

**OLD AGE IN A YOUNG COLONY:
IMAGE AND EXPERIENCE IN SOUTH
AUSTRALIA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>List of tables</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of figures</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Declaration</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>x</i>
1 INTRODUCTION	1
William Clayton: A young colonist grown old	1
The historiography of old age and concomitant methodological issues	9
Issues of definition	15
Methodology, structure and sources	21
2 SETTLEMENT: 'NONE BUT YOUNG COUPLES'	32
A young colony with no place for the old	32
Early reports of the colony	41
Demographic features of settlement	44
The role and effect of assisted migration	52
3 IMAGE, EXPERIENCE AND OLD AGE, 1830s – 1850s	65
The 'image-makers' and 'image-shapers' in the land of plenty	67
Responses to the image	73
Older people in early writing	82
4 CHANGES IN IMAGE AND EXPERIENCE, 1850s – 1870s	88
Shifting contexts	88
The impact of gold	89
Class and work	95
Traces of image, archetype and stereotype	105
5 INHERITANCE AND THE OLD	116
The usefulness of wills and probated estates	116
The nature of wealth described in the probate records	124
Distribution of wealth: Honouring, protecting and controlling kin and acknowledging friends	128
Misers, senility and wills	143

6 CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN IMAGE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY	150
Positive and sympathetic representations of the ageing	155
Negative portrayal of the ageing	165
The influence of the elderly in the late nineteenth century	173
Philanthropy – ‘endow its charities’	180
7 ‘THE DOWNGRADE OF LIFE’	185
On the ‘shady side of fifty’	186
Activity and independence	192
‘Troubles and vicissitudes’; ‘no fault of theirs’	199
Immigration policy and fear of the dependent aged	201
8 RESPONSES TO THE PLIGHT OF THE AGED: TOWARDS THE PENSION	208
The condition of the aged poor	211
Rations, relief and responsibility	215
Indoor relief: The Destitute Asylum	221
‘Against the risk of want’: Poverty and the pension	228
9 CONCLUSION	245
10 APPENDIX	267
11 BIBLIOGRAPHY	269

LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 1 Age Distribution in South Australia, 1844</i>	46
<i>Table 2 Probated Estates as a Percentage of Deaths, with Differentiation by Sex, 1855, 1861, 1871 and 1891.</i>	120
<i>Table 3 Proportion aged over sixty in the general population, among probated estates and in the deceased population (records for the latter showing proportion aged over fifty for 1855, 1861, 1871)</i>	123

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1</i> 659D34, Age, 1835, pen and brown ink, watercolour on coloured paper, artist: S. T. Gill. _____	34
<i>Figure 2</i> Age distribution in South Australia, 1844. _____	46
<i>Figure 3</i> Age distribution in South Australia, 1861. _____	48
<i>Figure 4</i> Age distribution in South Australia, 1871. _____	49
<i>Figure 5</i> Age distribution in South Australia, 1881. _____	49
<i>Figure 6</i> Age distribution in South Australia, 1891. _____	50
<i>Figure 7</i> “Yes, Immigration Is What We Want,” <i>The Figaro</i> , 1877. _____	59
<i>Figure 8</i> Emigration poster advertising free passage to South Australia. _____	69
<i>Figure 9:</i> Art Gallery of South Australia, 625D1, Shepherd and Sheep near Burra, n.d., black and brown watercolour wash on paper, artist: S. T. Gill. _____	101
<i>Figure 10</i> Excerpt from Sarah Chaston’s will, Sarah Chaston, 02159, Probate Books 1871, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide. _____	141
<i>Figure 11</i> 691G2, An Old Man, 1889, etching, artist: Harry P. Gill. _____	160
<i>Figure 12</i> B 47059, Mrs. Janet Lawrie [at c.80 years], 1890, photograph, artist: Ernest Gall. _____	161
<i>Figure 13</i> Photograph: B 17356, Flinders Plaque, [Unveiling of Flinders and Baudin plaque on the summit of the Bluff], 1902, photograph, artist: unknown. _____	174
<i>Figure 14</i> B 45044, South Australian Pioneers, c.1901 [Query 1906], photograph, artist: unknown. _____	175
<i>Figure 15</i> Photograph: Excerpts from photograph taken at Town Hall, 1871. Photographer: Duryea _____	175
<i>Figure 16</i> PRG 631/102/8, Francis William Cox, 1903, photograph, artist: Ernest Gall. _____	178
<i>Figure 17</i> 546D1, Knocked Up, c.1846, brown watercolour wash, white gouache on brown paper, artist: S.T. Gill. _____	187
<i>Figure 18</i> 8113Ph45, Autumn, 1903-12, photograph, artist: Frederick Joyner. _____	188
<i>Figure 19</i> 8113Ph43, In the apple loft, 1903-12, photograph, artist: Frederick Joyner. _____	188

- Figure 20 8113Ph40, *His last match, 1903-12, photograph, artist: Frederick Joyner.* _____ 189
- Figure 21 8113Ph41, *Boiling the billy, 1908, bromide photograph, artist: Frederick Joyner.*
_____ 189
- Figure 22 *Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia. SLSA: B 35550, Clarendon, [Four elderly men, Ted Dix, [first name unknown, probably Charles] Hicks, Phineas White and Jack Tester], c.1880, photograph, artist: unknown.* _____ 190
- Figure 23 *Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia. SLSA: B 6424, Captains of River Steamers, c.1875, photograph, artist: unknown.* _____ 190
- Figure 24 *Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia. SLSA: B 39282, Elderly woman, Barossa [Mrs. W. Helbig, aged 98, pushing her firewood in the wheelbarrow], c.1890, photograph, artist: unknown.* _____ 194
- Figure 25 917Ph30, *Old woman with child, c.1905, photograph, artist: T. H. Stoward.* ___ 195
- Figure 26 884Ph24, *The Departure of Emma Wolffe and her Family, c.1907, photograph, artist: John Kauffmann.* _____ 196
- Figure 27 *Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia. SLSA: B 47660, Scientific Studies, c. 1880, photograph, artist: Ernest Gall.* _____ 196

ABBREVIATIONS

AGSA	Art Gallery of South Australia
SLSA	State Library of South Australia
SRSA	State Records of South Australia

ABSTRACT

Ambivalence emerges as an enduring feature in attitudes to the ageing in most western societies. Attitudes toward and treatment of the ageing evident in nineteenth-century England and Europe are discernible in South Australia also, tempered by the unusual nature and process of systematic colonisation, a central feature of which was assisted migration. The careful planning associated with the establishment of the young colony, whose purpose was in part to relieve over-population in Great Britain, was characterised by hope for a better future and in particular for a better old age for ordinary working class people. Fear of dependence among colonists, which could jeopardise the prosperity of the colony and therefore of the dream of a 'land of promise' and plenty, further influenced attitudes to the ageing, perceived as posing a threat to an independent and prosperous future for the colony. Thus, the nature of colonisation in South Australia tilted the widely recognised phenomenon of ambivalence in attitudes towards the ageing to a negative view. Fear of the potential dependence of the ageing generated reaction and concern at government, official and private levels, and left a trace in representations of old people in popular culture. The social, economic and physical environment of the developing colony further tempered and shaped images of the ageing, the rhetoric relating to them, and their experience as old people in a young colony. The diversity of the physical, social, mental and financial resources of the ageing also influenced the nature and extent to which individuals were active in shaping their own experience. As the colony became established and the population grew, assuming different demographic features, the effects of the hope and fear that had driven colonisation remain discernible in public and private documents relating to old people. However, veneration and acceptance of the old are also apparent, reflecting maturation of the colony, echoing themes evident in other nineteenth-century societies and highlighting once again the ambivalence associated with the ageing. The study of ageing in nineteenth-century South Australia reveals both continuity with and differentiation from rhetoric, image and realities associated with the ageing in Britain.

DECLARATION

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1 INTRODUCTION

William Clayton: A young colonist grown old

The life of William Clayton, described below, spans the life of the colony of South Australia. His story encapsulates several of the themes identified throughout this study and demonstrates how hope for a new and better life, which drew many to the new colony, could turn to struggle in old age. Clayton's experiences illustrate motivating forces driving settlement and migration to the new colony, opportunities taken and frustrations experienced there, the difficulties of later life, particularly those relating to financial management, working life and independence, and the role of family members in assisting aged parents. As a young married man with the capacity to take on a trade and the potential to work for many years, Clayton matched the criteria set by the Colonisation Commissioners for immigrants to South Australia. His wife Mary Ann, as a young married woman likely to bear several children, was a desirable migrant too. Their decision to emigrate from England to start a new life in South Australia represented an act of hope for a better life. Many others made a similar decision. Clayton's optimism and enterprise saw him work in a trade, raise a family with his wife, contribute to the local community and embark on a business venture. The high level of involvement of South Australians in friendly societies reflects in part difficulties faced by families affected by industrial, farming and mining accidents, and Clayton's decision to help establish a local friendly society may well have been influenced by his father's work-related death. Hope dissipated in old age as financial difficulties became harder to overcome and employment was no longer readily available. The influence of children on ageing parents is evident in the Claytons' story; as they grew older Clayton and his wife made pragmatic decisions based upon

the realities of their lives and influenced by their daughters' views. The couple also demonstrated thrift, a quality admired and continually discussed in the context of government and community support for the ageing. The Claytons were fortunate to have family members who were willing and able to support them through offering a shared residence, for example. As a result, they were able to manage without government assistance until the advent of the pension. For ageing couples like William and Mary Ann Clayton and for family members who offered support and a place in their own homes the pension provided most welcome relief. Clayton's story shows the importance of family support in later years, the ongoing support offered by parents to children where possible and the input of children in the decisions made by ageing parents. Those elderly who did not have networks of support faced even greater difficulty.

Born in industrialising Manchester in 1833, William Clayton began his working life when he was 'not quite seven' as an errand boy for a fishmonger 'for a shilling per week and my dinner'.¹ William went to work in a weaving factory at age eleven when his sawyer father died at work.² His family knew people who were emigrating and William went to Liverpool to farewell one such family that was heading to America, catching smallpox on his visit.³ At 21 years of age Clayton married a cotton-winder from Manchester, Mary Ann Court, and the couple 'took it into our heads to ... emigrate to Australia', arriving in 1855 with a baby who was born on the journey.⁴ Following his father's occupation, Clayton became a sawyer at Mount Gambier, in the south-east of the colony. There, with a dozen or so others, he founded

¹ SLSA, D 6424(L), William Clayton, *Reminiscences of William Clayton*, c.1833-1912, p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11a.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

the Mount Gambier Lodge of Manchester Unity. Like some others Clayton and his growing family returned to England (1864) but emigrated again to South Australia in 1866, the Emigration Commissioner warning them to make good use of their time as he would not send them again.⁵ Clayton continued as a sawyer, bought land and began working as a carpenter. He and his wife took over the 'Shakesper Hotel' in Mount Gambier, later running the Cremorne Hotel in Unley, having moved to be closer to their son and daughters.⁶ The Claytons decided, in their sixties, not to take on the Sportsman's Arms Hotel in deference to their daughters, who 'did not like us goeing into the Hotel bussines again'.⁷ Indeed, observing her parents struggle with their finances, losing money to 'other People', daughter Eleanor invited them to live with her, rent-free, on condition that they agreed 'not to Enter again in the Hotel business'.⁸ In return, William built extensions on their daughter's house. He continued to work and save, and his wife also saved, unbeknown to her husband. When they gave £180 to Eleanor she and her husband used the money to build two houses, one for themselves and one for her parents. At 75, William did much of the carpentering work himself. He knew though that if he applied for a job as a carpenter he would 'have been told at once that [he] was too old that tha [they] wanted young men not old men'. Clayton considered though that he was 'quite active yet' and enjoyed 'very good health' when he was 80.⁹ When the old age pension began, not long after the completion of their house, William and Mary Ann applied, each receiving nine shillings and six pence per week.¹⁰

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 103, 104.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Historians have taken an increasing interest in the study of old age over the last two to three decades. For a long time though historians had shown little interest in the ageing. In much the same way that interest in the study of childhood increased following publication of Philippe Ariès' seminal work, *A History of Childhood*,¹¹ historians have gradually responded to European historian Peter Stearns' challenge in the late 1970s and early 1980s to investigate the experience of the ageing.¹² Those who have done so have taken different paths, historical demographers drawing upon the variable strengths of statistical material to develop understanding of patterns of work, residence, marriage and remarriage among older people, for example, and social historians tilling the fields of public policy, popular culture and documentation of private experience, using sources as diverse as parliamentary debates, literature, art, letters and newspapers to gain understanding of attitudes to ageing and the ageing. Each approach has its strengths and its concomitant complications. Most historical research conducted in this field to date concerns the experience of older people in America, Europe and Great Britain. The study of the ageing in America, as the only western society in this group established through the process of colonisation, provides salient points of comparison with the South Australian experience. In the Australian context research is in the early stages, scholars beginning to include consideration of the ageing in studies with a broader focus or tackling specific topics within the field.¹³ This study makes a contribution to that endeavour, and concerns the experience of the ageing in South Australia from the time of

¹¹ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

¹² Peter N. Stearns, *Old Age in European Society: The Case of France* (London: Croom Helm, 1977); Peter N. Stearns, *Old Age in Preindustrial Society* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982).

