space for a fee, public wharves contributed £2804 to government revenue in 1843.



By the mid-nineteenth century the shores of Sydney were a maze of wharves, warehouses and lanes, increasingly littered with carts and cargo. As the primary port of New South Wales, good wharf and storage space in Sydney was essential to its merchants' success. Entrepreneurs bought property directly behind their wharves in order to house goods for export. As many of the products were seasonal, such as wool, it was impossible for ships to service the volume of exports, even after the number of ships arriving in the harbour had risen from 428 in 1838 to 1166 in 1865.

Moore's Wharf and warehouses, Millers Point, c. 1847, Frederick Garling, watercolour, DG V1A/26

Coal, metals, tallow and wine were among the commodities sent overseas. The local breed of horse — commonly called the Waler — was also exported between the 1840s and 1940s, particularly to India where it was valued for its load-bearing capability and adaptability for use in cavalry units.



Coastal and river trade boomed around Sydney Harbour. Excluding European imports, the other Australian colonies accounted for half the £3 million (\$6 million) in imports to New South Wales, while New South Wales accounted for £2 million in exports to the other colonies.² To take advantage of this boom, coastal shipping companies emerged,

the most successful of which was the Hunter Steam Navigation Company (from 1851 the Australasian Steam Navigation Company). Formed in 1839, it created a monopoly on trade north of Sydney, transporting goods to Sydney and supplies back to the Hunter and beyond. It became so successful it set up wharves at Pyrmont, where it docked and built ships.



The Shamrock speaking the packet ship St George off Cape Dromedary, c. 1841–1857, artist unknown, oil, ML 581

While servicing trade between the Hunter River and Sydney, the Hunter Steam Navigation Company's expanding interests saw it developing a wider trading network. One of its first ships, *Shamrock*, ran a monthly service carrying cargo and passengers between Brisbane and Sydney into the 1840s.

As Sydney's trade and wealth continued to grow, the colonial government benefited from two crucial areas for government revenue growth: land sales, and custom and excise duties. In 1850 the total revenue for Sydney and the Middle District (excluding the Port Phillip [Melbourne] district) was £375 000. Of this figure the customs department accounted for £140 000 — over a third of the total revenue, and more than a fifth of the total colonial revenue. As the public purse filled with the income generated from the colony's docks, government and commercial works triggered rapid urban growth in Sydney's inner suburbs.



Circular Quay, c. 1854, Frederick Garling, watercolour, ML 88

Behind the ship *Pride of the Sea* is James Grocott's Wholesale Wine and Spirit Warehouse. In 1853 the colony imported over 3.5 million litres of spirits and 1.5 million litres of wine, although manufactured fabrics such as clothing and haberdashery made up the largest category of imports for the year.

Work on the harbour



Grafton Wharf, Darling Harbour, Sydney, 1871, photographer unknown, albumen photoprint, SPF/834

During the mid-nineteenth century Sydney's docks required the efforts of many thousands of workers, the majority of them labourers who loaded and unloaded goods. Photographs of the period show labourers leading horses, carrying packages and rolling barrels down wharves. In many respects the ocean trade fuelled the entire Sydney economy. In the 1840s a slump in the London markets triggered a depression which saw Sydney's unemployment reach 10 per cent. Dock workers — ex-convicts and free settlers alike — suffered during the depression as they were often unskilled labourers who could not find work without leaving the city.

While assisted immigration programs aimed to bring in agrarian workers to meet rural labour shortages, many immigrants chose to stay in the towns and cities. As the economy re-established itself in the late 1840s and early 1850s — on the back of imports and exports and the gold boom — workers were again in demand and the population of the city swelled. By 1850 the population of Sydney was 44 240 — almost a quarter of the New South Wales population.



Patent slip belonging to the Australasian Steam Navigation Co. [Pymont], c. 1855, Frederick Garling, watercolour, DG D3 f. 1

Sydney's shipbuilding industry employed a great number of skilled and unskilled workers, building progressively larger and more complex ships. At Pymont the Australasian Steam Navigation Company (formerly the Hunter Steam Navigation Company) constructed the first iron-hulled ship built in Australia, the *Ballarat*, in 1853.