¹³ See, for example, Grace Karskens, "Declining Life; On the Rocks in Early Sydney," and Simon Cooke, "Terminal Old Age: Ageing and Suicide in Victoria, 1841-1921," in David Walker, ed., with Stephen Garton, *Ageing = Australian Cultural History*, no.14 (1995), pp. 63-75, pp. 76-91; the main focus of Karskens' study has been the early history of the neighbourhood known as the Rocks in Sydney, New South Wales, and Cooke's main focus concerns the social history of suicide. Other articles in this publication of *Australian Cultural History* are of relevance here too.

settlement, when few old people lived in the colony, until the turn of the century, when the population was more mature in demographic terms, the colony was about to become a state within the Commonwealth of Australia and the push towards a pension for the ageing was at its strongest.

The focus of the study is the experience of and the representation of old age in the particular context of South Australia in the nineteenth century. The population of the colony grew from 546 in 1836 to 357,250 in 1900,¹⁴ making it a small community by comparison with some other societies in which the experience of ageing has been studied. The more than six hundred-fold increase in population over a sixty year period, inevitable in a newly established colony and accompanied by a steady increase in the proportion of aged individuals, elicited responses to the ageing expressed in popular culture and in community and official response to associated issues. In chapter 2, after considering the motives for and the background to settlement in South Australia, which had particular implications for older people, I will outline the experience of the ageing in the early years of the colony. Chapter 3 explores how images and rhetoric relating to older people developed in the early colonial context, finding expression in, for example, public documents and fictional and personal writing. Continuing the chronological approach, chapter 4 examines changes in the image and in the experience of the ageing in the middle years of the century. Centrally placed, chapter 5 departs from this approach in that it treats one type of source, probated estates, over the entire period of study, enabling observation regarding both the role and function of older people within the family

¹⁴ Tom Stevenson, "Population Statistics," in Wray Vamplew, Eric Richards, Dean Jaensch and Joan Hancock, *South Australian Historical Statistics*, Historical Statistics Monograph no. 3 (Kensington, N.S.W: History Project Incorporated, University of New South Wales, 1984) Australia 1788-1988: A Bicentennial History, p. 14.

and attitudes held by and about the elderly. The possession and distribution of property and personal items can reveal a considerable amount about the status of both testator and beneficiaries and about the values of individuals, family and community. In chapter 6 a return to chronological treatment allows examination of continuity and change in perceptions of the ageing expressed in an expanding range of sources in the later nineteenth century and of the influence of the elderly in colonial society. Conditions of daily life and the strategies old people used to extend and retain their independence in the last decades of the century are the subject of chapter 7. Chapter 8 examines more closely the circumstances of the aged poor and responses at individual, community and government level to their plight, including the movement towards provision of a non-contributory pension. Finally, chapter 9 provides an overview of the findings of this study.

The central concern of this thesis is not to examine the introduction of the Commonwealth old age pension or to trace development of retirement provisions, both topics that warrant independent scrutiny, but to investigate the experience of the ageing and perceptions about ageing and the aged in a developing colonial society. One aim, then, is to explore the relationship between the two: the perceived place of older people in the newly established and developing colonial society of South Australia, as reflected in popular culture and evident in such sources as contemporary publications and works of art, and the experience of individuals as they aged in the community, as observed through published and private records relating to topics such as work, residence, inter-generational relations and levels of dependence. Such exploration entails, for example, identification of images of old people expressed in literature and art and in public and private documents and observation of ways the elderly participated in the community through paid and unpaid work and in philanthropic

activities. A broadly chronological approach allows observation regarding shifts and continuities in the nature of both image and experience relating to the ageing over the century and regarding factors influencing such shifts and continuities.

Historians investigating the representation of old age and the ageing in Europe have traced changes in those representations and identified shifts in attitude to the ageing across time and place.¹⁵ The same cannot be said of South Australia. Nevertheless, similarities exist in rhetoric relating to old people, in images and representations of the ageing and in the experiences of old people in many societies over time. Factors contributing to variations in those experiences and representations in particular societies are of interest to the social historian. Although South Australia shared some characteristics with Great Britain, including the initial ethnic composition resulting from colonisation and the Westminster system of government, other factors such as the planned nature of the settlement, the selection process for migrants, the consequent structure of the population and the sparseness of the population differentiated the colony from the mother country. Unsurprisingly then, both continuity with attitudes towards the ageing and with their experience in Britain and departures from tradition and changes in circumstance for the elderly are evident in South Australia. Contrasts between public and private perceptions of the ageing and the experiences of the ageing emerged prior to settlement and continued throughout the colonial period. Some of these differences derived from the process of colonisation and the particular form that took in South Australia; specific emphasis placed on the value of the young influenced the demographic structure of the colony

¹⁵ See, for example, Stearns, *Old Age in European Society*; Stearns, *Old Age in Preindustrial Society*; Herbert C. Covey, *Images of Older People in Western Art and Society* (New York: Praeger, 1991); David G. Troyansky, *Old Age in the Old Regime: Image and Experience in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989).

and, in turn, the place of the old within it. Consequently, representations and descriptions of old age and the ageing reflected both long-standing traditional views evident in Great Britain and Europe and the influence of factors specific to the new settlement.

My hypothesis is that the nature of settlement and government policy regarding migration strongly influenced attitudes to the ageing in the early years of colonisation. The functional and pragmatic approach associated with the very particular and deliberate process of colonisation in South Australia placed emphasis on youth and vigour and had consequences for the ageing, excluding them from participation in assisted migration. Generally, old people who were fit and financially independent caused no concern to government planners, although few chose to travel to South Australia in the early years. By contrast, immigration of ageing members of the working class was a source of considerable debate and anxiety, evident in ongoing public discourse and based on recognition that their years in the productive labour force would be limited and that they may well require the support of the state in their decrepitude. As the colony developed and the migrant community itself aged, attitudes towards older migrants shifted, influenced by the need for skills or capital that could be provided by older individuals and by social considerations, for example. In the later years of the nineteenth century the demographic profile of the colony demanded acceptance of higher numbers of ageing, led to greater visibility of the ageing and impelled consideration of appropriate responses to their needs. Reflecting the close relationship between experience and rhetoric, changes in the portrayal of older people in popular culture are evident over the period too.

The historiography of old age and concomitant methodological issues

As already noted, interest in the ageing has grown considerably over the last century, in part reflecting the increased proportion of old people in developed societies throughout the world. Demographic features of modern industrialised and post-industrial societies, including low fertility rates and increased life expectancy, have led to a substantial rise in the presence of the aged in the community. Social issues concomitant with this rise include the dilemmas of how to provide adequate support for the dependent aged, how to minimise poverty among the elderly and how to determine the extent of responsibility of family and state for the well-being of the ageing. A large body of research and literature informed by gerontology and sociology and addressing these and related issues exists and continues to grow. Historical enquiry into old age has been less extensive but grows apace. The history of the ageing is inevitably the history of a minority group and the history of minorities is always difficult to chart as documentation by, of and about such groups is usually diffuse, incomplete and inconsistent. So the historian seeking to understand the place of old people in a past society must gather and interpret evidence from a vast array of sources. In responding to Stearns' call for a more subtle balance sheet in analysing the position of the ageing in past societies historians have adopted approaches informed by a range of theoretical frameworks. Ernest Burgess, Donald Cowgill, Lowell Holmes and other early researchers in the field, for example, sought to situate the experience of the ageing in western Europe and America in the nineteenth century along the scale provided by the modernisation theory.¹⁶ According to this model, which in simple terms provides a means of classifying societies and their features according to a lineal scale and

¹⁶ Ernest W. Burgess, *Aging in Western Societies* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Donald O. Cowgill and Lowell D. Holmes, "Ageing and Modernization," in Vida Carver and Penny Liddiard, eds., *An Ageing Population: A Reader and Sourcebook* (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton in association with Open University Press, 1978), pp. 51-65.

measures the extent of industrialisation and associated shifts in demographic structure, the position of the ageing bears an inverse relationship to modernising forces because changes in modes of production, residential habits, educational practices and property inheritance patterns, to name a few, tend to oust the elderly from their position of respect and authority. Correlations may indeed exist between industrialisation and changes in the lives of the ageing, but it does not necessarily follow either that an inexorable decline in conditions for old people will result or that the process of modernisation is the primary determinant of change. Historians and others may seek to identify ‘universal patterns of development’ that explain changes in the status and experiences of the ageing, but recognition of the particularity and influence of different historical settings is crucial to that process.¹⁷

The application of modernisation theory has generated debate among historians of the ageing. David Fischer’s treatment of the history of the position of the ageing in American society follows a ‘historical’ approach in relation to the modernisation theory, charting a shift from the ‘exaltation of age’ in the seventeenth century through to the early nineteenth century to the exaltation of youth that overlapped, beginning in the late eighteenth century and remaining in place to the present.¹⁸ Fischer attributes the shift from reverence to contempt in part to the ideological and cultural changes stimulated by the French Revolution and in part to the substantial demographic and economic changes that characterised the early modern period.¹⁹ Modernisation then was not solely a phenomenon of the nineteenth century. Prior to

¹⁷ Jon Hendricks, “The Elderly in Society: Beyond Modernization,” *Social Science History*, VI, no. 3 (1982), p. 339.

¹⁸ David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

1810 the proportion of people in America aged over 65 years was less than two percent.²⁰ The gradual ageing of the community, a corollary of declining fertility rates and, to a lesser extent, of decreasing mortality rates, led to the comparatively late identification of old age as a social problem in the early twentieth century. By contrast, France and Great Britain had already begun to address the ‘problem’ of old age in the 1850s and 1870s respectively.²¹ Prior to government intervention in issues concerning the old in America, popular literature tapped by historian Andrew Achenbaum, including magazines, newspapers and sermons, supports Fischer’s assertion that the gospel of thrift, an inextricable part of the secular morality of the Puritans, was, if practised when people were young, the cure-all for poverty among the aged.²² Similar themes certainly emerge in the newspapers of nineteenth-century Adelaide, South Australia’s main township. Stearns and Achenbaum, like Fischer, have found the modernisation theory a useful framework within which to examine the experience of the ageing but identify the ‘modernisation of the elderly’ as occurring in the twentieth century, when a ‘new emphasis on youth, progress, equality, technology, and material satisfaction, led to a redefinition of the ultimate meaning of life’.²³

Among those to question the relevance to historical study and the adequacy of the stratified structure of the modernisation theory, English historian Jill Quadagno describes the structural-functional approach, with its emphasis on the connection between industrialisation and status of the aged, as a taxonomy that necessarily overlooks differences inherent in

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

²³ Peter N. Stearns and W. Andrew Achenbaum, “Essay: Old Age and Modernisation,” *The Gerontologist*, XVIII (1978), p. 310.

different societies.²⁴ Demographic historian Peter Laslett dismisses the ‘unpleasing’ modernisation theory on the basis that it erroneously draws analogies between ‘non-European, developing, pre-industrial societies as they are now ... [and] developed industrial European or European-originated societies as they once were.’²⁵ Asked to give his view on the perception that there was a golden age of old age, which passed because of industrialisation, urbanisation and the weakening of familial bonds, French historian Philippe Ariès made the general comment that false ideas of the history of old age abound.²⁶ Others who have identified pitfalls in the methodology of the modernisation theory include American historians Tamara Hareven and Brian Gratton. Hareven points out that as ‘changes in the family are slower than in any other social institutions ... the accepted historical ‘stages’ and ‘periods’ in the study of western society may or may not fit historical change in the family’.²⁷ Brian Gratton remarks that ‘historians have developed a rightful indignation about the crude structuralism of modernization theory’ and identifies attitudinal histories as ‘valuable in unveiling the long record of prejudice toward old age’.²⁸ Looking beyond the modernisation approach, historians have placed the study of old age within the realms of family history and have variously applied the sentiments, household-economics, life course and demographic approaches. A combination of approaches, then, goes some way towards answering Hareven’s query as to how to ‘examine an age group and a stage of life when their experience, social definitions, and

²⁴ Jill S. Quadagno, *Aging in Early Industrial Society: Work, Family, and Social Policy in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Academic Press, 1982), pp. 3-12.

²⁵ Peter Laslett, “The Significance of the Past in the Study of Ageing: Introduction to the Special Issue on History and Ageing,” in *Ageing and Society*, IV (1984), pp. 380-381.

²⁶ Philippe Ariès, “Une histoire de la vieillesse?” *Communications*, XXXVII (1983), p. 47, [my translation].

²⁷ Tamara K. Hareven, “The Last Stage: Historical Adulthood and Old Age,” *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, CV (1976), p. 14.

²⁸ Brian Gratton, *Urban Elders: Family, Work, and Welfare among Boston’s Aged 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p. 3.

public treatment change over time'.²⁹ The life course approach, for example, acknowledges the limitations of emphasis placed on the 'less significant variable' of chronological ageing, striving instead to understand how individuals and families make the transition from one life stage to another and to understand the place of each stage 'in an entire life continuum'.³⁰ In particular, such an approach seeks to understand connections between the status and function of the ageing and 'treatment and roles of those in earlier stages of life'.³¹ Recognising the complexity of the subject, this study takes an eclectic approach, drawing upon demographic information, working to establish an empirical base, observing links between overall societal change and the experience of the ageing, noting changes in household structure over time and interpreting expression of sentiment in popular culture in an effort to begin to chart the territory in the South Australian context.

In her study of old age in nineteenth-century England Jill Quadagno identifies the perception of a sense of responsibility among members of the upper classes for the care of those below them in the social hierarchy as part of a romantic narrative that in turn informed the concept of a golden age of ageing.³² This study finds that such a sense of responsibility was indeed evident among the gentry of South Australia, a strong culture of philanthropic activity being established from the first years of settlement and continuing throughout the century. However, that such attitudes contributed to a golden age for the ageing does not necessarily follow. While consideration of the worth and status of the aged shaped responses to their need,

²⁹ Hareven, "The Last Stage: Historical Adulthood and Old Age," p. 14.

³⁰ Tamara K. Hareven and Kathleen J. Adams, eds., *Ageing and Life Course Transitions: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (London: Tavistock, 1982), p. xiii, xiv.

³¹ Tamara K. Hareven, "The Life Course and Aging in Historical Perspective," in Hareven and Adams, eds., *Ageing and Life Course Transitions*, p. 1.

³² Quadagno, *Aging in Early Industrial Society*, p. 2.

as evident in discussion of the subject in contemporary newspapers, motivation for philanthropic involvement came from broader sources, including religion. There was no golden age for the ageing followed by deterioration in the status of old people as processes of modernisation unfolded in the colony of South Australia. The government did not value old people highly in economic or social terms in the early stages of colonisation and rejection of the aged and wariness of the impact of their presence is apparent in immigration policies and practice throughout the period. In the planning stages and during the first years of settlement officials and colonists alike expressed hope that people could build a comfortable existence for themselves in old age, but great emphasis on the value and role of youth and vigour predominated. As the colony matured both in demographic and in social terms representations of ageing colonists as worthy and venerable emerged alongside enduring images of the ageing as indolent or miserly. Equally though, problems associated with old age attracted increased attention in the later years of the nineteenth century. In South Australia the status of the aged was not fixed at either end of the period under study.

Ambivalence in attitude to ageing and death has been part of Western culture for centuries and is a phenomenon widely recognised by historians. Georges Minois' discussion of old age in sixteenth-century Europe, for example, highlights elements of contradiction and paradox in attitudes towards the ageing evident in Renaissance art and politics. Admiration and contempt occupied closely juxtaposed positions, the suggestion being that although 'old age was detestable ... every old person was worthy of respect.'³³ Peter Stearns discovered, to

³³ Georges Minois, *History of Old Age: From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 293 - 295, 301, 303.

his surprise, strong negative bias against old people in traditional French society.³⁴ Philippe Ariès takes care to differentiate between the history of the actual roles of the old on the one hand and representations of old age in social images on the other, emphasising that the two do not necessarily coincide and that the nature of representations varies greatly over time.³⁵ So image and experience have their meeting points but are by no means the same. Each has the potential to affect and modify the other. The perception of South Australia as a young and vigorous colony both arose from government policy regarding immigration of old people and influenced that policy. Sometimes though, experience fractured the image. Involved in early planning of the colony, Charles Napier's vision of a society free of poverty, for example, failed demonstrably within a few years of settlement; no matter how hard emigration agents tried to exclude the aged from the process of migration, some slipped through. Young and old alike were vulnerable to the vagaries of drought, crop failure and economic crisis, leaving the dream of a colony free of poverty in tatters. Inevitably, tensions and contrasts between rhetoric and reality are evident in the representations and the experiences of the ageing in South Australia.

Issues of definition

Issues of definition inform any investigation into the experience of the ageing and their place in culture and can pose challenges in developing a sound theoretical discourse regarding ageing. Such issues also confront those investigating other age groups; childhood, adolescence and middle age each have particular characteristics to be considered when determining definitions. In relation to childhood, for example, physical milestones that occur consistently,

³⁴ Stearns, *Old Age in European Society*.

³⁵ Ariès, "Une histoire de la vieillesse?" p. 47.

including onset of first and second dentition, ambulation and puberty, allow the development of the child to be measured. However, variation that occurs across cultures in, for example, the age of menarche due to such factors as nutritional differences and exercise illustrates how even ostensibly straightforward divisions of age can become problematic. Similar variations occur in definitions relating to the aged across time and communities; age-related social function also plays a role in determining when an age category begins or ends, the nature of definition often depending on the purpose for which it is required. For the purposes of assisted migration to South Australia, for example, individuals were considered to be adult at the age of fifteen as this was the age at which they could commence work in a trade.³⁶ Definitions reflect societal values, and as a consequence the definition of old age is not a fixed concept. The historian interpreting and analysing sources relating to old age must therefore be prepared to work with shifting definitions that may be informed by economic, social, psychological or medical perspectives. Cicero, in his essay on old age, uses dialogue between Laelius and Scipio and the older Marcus Cato as a vehicle to express his own views on old age, his observations emphasising the subjectivity involved. Scipio, admiring Cato's wisdom, observes that 'old age never seemed a burden to you, while to most old men it is so hateful that they declare themselves under a weight heavier than Aetna.'³⁷ Moses Finley, grappling with the problem of definition, remarks that while there is 'a vague biological boundary-line' medical authorities have yet to establish a sound means of identifying old age in individuals.³⁸ Contemporary legislation provides sources that address the issue of definition, for if a society determines that individuals should receive special dispensation or exemption due to age the

³⁶ SLSA, D 6029/21(L), Free Emigration to Port Adelaide, South Australia, poster, *Letters from Cornish Settlers*.

³⁷ Marcus Tullius Cicero, "On Old Age," in Charles W. Eliot, ed., *Letters of Marcus Tullius Cicero with his Treatises on Friendship and Old Age, and Letters of Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus*, vol. IX (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909), p. 46.

³⁸ Moses I. Finley, "The Elderly in Classical Antiquity," *Ageing and Society*, IV (1984), p. 391.

relevant legislation is usually quite specific about qualifications. In early modern France, for example, civil law judged people to be physically too old to serve in the military from the age of 50, but considered that individuals could be imprisoned up to the age of 70 or beyond if in debt.³⁹ Such distinctions reveal a degree of pragmatism on the part of legislators and demonstrate the flexibility of definition relating to old age. As historians Margaret Pelling and Richard Smith assert, ‘it is now widely accepted that a society’s definition and treatment of its elderly are more culturally relative than is the case for any other age group.’⁴⁰ This study endeavours to identify and acknowledge the several streams of definition and to consider them in the context of South Australian society, cognizant of the broader context of classification of old age in other times and cultures.

For the purposes of discussion within this thesis, the benchmarks used to define old age by the contemporary society are most relevant. Sources giving contemporary definitions include census materials, legislation and government regulations specifying age-related immigration restrictions, mandatory retirement ages and exclusion from army activity on the basis of age. Definitions of a more personal and subjective nature appear in diaries, letters, popular literature and art. Census materials are particularly useful in determining contemporary understandings of age groups. The 1891 statistical register presented causes of death at different ‘Periods of Life’ and recorded ‘Old Age’ as a cause of death for those aged 60 years and over.⁴¹ Equally relevant is the description in the 1891 census of the period from

³⁹Gerard Mauduech, “La Vieillesse en France sous l’Ancien Régime Spécialement en Normandie,” *Société Française d’Histoire des Hôpitaux* XXXIV (Paris, 1977), pp. 66, 69.

⁴⁰ Margaret Pelling and Richard M. Smith, eds., *Life, Death and the Elderly: Historical Perspectives* (Oxford: Routledge, 1991), p. 8.

⁴¹“Return showing the Causes of Deaths at different Periods of Life in the Province (exclusive of the Northern Territory) in the year 1891,” “Statistical Register of the Province of South Australia for the Year 1891. Compiled

fifteen to 60 years as the ‘self-supporting age’, and of those aged over 65 as ‘the aged persons’.⁴² There was inconsistency in definitions used at administrative level, and even those in official circles in late nineteenth-century South Australia acknowledged the shifting boundaries of definitions. Giving his opinion regarding the appropriate age to give the pension, Emanuel Hounslow told the 1897 Select Committee into the Aged Poor that ‘some men are older at 40 than others at 60’.⁴³ Some years later, when the old age pension had become reality, regulations under the Invalid and Old-Age Pensions Act of 1908-1909 identified those of ‘advanced age’ as ‘70 years and upwards’.⁴⁴ Such individuals became eligible for the pension if ‘marked degenerative changes’ accompanied their advanced age.⁴⁵ For example, ‘chronic articular rheumatism depriving sufferer of use of a limb, and rendering him permanently incapable of doing work’ amounted to adequate qualification for the pension.⁴⁶ For the purpose of determining eligibility for the pension then, the capacity to work had greater significance than chronological age. Other factors, such as the character and habits of the applicant and the ability and willingness of relatives to provide for ageing kin also influenced decisions about receipt of the pension. Such examples illustrate how attempts to grapple with the ‘problem’ of definition can lead to greater understanding of contemporary perceptions and factors that influence the experience of ageing in the community under scrutiny.

from Official Records. Part II, Vital Statistics,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 3, 1892 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1893).

⁴²“Minutes of Evidence before the Select Committee on Relief of Aged Poor,” in “Report of the Aged Poor Royal Commission, together with minutes of proceedings, evidence and appendices both of Select Committee and Royal Commission,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. II, no. 21, 1898-99 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1899), p. 2.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁴1908-09, Invalid and Old-age Pensions Act, no. 17, 1908 [1909, no. 3].

⁴⁵SRSA, GRG 29/3, Statutory Rules: Provisional Regulations under the Invalid and Old-Age Pensions Act 1908-1909, no. 121 (1910), p. 3.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

Categorisation according to chronological age is necessary for some purposes, including establishing the proportions in a community deemed by their years to be old. However, abiding by chronological categorisation in all areas can limit understanding of attitudes to ageing. Old age defies categorisation by any single standard as mental and physical condition, the capacity to work and response to life-course events vary considerably among individuals of the same chronological age. It is equally important to recognise the subjective nature of the definition of old age at an individual level and in the realms of art and literature. While some people considered themselves or others old at 50, basing their judgement on the discovery of grey hairs, birth of a grandchild, advent of menopause or physical deterioration, others perceived old age to begin many years later. Gender, wealth or access to resources and ethnic background are some of the factors that exert a modifying effect on the 'age' of the individual. As British historian Michael Anderson points out, differing conditions meant that 'aging occurred earlier in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than it does today',⁴⁷ when the boundaries of old age are being pushed further back. Anderson notes that the British Friendly Society Acts of 1875 and 1887 defined anyone over 50 as having entered old age, while Boards of Guardians categorised those aged 60 and over as "aged and infirm".⁴⁸ The following example further illustrates the relativity of old age: a missionary watching while an officer recorded the details of a new inmate, aged 70, to the Greenwich hospital in England, which housed aged and disabled seamen and soldiers in the mid-nineteenth century, commented that this was a 'good old age' only to be told, 'We do not consider that old here' and that a 70 year-

⁴⁷ Michael Anderson, "The impact on the family relationships of the elderly of changes since Victorian times in Governmental income-maintenance provision," in Ethel Shanas and Marvin B. Sussman, eds., *Family, Bureaucracy and the Elderly* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1977), p. 40.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

old was ‘almost a junior’.⁴⁹ Anderson sums up differences between modern 70 year-olds and those of the early twentieth century thus: ‘Relative to the rest of the population there are more of them, they are slightly more likely to have spouses alive, they will live longer and be healthier, but be less able, regardless of their own wishes, to continue to support themselves in the same way as the rest of the population ... through employment.’⁵⁰ Descriptions of the ageing as ‘young old’ and ‘old old’ acknowledge the importance of flexibility of definition and allow inclusion of the active and independent 80 year old in the category ‘young old’, and of the arthritic and attitudinally old 50 year old in the group ‘old old’.⁵¹

For the purposes of demographic analysis the age of 60 serves as a consistent and accepted benchmark of old age. Another important element in discussion of definition in this study involves consideration of the demographic ageing of populations. As sociological historian Donald Cowgill explains, a population is said to be ‘ageing’ when the ‘elderly segment of [the] population is increasing faster than the rest of the population’, the ‘most common index ... [being] the change in the percent of the total population which is 65 years of age and over’.⁵² Where less than four percent of the population is aged 65 or over the population is considered ‘young’, while between four and seven percent aged 65 or over mark

⁴⁹ John Garwood, *The Million-Peopled City Or; One-Half of the People of London made known to the Other Half* (London, 1853), p. 92.

⁵⁰ Anderson, “The impact on the family relationships of the elderly of changes since Victorian times in Governmental income-maintenance provision,” p. 41.

⁵¹ Bernice L. Neugarten, “Age Groups in American Society and the Rise of the Young-Old,” *Political Consequences of Aging: The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CCCCXV (1974), pp. 187, 191.