The town labourer tended to live a more precarious life than his inland counterpart. Farm workers were usually given lodgings, rations and regular work. The town labourer received none of these. Although pay tended to be higher than in Britain, the work was hard, and workers were rarely hired for more than a week at a time.³ A labourer could work on the docks, in a warehouse and on a construction site within a fortnight, and yet go another month without work. Boarding houses and inns arose to accommodate the kind of lifestyle that came with irregular, casual work in changing locations. One commentator described living conditions for these workers:

Labourers, draymen, seamen, hawkers, journeymen, policemen, etc. chiefly inhabit [the Darling Harbour district], but there is a remarkable number of lodging & boarding houses, which generally consist of small dirty cottages, and are really brothels or little better.⁴



Mosman's Bay, c. 1843, Conrad Martens, watercolour, DG V1A/18

Whaling was one of the first primary industries in New South Wales and remained important despite the increased use of gas and kerosene for lighting. Whaler Archibald Mosman sent ships to the popular whaling grounds off the New Zealand coast. In 1851 Britain imported over 1000 tonnes of whale oil from New South Wales.

Conclusion

Sydney Harbour emerged as a crucial trading hub in the nineteenth century, servicing markets overseas while creating wealth for the colony and work for its residents. Working within the aesthetic tradition of the time, artists created a romanticised vision of the city's rough, industrial foreshore. But captured within these artworks — and shown in the photography of the era — is the energy that defined Sydney's wharves and the labours of its dockside workers. With commercial shipping in Sydney now declining, these images preserve the rich history of Sydney's working harbour.

Clinton Johnston

Curator

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- 1 Haines R, *Life and death in the age of sail: The passage to Australia* Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003, p. 315
 - 2 *Return of total value of imports into Australian colonies from Mauritius, Ceylon, Hong Kong, India, China, Manilla, and other foreign countries or British possessions, out of Europe, 1858–1860*, printed for the House of Commons, 27 June 1862
 - 3 Crowley, FK, *Working class conditions in Australia 1788–1851*, Phd thesis, University of Melbourne, 1949, p. 221
 - 4 Jevons, William, *Remarks on the social map of Sydney 1858*, ML B 864, p. 10

circular wharf
mort's stores
queen's wharf
mr campbell's wharf
miller's point
mosman's bay
albion mills
darling harbour
north shore
moore's wharf
custom house
circular quay
sugar co.'s works
sydney cove
towns' wharf
pyrmont

Item list

Fine art prints of artworks from this exhibition can be ordered from the Library Shop, telephone (02) 9273 1611 or email libshop@sl.nsw.gov.au.

1. George Edwards Peacock (1806–1890)
Custom House & part of Circular Wharf, Sydney N.S.W., 1845
Oil on board
Presented by Sir William Dixon, 1929
DG 38
2. Henrietta E Bloxsome (1796–1876)
Sydney Harbour N.S. Wales [Cremorne Point in foreground], 1849
Watercolour
DG XV1/33
3. Samuel Elyard (1817–1910)
Queen's Wharf [Circular Quay], 1873
Watercolour
Presented by Sir William Dixon, 1951
DG D5 f. 9
4. Conrad Martens (1801–1878)
Mr Campbell's Wharf [Campbells Cove], n.d.
Pencil on paper
Presented by Sir William Dixon, 1951
DL PXX 12 f. 13
5. Artist unknown
View of Miller's Point and Darling Harbour, c. 1870
Oil
Purchased 1965
DG 392
6. Conrad Martens (1801–1878)
Mosman's Bay, c. 1843
Watercolour
DG V1A/18
7. Frederick Garling (1806–1873)
Albion Mills (Darling Harbour) property of J. Terry Hughes. Destroyed by fire, March 2, 1841, c. 1840
Watercolour
ML 43
8. Joseph Fowles (1810–1878) (attributed)
Millers Point, Sydney (or *Sydney in the Forties*), c. 1845
Watercolour
Bequeathed by DS Mitchell, 1907
ML 66
9. Photographer unknown
Grafton Wharf, Darling Harbour, Sydney, 1871
Albumen photoprint
SPF/834
10. Photographer unknown
Towns' Wharf [Millers Point] & *North Shore*, c. 1875
Albumen photoprint
Presented 1954
PXA 970 f. 4
11. Downing St circular, 25 February 1856
Manuscript
Bequeathed by DS Mitchell, 1907
A279 f. 89
12. Jacob William Jones (b. c. 1816)
View in Sydney Cove, N.S.W., 1845
Pencil
Presented by Sir William Dixon, 1951
DGA 32 f. 4
13. Frederick Garling (1806–1873)
La Hogue, sailing ship, outside Sydney Heads, c. 1860–1865
Watercolour
SV/77
14. Artist unknown
The Great Britain before leaving Liverpool for Australia, c. 1860
Oil on canvas
Presented by E Newton Daly
ML 81
15. Gibbs, Bright & Co
Flyer for the voyage of the *Great Britain* from Liverpool to Australia, 30 January 1854
Printed
Bequeathed by DS Mitchell, 1907
A279 f. 61
16. Artist unknown
The Shamrock speaking the packet ship St George off Cape Dromedary, c. 1841–1857
Oil
Presented by Mrs Young
ML 581
17. Woolcott & Clarke's map of the City of Sydney: with the environs of Balmain and Glebe, Chippendale, Redfern, Paddington &c., 1854
Printed
ZM2 811.17/1854/1

18. Samuel Thomas Gill (1818–1880)
General view of Sydney from North Shore, 1861
Watercolour
Presented by Sir William Dixon, 1930
DG XV*/Sp.Coll/Gill/1
19. Frederick Garling (1806–1873)
Moore's Wharf and warehouses, Millers Point, c. 1847
Watercolour
Presented by Sir William Dixon, 1929
DG V1A/26
20. George Edwards Peacock (1806–1890)
Custom House and Circular Quay, 1845
Oil on board
Presented by Sir William Dixon, 1929
DG 35
21. Frederick Garling (1806–1873)
Circular Quay, c. 1839
Watercolour
Presented by Sir William Dixon, 1929
DG V1A/28
22. John Black Henderson (1827–1918) (attributed)
Sugar Co.'s Works, North Sydney, c. 1858
Watercolour
SSV1A/N SYD/2
23. Frederick Garling (1806–1873)
Circular Quay, c. 1854
Watercolour
Bequeathed by DS Mitchell, 1907
ML 88
24. Samuel Elyard (1817–1910)
Gas Works, Millers Point, c. 1873
Watercolour
Presented by Sir William Dixon, 1951
DG D5 f. 14
25. Frederick Garling (1806–1873)
Patent slip belonging to the Australasian Steam Navigation Co. [Pyrmont], c. 1855
Watercolour
Presented by Sir William Dixon, 1951
DG D3 f. 1
26. Photographer unknown
The Custom House, Circular Quay, c. 1855
Postcard, copied from original photograph
From Tyrrell's 'Old Sydney', 1st series, c. 1920
PXB 305/2
27. Freeman Brothers (attributed)
Campbell's Wharf and Sydney Cove from Dawes Point, 1854
Albumen photoprint
SV/12
28. Photographer unknown
Wilkinson Bros & Co sawmill, Liverpool St, Sydney, c. 1850s
Albumen photoprint
Presented by J Jervis, 1949
SPF/440
29. JR Clarke
Australasian Steam Navigation Company's Wharf, Darling Harbour, Sydney, c. 1870
Albumen photoprint
SPF/824
30. Charles Pickering
Mort's Stores, Circular Quay, c. 1870
Albumen photoprint
SPF/765
31. Photographer unknown
Australian Gas Works, Jenkins St, Sydney, c. 1870
Albumen photoprint
SPF/955
32. Alexander Brodie
Grafton Wharf [Darling Harbour], c. 1870
Albumen photoprint
SPF/825



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