⁵² Donald O. Cowgill, “The Aging of Populations and Societies,” in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Political Consequences of Aging*, CCCCXV (1974), p. 2.

a ‘mature’ population, and over seven percent in that category indicate an ‘aged’ population.⁵³ In 1870 Australia had a young population with only 1.7% aged 65 years or over. By contrast 7.4% of the French population had attained the chronological benchmark of old age, thereby defining France as an aged population.⁵⁴ Australia did not become a mature population in these terms until well into the twentieth century, but by the late nineteenth century South Australia more closely resembled other western societies in demographic structure and consequently faced similar issues in relation to the place of the ageing within the community.

Methodology, structure and sources

Some clarification regarding the geographic and temporal parameters of this study, the types of sources used and the reasons for inclusion and exclusion of particular materials and topics is appropriate. The dissertation primarily concerns inhabitants of South Australia in the nineteenth century whose residence resulted from European settlement and does not involve study of the experience and representation of ageing indigenous Australians. Such a study would require its own treatment using different sources to those considered here. In geographical terms, the colony of South Australia included the Northern Territory from the 1860s; the Colonial Office transferred the Northern Territory to South Australian administration in 1863 and the Commonwealth assumed control in 1911. Most official figures for South Australia in this period, however, excluded the Northern Territory. To do justice to issues specific to the experience of the ageing in the Northern Territory would involve examination of sources specific to that area. In temporal terms the study primarily concerns

⁵³ Jon Hendricks and C. Davis Hendricks, “Ageing in Advanced Industrialized Societies,” in Vida Carver and Penny Liddiard, eds., *An Ageing Population: A Reader and Sourcebook* (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton in association with Open University Press, 1978), p. 29.

⁵⁴ Cowgill, “The Aging of Populations and Societies,” p. 3.

the colonial period but includes discussion of material from the early years of the twentieth century where appropriate. Photographs taken by Frederick Joyner and others in the early 1900s, for example, provide useful documentation of the lives of ordinary older people and are likely to represent accurately the activities and appearance of people in the closing years of the 1800s. Some topics integral to the experience of the ageing, such as retirement and the introduction of the aged pension, invite detailed consideration in their own right but are treated here in the context of shifts in perceptions of the ageing and in the experiences of older people. In chapter 8, for example, discussion of the movement towards the introduction of the pension shows the challenges those involved, from social reformers to parliamentarians, faced in defining and redefining their views about the responsibility of individual and community in relation to the aged. Inevitably, shifts in thinking about ways of handling the ‘aged problem’ occurred as participants strove to align idealism and pragmatism.

The range and types of sources that inform this study reflect the period and the place under consideration and the nature of the topic. The fact that South Australia was scantily populated, particularly in the early decades of settlement, resulted in a scarcity of material, especially that relating to the ageing. Increased awareness of the value of statistical information led to collection of a broader and more consistent body of data in South Australia in the nineteenth century than had been the case in earlier years in Britain and to the well-intentioned if short-lived formation of the South Australian Statistical Society in 1835. Nevertheless statistical evidence was not ‘particularly good’ and some material went astray, destroyed in the interests of confidentiality.⁵⁵ The following example illustrates the unreliability of some contemporary statistical evidence. Commenting on the annual report of

⁵⁵ Vamplew *et al.*, *South Australian Historical Statistics*, pp. 9, 10.

the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriages, the *Observer*'s reporter noted that two 'old bachelors' married and nine 'hoary-headed widowers took it into their heads to be remarried, after having reached or passed the ordinary term of three score years and ten'.⁵⁶ Some ministers, however, had not recorded the exact age of those they married, affecting the quality of the returns, so that if 'an old boy of eighty or ninety took it in his head to get married, the fact of his taking such a step at such a time of life would be lost sight of'.⁵⁷ Sources used to gather evidence regarding image and perception include parliamentary debates and papers, legislation, official correspondence, sermons, newspapers, journals, prescriptive literature, photographs, cartoons, paintings, popular literature including poetry and novels and personal documents including diaries and letters. Such sources also yield information regarding the experience of the ageing, along with census material and documentation of probated estates. Sources such as notes of medical officers and visiting officers to applicants for outdoor relief further reveal information about residential arrangements, work circumstances and health of the ageing. They do not, however, give information about the views of the ageing themselves. Inevitably, those whose voices resonate most clearly are the articulate, the letter writers and diarists. Some less literate individuals did record their ideas and experiences by dictating letters to literate companions or by struggling with the pen themselves. By its nature the topic of ageing, like others involving study of minority groups in society, requires those seeking knowledge and understanding to adopt an eclectic approach in relation to sources. Medievalist Michael Sheehan comments that it is necessary for the historian to 'ransack a vast body of literature in many languages and an iconography of major proportions' to gain understanding of attitudes towards the ageing as

⁵⁶ *The Adelaide Observer*, 3 April 1880, p. 565c.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

expressed by philosophers, theologians, and by the elderly themselves, comparison with other cultures serving to refine the understanding so gained.⁵⁸ His view bears application to study of the ageing in other times and places too and certainly applies to the study of the ageing in nineteenth-century South Australia. As Margaret Pelling and Richard Smith, historians of the experience of the ageing in Britain, point out ageing is essentially a private process and experience, but one that is nevertheless accessible to the historian.⁵⁹ In the case of South Australia, much of the evidence used to identify tensions between image and experience is captured through such diverse sources as those mentioned above. In particular personal materials such as letters and diaries and official materials documenting individual circumstances can provide correlations and contrast with discussion conducted in the public forums of newspapers and parliamentary debate.

Wills too can provide a wealth of information, as they show how individuals distribute their wealth and thereby reflect individual and community values and expectations in microcosm. In South Australia probated estates, from the two earliest recorded in 1844 to the prolific numbers of later years, provide direct evidence of many aspects of the lives of older people. The specific nature of the material included in the probated estates sampled from 1855 to 1891 and the few probated wills recorded in the early years of settlement necessitates separate treatment of that source. Among the limitations associated with the source is the lack of consistent information regarding the age of testators. As already observed, limited sources exist that reveal the realities of life for the ageing and while it is desirable to gather

⁵⁸ Michael M. Sheehan, ed., *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, Selected Papers from the Annual Conference of the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto 25-26 February and 11-12 November 1983 (Toronto, 1990), pp. x, xi.

⁵⁹ Pelling and Smith, eds., *Life, Death and the Elderly*, p. 2.

information about people from all levels of society, the poor and the illiterate leave few traces. This is particularly evident in examination of probated wills in South Australia. Eric Richards comments that South Australian historians benefit from the nature of the migration process, which encouraged even the barely literate to write to relatives and friends back home, or to dictate a letter.⁶⁰ Wills too could be made by people of all classes, but the probated wills sampled and examined tend to concern estates of some substance, thus excluding a significant proportion of the community. Nonetheless, South Australia had the highest proportion of probated wills of all the colonies, and their examination is worthwhile.

Newspapers provide a valuable source of information about popular culture, and in the context of colonial South Australia periodicals have a significant place, as they represent the most readily accessible source of cultural expression. One of the most widely read newspapers in Adelaide in the late nineteenth century was *The Adelaide Observer*. This everyday text, therefore, provides extensive information about attitudes to old people and to ageing through, for example, poetry and short stories, anecdote, reports about the lives and activities of colonists and debate that flourished in letters to the editor. It has not been possible to consider the contents of all South Australian newspapers. In America, a plethora of published sermons provide insights into societal attitudes towards old age.⁶¹ In nineteenth-century South Australia, the practical difficulties that limited publication of fiction meant that preachers from South Australia simply did not rank with their American and British peers, the likes of Scott

⁶⁰ Eric Richards, "A Voice From Below: Benjamin Boyce in South Australia, 1839-1846," *Labour History*, XXVII (1974), p. 65.

⁶¹ David Fischer and Andrew Achenbaum found abundant prescriptive literature about old age in the sermons of colonial America. Fischer, *Growing Old in America*; W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience since 1790* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

Holland and Hugh Price Hughes, in terms of publication.⁶² The influence of practising ministers, many of whom remained active into old age, was nevertheless significant in the colony. One such minister, Primitive Methodist Hugh Gilmore, came to South Australia in 1889 to preach on the Adelaide circuit and was one of few South Australians to have sermons published.⁶³ Views expressed through sermons and related material provide further insights into contemporary attitudes held towards and by the ageing.

The manner in which old people are represented in popular culture reflects attitudes held toward them and, to an extent, influences opinion. According to the findings of Alicia Nitecki, the aged appear as figures representing ‘man’s spiritual corruption’ in English poetry of the fourteenth century, and she concludes that such representation ‘exposes man’s fear and repugnance in the face of aging ... [and] treats the aged as grotesques, as vehicles of metaphor rather than as characters’, Chaucer’s works providing clear evidence of this.⁶⁴ Nitecki observes that an idealised view of the ageing, evident in works like the *Aeneid*, *De Senectute*, and *Beowulf* that include poems positioning the aged as ‘wise and experienced, as reconciled to their years’, appears again in works of the fifteenth century.⁶⁵ Representation of the ageing in visual and literary form is not fixed or static in any society, but reflects popular attitudes and

⁶² Holland, Canon of St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, from 1884, published works with titles such as *Logic and Life*, his writing also being included in such publications as Grenville Kleiser, ed., *The World’s Great Sermons*, IX (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909), pp. 147-164. Hughes wrote about the causes of pauperism in his work, Hugh Price Hughes, *The Philanthropy of God: Described and Illustrated in a Series of Sermons* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890).

⁶³ Gilmore died two years after his arrival at the age of forty-nine but made considerable impact through his sermons, published posthumously, Hugh Gilmore, *Sermons by the Late Hugh Gilmore: Being Full Reports of Occasional Sermons Preached at the Primitive Methodist Church, Wellington Square, North Adelaide, South Australia, 1889-1891* (Adelaide: Printed by Vardon and Pritchard, 1892).

⁶⁴ Alicia K. Nitecki, “Figures of Old Age in Fourteenth-Century English Literature,” in Sheehan, ed., *Ageing and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, pp. 113, 116.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

therefore can provide insight into shifts in the status of old people and into perceptions of their place in society. In South Australia the aged appear in various forms in works of poetry, popular literature and in the more limited body of visual material in art and photography. They are lightly mocked or derided, some works exaggerating qualities such as eccentricity or miserliness, they are revered and honoured for their life's work, they are pitied and presented as sufferers, and they are presented as philosophical and wise. No single view of the aged predominates in this period. Rather, amidst the many and diverse representations of old people, some dominant images are discernible. In poems in particular the aged appear variously as honourable, venerable, worthy of respect, lonely, introspective and withdrawn. Some fictional pieces describe the old as irascible, eccentric, difficult and miserly. So the elderly are portrayed as both pitiable and admirable figures. That the representation of old people in works of popular culture is not one-dimensional attests to some measure of accuracy in the relationship between reality, or lived experience, and cultural expression, as the experiences of the ageing did vary widely according to such factors as class, health, strength of family and social networks. If old people were predominantly and consistently denigrated in popular literature, it could be deduced that, indeed, the elderly commanded little respect in the communities in which they lived. Similarly, a consistently positive portrayal of old people might suggest a culture of veneration of the aged.

Certainly, shifts in emphasis in literature can reflect shifts in attitude in the broader society. Historians considering changes in views towards the ageing in colonial America have looked to popular literature to identify such shifts in societal mood and in the status of the ageing. The variation in resulting interpretations reflects, in part, differences in methodology, and is worth noting in the context of the South Australian experience. As already alluded to,

historians Andrew Achenbaum and David Fischer both identify a shift in attitudes towards the ageing in America, but while Fischer places the transition in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Achenbaum concludes that the most profound changes occurred in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁶ In an attempt to pinpoint more accurately the nature and timing of this shift in attitude historians Maris Vinovskis and Jane Range used a content analysis approach to examine portrayal of the elderly in the American magazine, *Littell's Living Age*, a source used by both Fischer and Achenbaum.⁶⁷ Their study highlights the value of methodical examination of sources that are otherwise vulnerable to subjectivity in analysis. Range and Vinovskis were able, for example, to quantify the appearance and role of elderly characters in fiction in terms of such variables as sex, class, health and position in the household, and in terms of their behaviour and attitudes. They conclude that Fischer may have 'overestimated the nature and extent, by the early nineteenth century, of the negative portrayal of the elderly', while Achenbaum probably 'underestimated ... negative perceptions of aging prior to the Civil War.'⁶⁸ Acknowledging that the correlation between representations of the elderly in literature and the reality of their lives may not be strong, Range and Vinovskis comment that images presented in literature may nevertheless influence popular perceptions, perhaps 'slow[ing] the pace of negative attitudes and behaviour toward the elderly in nineteenth-century America', and 'even mask[ing] ... the harsher aspects of growing old for many Americans in that period.'⁶⁹ Such analysis acknowledges the importance of ambivalence as an enduring element in attitudes to the ageing and the complexity of the interaction between perception and

⁶⁶ Fischer, *Growing Old in America*, p. 101; Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience since 1790*, p. 39.

⁶⁷ Jane Range and Maris Vinovskis, "Images of Elderly in Popular Magazines: A Content Analysis of *Littell's Living Age*, 1845-1882," *Social Science History*, V (1981), pp. 123-170.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 157.

experience and invites close perusal of comparable sources in other communities. Examination of material published in South Australia reveals similar levels of ambivalence, negative and positive portrayal of the elderly being evident throughout the nineteenth century to varying degrees. The exacting processes of content analysis could assist in establishing the extent to which image reflected the reality of older people's lives. Writing about appropriate and effective methodological approaches to the history of the family, Michel Dahlin observes that any approach can be flawed.⁷⁰ Recognizing that prescriptive literature, for example, may not be widely heeded in the society in which it is produced and therefore cannot be taken to directly reflect family values and behaviours, Dahlin comments that such material may nevertheless help historians to 'make judgments about the larger culture'.⁷¹ Similarly, scepticism about the reliability and usefulness of the 'literature of sentiment' influenced Range and Vinovskis' foray into content analysis of popular literature in search of shifts in attitude to the elderly.⁷²

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Study of prevailing attitudes to and treatment of older people in nineteenth-century South Australia enables observation about, for example, family structure and values, the nature of neighbourly relations in the circumstances generated by a colonial context and societal norms and mores regarding thrift, independence, charity and philanthropy. The broadly chronological structure within this study facilitates observation of changes in attitudes and practice as the

⁷⁰ Michel Dahlin, "The U.S. Family in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Periods," in Patricia J. F. Rosof and William Zeisel, eds., *Family History* (New York, N. Y: Copublished by The Institute for Research in History and Haworth Press, 1985), pp. 90-91.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁷² *Ibid.* Dahlin further notes that the content analysis approach itself is flawed by the narrowness of focus involved.

community developed. The years 1836 to 1850 mark the establishment phase of the colony, the 1850s to the 1870s constitute the middle period and the later period treated includes the 1880s and 1890s. Divisions are approximate; some discussion of the 1850s is included where relevant in an early chapter and of the early years of the twentieth century in the final chapters. The 1850s signalled a new phase of maturation in the colony's development, marked by the advent of responsible government and by increased prosperity associated with activities such as the mining of lead, silver and copper. This decade is also marked, however, by challenges in the growth and stability of the society posed by the effect of the gold rushes, which syphoned a significant proportion of the adult male population away to the eastern colonies, despite the efforts of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners to prevent such movement. Such fluctuation in population held implications for the ageing. Economic depression in the last decades of the nineteenth century coincided with maturation in the demographic regime of the colony, falling marriage and fertility rates and a concomitant increase in the proportion of older individuals in the community, an increase in poverty among the ageing and a more coordinated and self-conscious response at all levels to the 'problem' of the aged poor. Whereas the ageing were barely visible at the commencement of settlement they had become the focus of public and political attention by the turn of the century.

This study does not fall into the category of historical demography but nonetheless is informed by demographic background and observation. The demographic profile of South Australia at the time of establishment of the colony, one consequence of the planned founding of the settlement, held implications for old people both in terms of their involvement in the life of the colony and in the ways they were perceived. As the demographic profile of the colony altered, concomitant shifts in the economy and society shaped and were influenced by the

experience of the ageing. The increase in the proportion of the elderly in any given population is the result of the interaction of ‘first-order variables such as fertility, mortality, and migration ... with the initial age composition of the population’.⁷³ In the case of South Australia, deliberately starting out as a ‘young’ colony, the ageing of the population was initially slow, and in this sense, as a colony ‘of immigration’, the South Australian experience is closer to that of other ‘young’ societies like Canada and the United States of America.⁷⁴ Richard Smith suggests that to assess changes in the place of the ageing in the community with any accuracy historians should consider a broad time span.⁷⁵ In keeping with this suggestion this study, while focussing on colonial South Australia, makes reference to work exploring the experience of the ageing in other times and in other places; of particular relevance are studies of ageing in other Australian colonies, America and England. Conversely, it is only by hoeing the territory piece by piece that a more complete picture will be drawn. The South Australian experience, investigated here, provides the opportunity to observe how cultural continuities shape the experience of the ageing and how the particular circumstances associated with development of a planned colony disrupted some of those continuities, offering opportunities to create a ‘better’ old age.

⁷³ Peter Laslett, “Necessary Knowledge: Age and Aging in the Societies of the Past,” in David I. Kertzer and Peter Laslett, eds., *Aging in the Past: Demography, Society, and Old Age* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), p. 10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁵ Richard M. Smith, “The Structured Dependence of the Elderly as a Recent Development: Some Sceptical Historical Thoughts,” *Ageing and Society*, IV (1984), p. 413.

2 SETTLEMENT: 'none but *young couples*'

A young colony with no place for the old

'It is proposed that all individuals conveyed to the colony shall be young persons of both sexes in equal numbers; a preference being given to young married couples not having children.' This would 'ensure the greatest amount of labour from the individuals ... who from their age will probably for many years be useful as labourers ... [and] it will derive the greatest possible increase of numbers.'¹

Such was the pragmatic thinking of those involved in planning the settlement of South Australia. The colony of South Australia shared many characteristics of new settlements with other Australian colonies, but several unique characteristics differentiate the experience of South Australian settlers from others. To a degree, for example, all Australian colonies were young in demographic terms. In South Australia, however, the demographic profile along with associated social structures and features derived from carefully deliberated decisions. This chapter will explore reasons for this, concomitant difficulties accompanying the planning and its implementation and subsequent changes in demographic features of the colony. A primary concern throughout is to situate the ageing within this setting: to establish the extent to which initial plans accommodated or excluded old people; to determine the place of the ageing, in demographic terms, in the colony of South Australia; and to consider how their situation changed in the context of a growing population. Both the purpose and manner of colonisation carried implications for the subjects of this study, the ageing, necessitating this background discussion.

¹ South Australian Association, *Outline of the plan of a proposed colony to be founded on the south coast of Australia with an account of the soil, climate, rivers, etc. with maps, 1834* (Hampstead Gardens, S.A: Austaprint, 1978), first published in 1834, p. 15.

As an experiment in systematic colonisation the British province of South Australia, founded by Act of Parliament in August 1834 and publicly proclaimed upon the Governor's arrival in December 1836, was the product of careful planning. Those involved had particular aims, including the reduction of pauperisation within British society. Widespread poverty in Britain led to low life expectancy for many; an 1834 report about conditions among the labouring population linked ill-health to overcrowding and made the observation that, 'The gentry of Liverpool ... live 35 years, the tradesmen 22 years, the working class 15 years'.² Addressing the House of Commons regarding the re-appointment of the Select Committee on Emigration in February 1827, Colonel Robert Torrens claimed that a programme of emigration would be more cost-effective 'than maintaining paupers in their parishes at home', and declared himself convinced that 'judiciously conducted [emigration] would ... be the appropriate remedy... for the deep-seated disease which infects our social system.'³ Among those who considered the problem, Colonel Charles Napier blamed bad government for creating such a 'degree of misery... [among] certain classes' that people sought 'some place of refuge'.⁴ Difficult conditions brought resentment of taxes resulting from the Poor Laws. So the life of the English labourer was not only short but 'full of miseries', as he was doomed to remain 'a poor independent miserable spadesman whom taxes, large farmers, and other evils crush to the earth.' Comparing the hapless labourer, well-represented by the aged couple depicted in S. T. Gill's sketch (Figure 1), to 'the worm that he chops with his spade', Napier observed that, 'in age, he falls into a workhouse, glad, by means of the poor laws, to receive

² Edwin Chadwick, "General Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain," in Philip Woodruff, *Two Million South Australians* (Adelaide: Peacock Publications, 1984), p. 31.

³ Henry Capper, *Capper's South Australia*, (London: H. Capper, 1839), pp. 3, 8.

⁴ Charles James Napier, *Colonization: Particularly in Southern Australia with some remarks on Small Farms and Overpopulation* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1835), p. 11.

back (and *most justly* to receive back) a part of that property which a vile system has taken from him ... he looks upon death as his only hope of rest and happiness.’⁵



Figure 1 659D34, Age, 1835, pen and brown ink, watercolour on coloured paper, artist: S. T. Gill.

Despite his dramatically expressed opinion, Napier did not agree that emigration was ‘necessary to England’, instead viewing development of the colony ‘as a matter of private, and bold speculation, which ... will, eventually, be very profitable to those engaged in it, as merchants, farmers, and labouring men of all descriptions.’⁶ He nevertheless acknowledged that the foundation of South Australia would ‘give vent’ to the recently recognized problem of over-population in Britain,⁷ provide a market for surplus produce and for investment and serve

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

⁷ Demographic historian Wilfred Borrie argues that recognition of over-population in Britain and, as a corollary, the benefits of settlement schemes in Australia only occurred in the 1830s in response to such impetus as the Irish food shortages. Wilfred D. Borrie, *The European Peopling of Australia: A Demographic History, 1788-1988*

as ‘a model by which to correct our system of Colonial Government.’⁸ Concurring, the authors of the South Australian Association’s plan for the colony went so far as to declare that South Australia would be ‘the first colony ever established with any intelligent perception of the ends of Colonization’ and the first to be ‘founded by Englishmen, in a genial climate, free from the evils of the slave or convict system, and at the same time provided with the requisite amount of labour’.⁹ Deliberate encouragement of emigration by the young and equally deliberate exclusion of the old comprised a significant element of the thoughtfully constructed plan.

Colonel Torrens used evocative metaphoric language to outline benefits of colonisation to the House of Commons in 1827, suggesting that, ‘In giving effect to extensive and improved plans of colonization we are multiplying the British nation; we are rocking the cradles of giant empires’.¹⁰ Similar imagery creating parallels between the concept of infancy and colonisation characterizes several documents connected with the establishment of South Australia as a colony. When the Colonisation Commissioners offered the first governorship to Charles Napier in 1835, disagreement over such issues as availability of troops and extra funds led to debate over the purpose and nature of the settlement, and finally to Napier’s rejection of the position. The Colonisation Commissioners considered Napier’s request for access to significant public funds at odds with the self-supporting principle. Refuting their argument, Napier embraced the metaphor of colony as infant, remarking that providing a military force ‘is in no way contrary to what they call the “*self*-supporting system;” it is merely to provide a temporary force, lent to protect it in its infancy, and enable it, in due time, to act with

(Canberra: Demography Program, Research School of Social Sciences, The Australian National University, 1994), p. 47.

⁸ Napier, *Colonization: Particularly in Southern Australia*, p. 2.

⁹ South Australian Association, *Outline of the plan of a proposed colony*, p. 17.

¹⁰ Capper, *Capper's South Australia*, p. 8.

independent vigour, instead of being strangled in the cradle.’¹¹ The metaphor of colony as infant, widely used, assumed physical form when Captain Morgan of the Duke of York, the first ship to reach Nepean Bay on Kangaroo Island, decided the baby daughter of passengers named Beare should be the first to set foot on the colony’s soil.¹²

A contrasting metaphor used to conceptualise and describe the process of colonisation compared the moving of a society to the transplantation of a tree. Exploring this image in his contemporary account, Henry Capper referred to Joseph Banks’ efforts to replant full-grown trees, which failed due to the removal of smaller roots and branches, and the discovery that successful transplantation required removal of ‘the whole of the tree uninjured’.¹³ Shifting his discussion to societal transplantation, Capper stated that ‘success depends upon attention to details’, remarking that, ‘Many a modern Colony has perished through the inattention of its founders to little matters which, it was supposed, would take care of themselves.’¹⁴ Capper believed that, in the case of South Australia, ‘the greatest attention has been paid to details.’¹⁵ Again, Napier used similar metaphorical language, describing South Australia as ‘a colony to which ... *society* shall be transplanted, [and] ... religion ... [will] take immediate root, and exert all its happy social influence.’¹⁶ Capper’s image, while evocative, is not wholly accurate, as at no point did those involved in the establishment of the colony of South Australia intend to transplant the whole of the tree; just those parts they considered would generate new growth.

¹¹ Napier, *Colonization: Particularly in South Australia*, p. xxiv.

¹² *The Adelaide Observer*, 31 July 1886, p. 198d.

¹³ Capper, *Capper's South Australia*, p. 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁶ Napier, *Colonization: Particularly in South Australia*, p. 265.

Use of metaphor associated with the commencement and development of the colony is not confined to contemporary accounts, as evidenced by Louis Hartz's mid-1960s theory of fragmentation, which echoes Capper's notion of transplantation. John Hirst identifies Hartz's central idea as being that, 'Europe's colonies of settlement are fragments of Europe whose nature and course are determined by the ideology which prevailed at the time they left the mother culture'.¹⁷ In the case of Australia, according to Hartz, the fragment was 'radical, charged with the proletarian turmoil of the Industrial Revolution'.¹⁸ Hartz's theory initially generated debate but has since been largely ignored or rejected as flawed and simplistic.¹⁹ The notion at the heart of his theory, that the ideologies of those involved in establishing a colony influence its structure and development, is relevant in the case of South Australia. However, ideology alone does not shape the social, economic and political structures of a new community. As Robert Woods observes, myriad factors 'more varied and more complex than ... previously thought' influence the demographic structure of a society.²⁰ Consequently, posits Woods, 'particular cultures were likely to have their own specific demographic regimes; and ... demographic experiences might not be culturally transferable.'²¹ Thus, even if the founders had wished to recreate or 'transplant' British society exactly, local factors would have cast their own influence. As Elaine Bjorkland points out, the establishment of the colony involved

¹⁷ John B. Hirst, "Historical Reconsiderations 1: Keeping Colonial History Colonial: The Hartz Thesis Revisited," *Historical Studies*, XXI (1984), p. 86.

¹⁸ Louis Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies: Studies in the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964), p. 3.

¹⁹ See, for example, discussion in: Geoffrey C. Bolton, "Louis Hartz," *Australian Economic History Review*, XIII (1973), pp. 148-156; Hirst, "Historical Reconsiderations 1: Keeping Colonial History Colonial: The Hartz Thesis Revisited," pp. 85-104; Allan William Martin, "Australia and the Hartz 'Fragment' Thesis," *Australian Economic History Review*, XIII (1973), pp. 131-147. Martin, in particular, points out that radicalism was 'slow to emerge', especially among assisted free immigrants who were poor but actively sought independence, Martin, p. 136.

²⁰ Robert I. Woods, "Theory and Methodology in Population Geography," in Michael Pacione, ed., *Population Geography: Progress and Prospect* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 25.

²¹ *Ibid.*

experimentation in terms of the scheme used to establish its population, the ‘unfamiliar environment’ and the practical difficulties associated with the isolation of the new colony,²² all of which combined to create unique circumstances that shaped the demographic, economic and social structures of the colony.

In fact, those involved in planning the settlement actively intended to *avoid* replication of the demographic experiences of the ‘Mother Country’. Instead, informed by particular ideologies and goals, they hoped to create a ‘Land of Promise’,²³ where working class people could look forward to something other than Napier’s life of misery, especially in old age. In Bjorklund’s view, even the physical layout of Adelaide, including wide streets and parklands, constituted ‘philanthropic experiment’, as those responsible endeavoured to provide access to the ‘social, economic and political freedoms which had been shaken from the cities of England by the Industrial Revolution.’²⁴ The Commissioners and others held strong beliefs about what was possible in the new colony, the strength of their vision evident in correspondence and regulations relating to the process and nature of settlement throughout the first decade of colonisation. Robert Gouger, one of several young men involved in the planning and early settlement of the colony,²⁵ made his view clear that ‘Colonization is hard work, and no one, unless possessed of a considerable capital, ought to think of going to a new country unless he is disposed to put his shoulder to the wheel in good earnest.’²⁶ Planners believed that the

²² Elaine M. Bjorklund, “Adelaide: An Experiment in Land Settlement,” *Extract from Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, South Australian Branch, Session 1950-51*, LII (1951), p. 33.

²³ William Shaw, *Land of Promise: Or My Impressions of Australia* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1854).

²⁴ Bjorklund, “Adelaide: An Experiment in Land Settlement,” p. 34.

²⁵ Gouger was aged 34 years at the founding of the colony.

²⁶ Robert Gouger, *South Australia in 1837; in a series of letters: with a postscript as to 1838* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1838), p. 91.

process of colonisation, aimed to benefit the young, demanded their involvement and whole-hearted effort.

The youth of the migrants and the relative absence of older people appeared advantageous to those concerned with cultivating religion in the newly established colony. John Brown, secretary of the Society for Providing Religious Instruction among the Dissenters in the proposed New Colony of South Australia, and author of the Society's prospectus, reasoned that the way the colony was to be established and in particular the age of the colonists would have implications for the establishment, growth and support of religion there. The sale of land to the highest bidder and use of the resulting funds to send 'young persons of the labouring classes of both sexes in equal numbers, a preference being given to young married couples', meant that no land would be set aside for the use of the church, in contrast to the experience in other colonies.²⁷ Instead, settlers and their supporters in Britain would need to take responsibility for the 'enforcement of religion', and while the working-class origins and limited means of most emigrants meant that they could not provide financial support for pastors, they would be 'of an age and station to be most susceptible to the influences of religion'.²⁸ Elaborating, Brown reasoned that as 'religious and moral instruction to be most extensively efficacious, must have been afforded in early years, and have thus interwoven themselves with the mental constitution of the individual', so it was fortuitous that young people would comprise the majority of migrants.²⁹ Aware that the 'whole, or nearly the whole, of the labouring class when sent out will be young persons without families', and that

²⁷ John Brown, "Prospectus for a Society for providing religious instruction among Dissenters in the proposed New Colony of South Australia (1834)," in Brian Dickey and Peter Howell, eds., *South Australia's Foundation: Select Documents* (Netley: Wakefield Press, 1986), p. 30.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

consequently ‘the colony will in the course of a few years consist chiefly of individuals still young, and of children; and the latter will form the largest portion of the community’, Brown asserted that particular efforts should be made to support the cultivation of religious education in the colony.³⁰

Keen awareness of the dangers and possible consequences of over-supply of labour is evident in the directive to the Resident Commissioner that, ‘During the early infancy of the colony, the most important part of your duty will be to take care that no labouring emigrant falls into a state of destitution’.³¹ The Commissioners, ‘fearful of inflicting upon the Colony the evil of a redundant, and therefore pauper population’, slowed the flow of emigration until gauging demand for labour.³² In Napier’s optimistic assessment, which reflects his belief in the level of planning associated with settlement, ‘*poverty*, it may be said, will not appear for some centuries’ in South Australia.³³ In fact, destitution among the new settlers of South Australia emerged as a problem within five years of settlement, the nature of the migration selection process accruing blame. In ongoing correspondence to Lord Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Governor Grey reported in April 1842 that, ‘The exclusive appropriation of the Land Fund to the introduction of pauper emigrants into the colony has been one of the causes of the continued destitution of a large number of able-bodied labourers’.³⁴

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 31.

³¹ *Second Annual Report of the Colonization Commissioners for South Australia to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1837* (Adelaide: Surveyor-General's Office, 1838), p. 14.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³³ Napier, *Colonization: Particularly in Southern Australia*, p. 46.

³⁴ SRSA, GRG 2/23/2, no. 51, *Despatches, Grey to Stanley, 1841-1843*, April 22 1842.

Early reports of the colony

As the Colonisation Commissioners hoped and expected, ‘satisfactory accounts sent home by the emigrants of the labouring class create[d] among their friends and connexions so strong a feeling in favour of the Colony, that the applications for a free passage from industrious families [were] extremely numerous’, generating strong chain migration.³⁵ Various contemporary sources, both official and unofficial, presented a rosy picture of the potential for a good life in the colony. Henry Sparkes, writing to his friend John Peck in September 1838, described South Australia as ‘one of the loveliest countries ever seen’, a place where ‘all manner of trade is flourishing, ... [w]ages are very high, and [w]e have everything in abundance the heart could wish for, both in shape of luxuries and necessaries.’³⁶ The author of the 1847 *Almanack* similarly declared that, ‘Throughout the whole country, the necessaries and comforts of life are possessed in abundance’, proffering as evidence the remuneration rates for shepherds, hut-keepers, female house servants, labourers and ‘artizans’.³⁷ Reinforcing these impressions, the Reverend Thomas Stow praised the colony on a range of fronts, proclaiming that, ‘We have no droughts, no seasons in which grain is not brought to maturity In Adelaide we have never known the want of abundant water [as m]ost of the wells in and about Adelaide, yield delicious water.’³⁸ Recommending South Australia’s climate to intending emigrants, Stow declared that despite isolated cases of dysentery, ‘We have no epidemics’, and that in his twenty years’ experience as a minister he had never had ‘so little sickness’ in his

³⁵ *Second Annual Report of the Colonization Commissioners for South Australia to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1837* (Adelaide: Surveyor-General's Office, 1838), p. 6.

³⁶ Capper, *Capper's South Australia*, p. 177.

³⁷ Andrew Murray, ed., *The South Australian Almanack and Town and Country Directory for 1847* (Adelaide: A. Murray, 1847), p. viii.

³⁸ *South Australia in 1842* (London: J. C. Hailes, 1843), p. 13.

congregation as he had encountered in the colony.³⁹ At an official level Wentworth's advice to emigrants, to be read prior to embarking or on the journey, included this positive appraisal of health in the colony:

There is no country so free from disease, no bilious fevers, no agues, (so fatal in the United States and Canada) none of the chronic or inflammatory diseases of Europe are found here; small-pox, measles, hooping cough, are totally unknown. Persons of delicate constitution and indifferent health, persons advanced in life, after a few years' residence in this climate, acquire new vigour and health.⁴⁰

Others tempered their enthusiasm in missives home by emphasising the need to work hard. Enoch Essex, for example, writing to W. Taylor in Gloucestershire in August of 1838, declared, 'It is of no use for a man or woman to think of coming to Australia to be lazy, for they will be miserably mistaken, as it is downright hard work here; but a sober, steady man may do well.'⁴¹ In June of the same year, William and Sarah Pearce wrote to a friend, Mr Clark, giving a frank appraisal of their early experience in the colony. William reported that his business was 'fast increasing', but that expenses meant he had only saved about one hundred pounds. Like many others, the Pearces believed that 'Almost any person here, if industrious and willing to work, sober, and steady, may obtain a good livelihood, and save a little property for old age.'⁴² Some made bolder statements about the potential to do well in later years. In August 1838, Stephen Goldsack, anticipating a friend's possible objection to emigrating, wrote, 'I suppose, Mr James, you think yourself too old now to do any good? Well! That excuse is better than a worse.'⁴³ He proceeded to assure his friend 'that, as sure as I breathe,

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁰ "Extracts from Wentworth, to assist the Emigrant in his preparation to embark, and during the Voyage," in Napier, *Colonization: Particularly in Southern Australia*, p. 219.

⁴¹ Capper, *Capper's South Australia*, pp. 172, 173.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 166.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

there are people in Adelaide ... as old as your father, who left England two years ago not worth ten shillings, and now, through nothing but industry, they have each several good stone houses and several acres of town land'.⁴⁴ Urging his friend, a wheelwright by trade, to consider making the journey, Goldsack told him that, 'There are eight persons, who received a free passage with us, each older than you; but, since they have become the free citizens of Adelaide, they are cutting about like lads of sixteen, congratulating each other as they meet.'⁴⁵ To another colonist, William Shaw, writing in the 1850s, Australia was the 'Land of Promise', a place where 'there is nothing ... venerable or of authority – nothing older than a gum tree'.⁴⁶ Shaw urged any potential emigrant to 'blot out all records of the past ... overcome early prejudices ... dismiss the foolish dreams of sudden wealth, and get into harness', whereupon 'prosperity will reward his exertions.'⁴⁷ For the young, who comprised the vast majority of colonists, and for the relatively few older migrants the connection between hard work and a prosperous future was clear. Years later novelist Anthony Trollope echoed the enthusiasm of Shaw and others in his comment, made in 1871, that, 'Adelaide was intended to be the earthly paradise of perfected human nature.'⁴⁸ Whether or not Trollope's vision was attained, John Conigrave, writing in the 1880s, reflected that, 'In the brief space of fifty years a mere handful of the Anglo-Saxon race have, by industry, enterprise, and thrift, laid the foundations of a young nation.'⁴⁹

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Shaw, *Land of Promise*, p. 329.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Christine Chinner, 'Earthly Paradise': *A Social History of Adelaide in the Early 1890s (1890-1895)*, (Honours thesis, University of Adelaide, 1960), p. ii.

⁴⁹ John Fairfax Conigrave, *South Australia: A Sketch of its History and Resources: A Handbook* (Adelaide: E. Spiller, Govt. Printer, 1886), p. 178.

Demographic features of settlement

Woods' observation, noted earlier, that 'particular cultures [are] likely to have their own specific demographic regimes',⁵⁰ themselves the product of various interacting factors, is pertinent to discussion of the demographic structure of early South Australia. As demographic historian Peter Laslett explains, increase in the proportion of the elderly in a population is the result of the interaction of 'first-order variables such as fertility, mortality, and migration [which themselves change over time] with the initial age composition of the population'.⁵¹ In the case of South Australia, deliberately starting out as a 'young' colony, the ageing of the population was initially slow, reflecting the migration of large numbers of young people and associated high levels of fertility. In this sense, as a colony 'of immigration', the South Australian experience bears similarity to that of other 'young' societies like Canada and the United States of America, as described by Laslett.⁵² The proportion of old people is small relative to the rest of the population in most early industrial communities, but significant variation does occur. Thus, while recently settled colonial communities of the mid-nineteenth century included particularly small numbers of elderly people, the proportion of the population aged over 65 in 1850 was 4.6% in England and Wales and in France was even higher, 6.5%, reflecting the influence of factors including decline in fertility in these and other European countries.⁵³

⁵⁰ Woods, "Theory and Methodology in Population Geography," p. 25.

⁵¹ Laslett, "Necessary Knowledge: Age and Aging in the Societies of the Past," p. 10.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵³ Peter Laslett, "Societal Development and Aging," in Robert Binstock and Ethel Shanas, eds., *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1976), p. 103.

The dramatic absence of the ageing in the early years of colonisation, in stark contrast to the presence of people aged 21 to 45 years, who comprised over 40% of the population, is evident in analyses of population available in the census return for 1844, shown in Table 1 and Figure 2. According to information gathered in the census a mere .36% of inhabitants of South Australia were aged 60 and over in February 1844. More males than females contributed to that minute percentage, reflecting the trend at all ages; 44.6% of the total population at this early point in the colony's development were female, despite efforts at an official level to ensure an even balance of the sexes. An earlier, unofficial census conducted in 1840 revealed a total population in Adelaide and country districts of 14,745, although the author of *South Australia in 1842* noted that allowance for omissions including the recording of inhabitants of remote areas would result in a more accurate figure of approximately 16,000.⁵⁴ Any inaccuracy notwithstanding, the author observed that, 'The proportion of females to males, is much greater in South Australia than in the neighbouring colonies – a circumstance not only favourable to an increase in population, but conducive to domestic comfort, and prevention of vice.'⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the 1844 census showed that of a total of 9526 males in the colony, only 44 were aged 60 or more, compared to a mere 18 out of 7670 females. Although the desired balance of male and female migrants, one aim of colonisation, was not immediately achieved, the youthful base of the colony's population in the first years of settlement was readily established. As intended, old people were scarcely visible or present in the early years of South Australia.

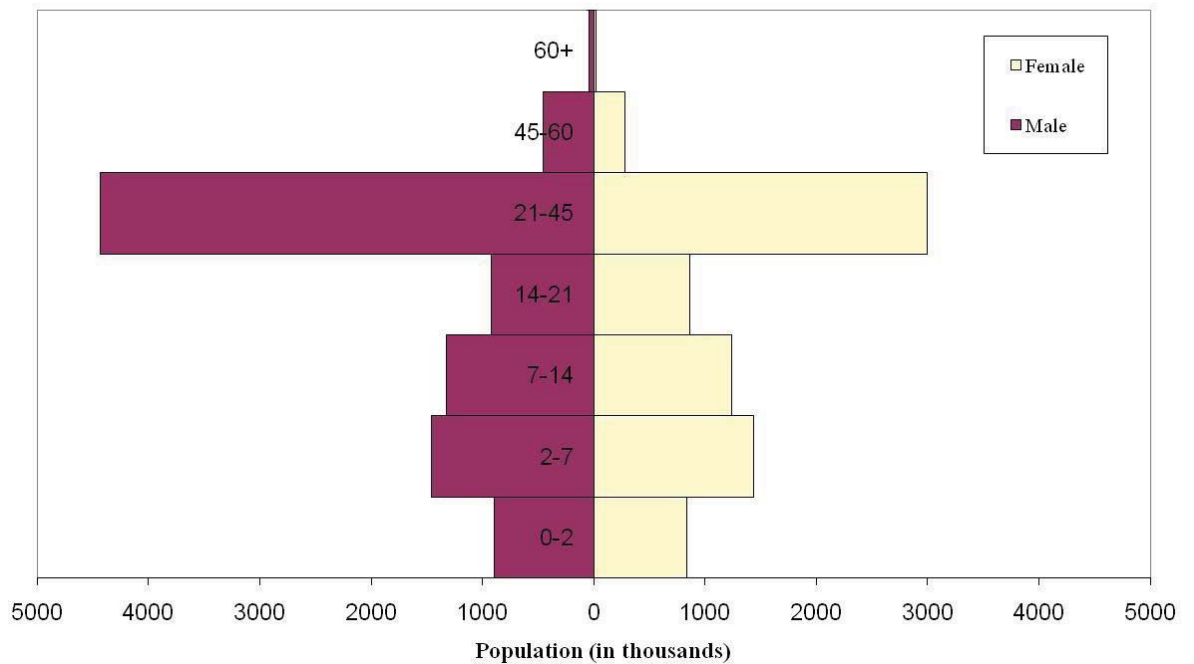
⁵⁴ *South Australia in 1842*, p. 18.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* It is important to note that this study excludes consideration of the Northern Territory, which, by the end of the nineteenth century had 'nearly eleven times as many males as females', *The Adelaide Observer*, 5 August 1899, p. 281a.

Table 1 Age Distribution in South Australia, 1844

Age	Males	Females	Total number	Percentage
Under 2	890	834	1724	10.02
2-7	1459	1434	2893	16.82
7-14	1322	1241	2563	14.93
14-21	922	866	1788	10.39
21-45	4432	2996	7428	43.19
45-60	457	281	738	4.29
60 +	44	18	62	0.36
	9526	7670	17196	100.00

Source: General Colonial Statistics, Government Census Return, for 1844.⁵⁶

**Figure 2 Age distribution in South Australia, 1844.**

Note: Age divisions are presented as recorded.

⁵⁶ James Allen, *The Royal South Australian Almanack and General Directory for 1845* (Adelaide: James Allen, 1845), p. 149; "Statistical Register of the State of South Australia for the Year 1908. Compiled from Official Records. Statistical Summary of South Australia from its Foundation. 1836 - 1908," *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 3, 1909 (Adelaide: Acting Government Printer, North Terrace, 1909).

Historians hold dissenting views regarding the reliability and comprehensive nature of colonial census-taking. Joseph Powell, observing vagaries in each colony's system of collection of statistics, finds it 'exceedingly difficult to discover any reasonable uniformity between the statistical records of Australia's different political units, except at the crudest level of analysis, before the Census and Statistics Act of 1905.'⁵⁷ Any comparative comment relating to the demographic structure and experience of the colonies would need, then, to recognize such variation. By contrast, demographer Wilfred Borrie concludes that 'the quantity and quality of the statistical material ... was remarkable', and reflected the desire of British administrators to track progress and change in the colonial populations.⁵⁸ Comparison between the colonies may be difficult to make, especially before the advent of synchronized censuses, but each colony did gather valuable information about its inhabitants. Eleven censuses were conducted in South Australia between 1844 and 1911, the census of 1881 being the first simultaneous census in the colonies. Figure 3 through to Figure 6 show the distribution of population by age in South Australia from the censuses of 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1891. These provide snapshots of the changing age profile of the colony.

⁵⁷ Joseph Michael Powell, *Mirrors of the New World: Images and Image-Makers in the Settlement Process* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978), p. 138.

⁵⁸ Borrie, *The European Peopling of Australia*, p. 7.

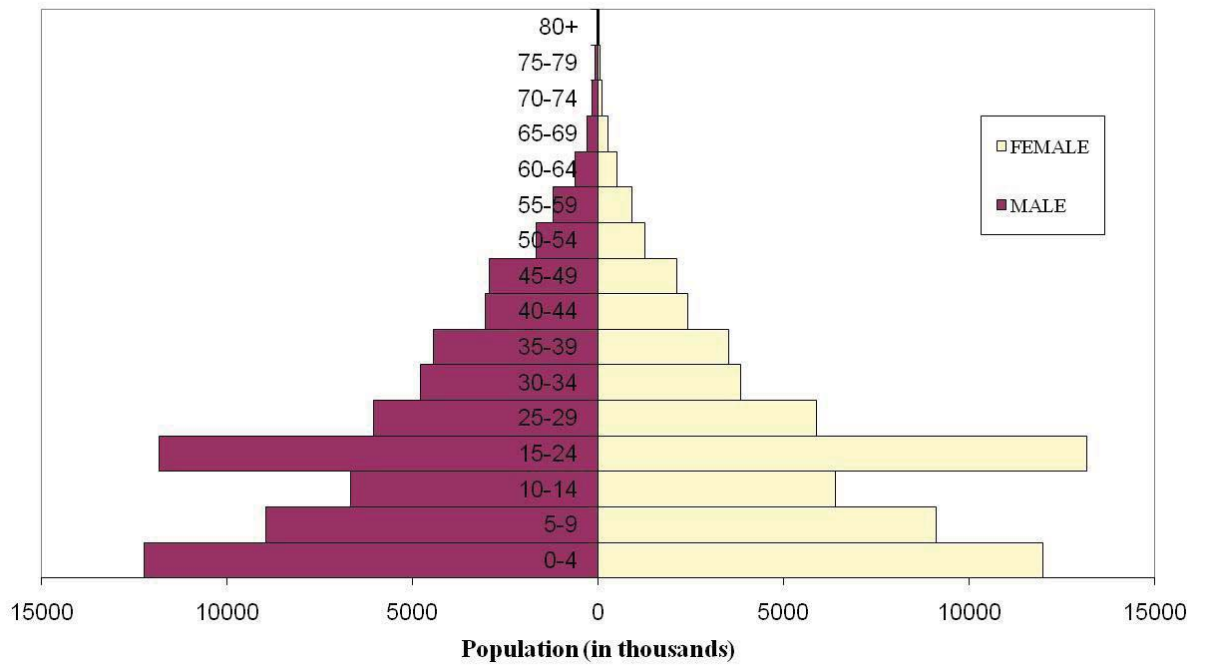


Figure 3 Age distribution in South Australia, 1861.
 Note: Ages 15-19 and 20-24 are combined in this census.

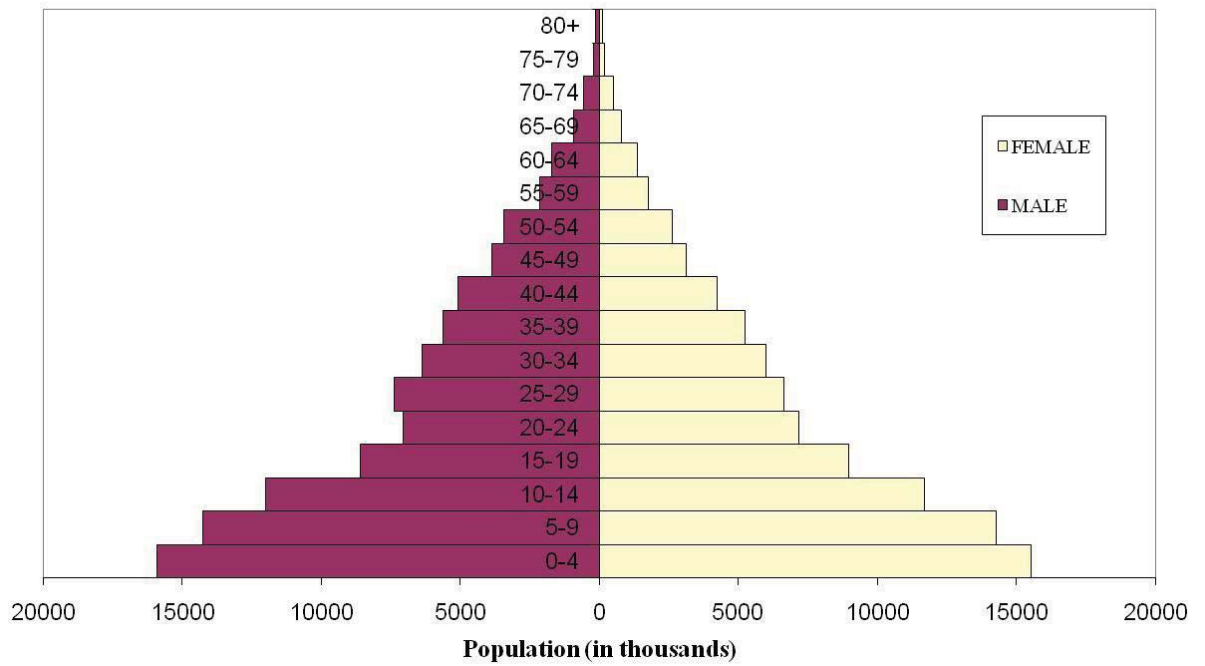


Figure 4 Age distribution in South Australia, 1871.

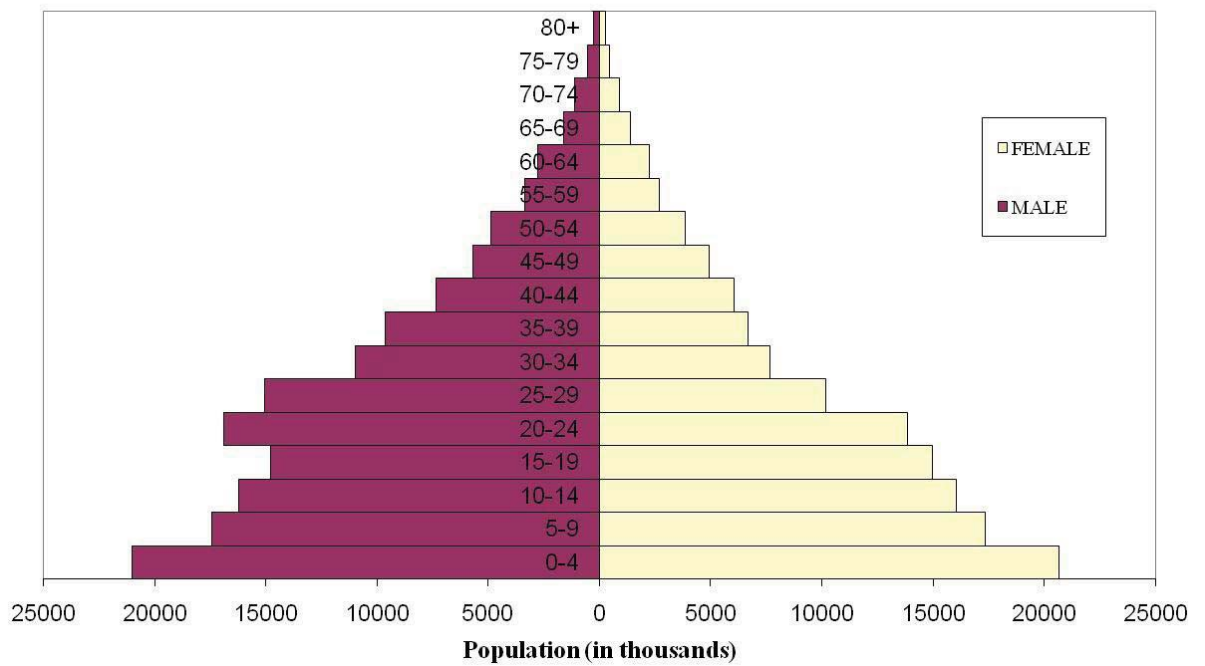


Figure 5 Age distribution in South Australia, 1881.

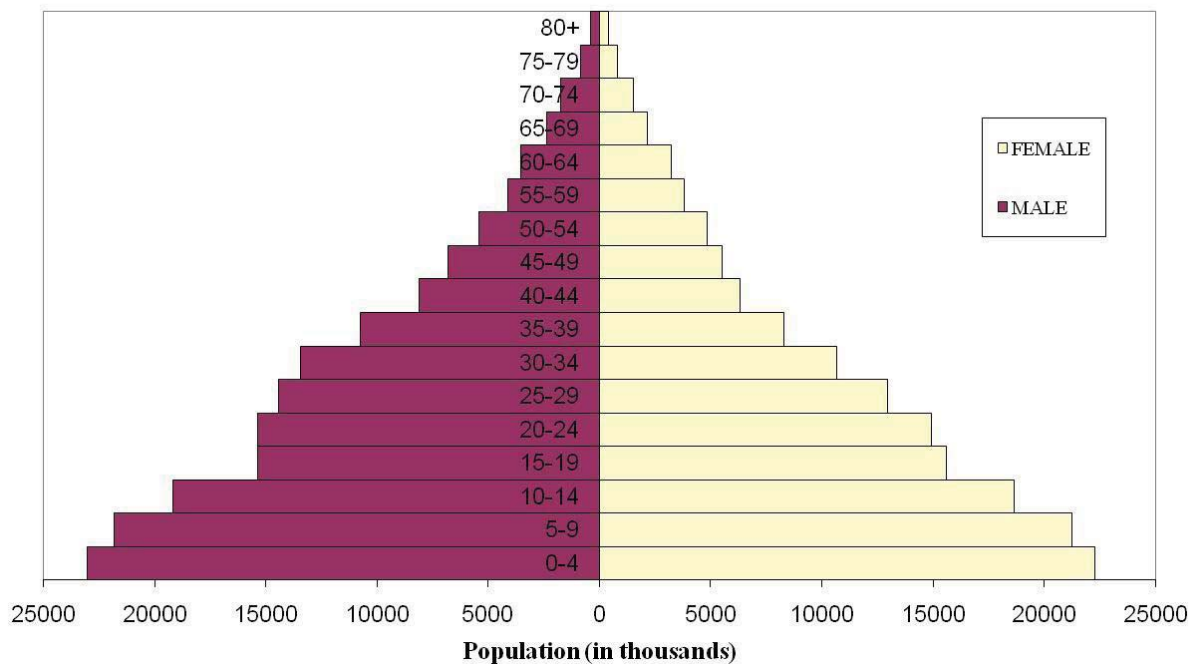


Figure 6 Age distribution in South Australia, 1891.

Nearly twenty years after the first official census, when .36% of individuals counted were aged over 60, the percentage of those aged 60 or over had increased to 1.67%. In this age category as in most, there were more males than females, a feature noticeable in each census though to and including 1891. In the early 1890s the proportion of those aged over 60 in both the male and female populations was the same, although males over 60 outnumbered females by 711. Overall, the proportion of aged individuals in the community continued to increase steadily, reaching 3.5% in 1871, 4.1% in 1881 and 5.3% in 1891.⁵⁹ The gradual increase reflects several demographic phenomena within the community, the most obvious being the ongoing ageing of large numbers of those who came to the colony as men and women in their twenties and thirties in the 1830s, '40s and '50s, and who remained in South Australia,

⁵⁹ Figures for the whole of Australia are comparable, with 4.4% aged over sixty in 1881 and 5.1% in 1891.

creating the ‘kinked age structure’ that typifies communities built upon mass migration.⁶⁰ As the initial age composition in the colony heavily favoured the young, an increase in the proportion of elderly in the population over time was inevitable, when the effects of mortality, fertility and migration are taken into consideration. The role of immigration in determining the profile of population in the nineteenth century is clear, not only in South Australia but in Australia generally.⁶¹ The impact of migration ensured that Australia remained a relatively ‘young’ population well into the twentieth century, testimony to the principle that the ‘age and sex structure of a population at any one time bears traces of the demographic history of a period that stretches many years into the past.’⁶² Countries are considered to have an ‘old’ population when more than eleven per cent of the population are aged over 65 years, a situation attained first by France and then by increasing numbers of developed countries as the twentieth century progressed, and as declining birth rates gradually exerted their own effect.⁶³ As population historian Robert V. Jackson points out, features of population growth that are associated with the ‘pioneering phase’, including the influx of young people, are temporary and are usually followed by a period of slower growth.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Alan Ross Hall, “Some Long Period Effects of the Kinked Age Distribution of the Population of Australia 1861-1961,” *Economic Record*, XXXIX (1963), p. 43.

⁶¹ See for example Edward Rosset, *The Aging Process of Population* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1964), pp. 236, 237.

⁶² Robert Vincent Jackson, *The Population History of Australia* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1988), p. 31.

⁶³ Rosset, *The Aging Process of Population*, pp. 198, 210.

⁶⁴ Jackson, *The Population History of Australia*, pp. 2, 7. Jackson notes the combined effect of reduced immigration and fertility decline on the rate of population growth in Australia from the 1860s to the 1930s.

The role and effect of assisted migration

In South Australia a particular approach to assisted migration shaped the nature of that pioneering phase, which in turn exerted a powerful influence over the demographic profile of the colony for many decades. The Wakefield Scheme, devised by the young, pragmatic and incarcerated Edward Gibbon Wakefield in 1829, provided the rationale for settlement in South Australia and informed the programme of assisted migration implemented there. Referring to the experience of other colonies, including New South Wales, where imbalance of the sexes led to uneven development of the population, Wakefield argued that it would be ‘absurd’ and ‘unprofitable’ to bring only males or those ‘too old to encrease [sic] their numbers’.⁶⁵ Whereas other colonies had borne the costs of relocating individuals, including those who were ‘old, infirm, idle, ignorant or vicious, and nearly or wholly useless to the Colony’, Wakefield proposed that the South Australian venture involve ‘none but *young* couples, well adapted to the wants of the Colony’.⁶⁶ Regulations governing assisted migration detailed the intention and function of the scheme. Basically, proceeds ‘from the sale of land and the rent of pasturage’ were to form the basis of an emigration fund, which would be used to provide free passage for poor labourers from Great Britain and Ireland, ‘provided that they shall, as far as possible, be adult persons of both sexes in equal proportions, *and not exceeding the age of thirty years.*’⁶⁷ Both nomination by those who purchased property and selection initially by the South Australian Commissioners or their agents in England provided means of securing emigrants suitable for free or assisted passage under the scheme.⁶⁸ In the period from 1836, when 711

⁶⁵ Prichard, ed., *The Collected Works of Edward Gibbon Wakefield*, p. 296.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Gouger, *South Australia in 1837*, p. 108, [Italics my emphasis].

⁶⁸ The South Australian Commissioners were disbanded in 1840, their responsibilities in relation to immigration matters assumed by the Land and Emigration Commissioners, also responsible for migration to New South Wales

assisted immigrants arrived in the colony, to 1851, when over 3500 received assisted passage, a total of 32,789 men, women and children received assistance to migrate to South Australia.⁶⁹ Aspiring emigrants seeking free passage had to meet criteria that changed according to the perceived needs of the nascent society; in 1838 the Board of Commissioners stipulated that, ‘They must be real labourers going out to work for wage, in the colony, of sound mind and body, not less than fifteen, nor more than thirty years of age, and married.’⁷⁰ While details relating to occupation fluctuated, the call for young migrants remained constant.

Thus, the vision for the nature of settlement within the colony involved a system of selection that led to exclusion of the old, based on the rationale that, ‘By selecting young people only as emigrants, means are adopted of increasing the population at the lowest cost’.⁷¹ In explaining the principles informing the process of selection, Gouger added to Wakefield’s pragmatic emphasis on the productivity of the young, in terms both of labour and of reproduction,⁷² by remarking that ‘the distaste for emigration is seldom so strong among the young and enterprising as among the old’.⁷³ Showing awareness of the need to influence the initial age composition in the colony, he identified as a further benefit that, ‘the pain necessarily felt by the very young and tender is avoided, by the emigration of their parents at

and Van Diemen’s Land. Thomas Augustus Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia: From the First Settlement in 1788 to the Establishment of the Commonwealth in 1901*, vol. I (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1969), first published in 1918, pp. 372, 373.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

⁷⁰ Gouger, *South Australia in 1837*, p. 109. For discussion of the rationale relating to occupations of early assisted emigrants, see Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, vol. I, p. 371f.

⁷¹ Gouger, *South Australia in 1837*, p. 10.

⁷² Prichard, ed., *The Collected Works of Edward Gibbon Wakefield*, p. 296.

⁷³ Gouger, *South Australia in 1837*, p. 10.

such an age as that the increase shall take place in the province.⁷⁴ Other colonies also used selected migration to boost their populations and, along with South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia ‘made most use of this system’.⁷⁵ As Frank Crowley observes, ‘with safeguards in the way of age limits and tests of physical fitness it was considered to be the best means of artificially increasing the population in new communities.’⁷⁶

Napier’s vision of a colony free from poverty remained unrealised. Financial and administrative difficulties developed swiftly as numbers arriving in the colony grew, and while measures taken to address these problems, including the removal of the inflexible Governor Hindmarsh and the over-spending Governor Gawler, had some effect, the bankruptcy of the colony meant that the Land and Emigration Commissioners had to suspend the flow of migrants. The government suspended assisted migration from mid-1840 due to depression, resuming in late-1845, when 172 migrants received free passage to Adelaide.⁷⁷ Complaints about the quality and suitability of migrants were made as early as 1839, early in the process of colonisation, although some believed that such concerns were ill-founded, and that most ‘were likely to make desirable colonists.’⁷⁸ Questions about the type and the numbers of migrants brought to the colony continued to arise throughout the period of assisted migration and were not confined to the age of new arrivals. Following a poor harvest in 1854, for example, 8,600 migrants arrived over eight months: a large number of these were single women, too few of whom were ‘accustomed to out-door work’ or even to domestic service,

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Frank K. Crowley, “The British Contribution to the Australian Population: 1860-1919,” *University Studies in History and Economics*, II (1954), p. 68.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, vol. I, p. 373.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

although many had described themselves as having relevant experience.⁷⁹ In addition, the sheer numbers caused ‘very great embarrassment and heavy expenses’, generating concern and investigation at official and parliamentary level.⁸⁰ The discovery of gold was made generally known in May 1852 and prompted many men to travel overland to the goldfields, compounding the effects of the poor harvest and leaving an unanticipated and unwelcome imbalance in the sexes. Even the most careful planning could not take the unpredictable into account. The consternation and debate generated by the influx of 11,871 migrants in 1855, when the colony’s existing population stood at approximately 80,000, overshadowed concerns about misrepresentation of age and the migration of older people, even if in relatively low numbers.

Achievement of the desired demographic structure, essential features of which included a solid base of young people and a balance of males and females, required an organised approach to assisted migration. The system of selection of suitable migrants involved agents based in England, Scotland and Wales, each responsible for managing the process of migration within a district.⁸¹ Instructions to agents clearly stated that selected emigrants ‘must be strictly confined to persons of the laboring classes ... who have established a character for industry, sobriety, and general good conduct’, further specifying that individuals who were not members of the laboring class, ‘[r]educed tradesmen,’ and those ‘in the habitual receipt of

⁷⁹ “Immigration Correspondence,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no.18, 1858 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1858), p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2f.

⁸¹ “Colonial Estimates,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, Supplementary – 1858, vol. I, no. 4, 1858 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1858).

parochial aid, are decidedly ineligible.’⁸² The difficulties associated with administering these directives are reflected in the Adelaide-based Immigration Agent, Dr. Handasyde Duncan’s, correspondence on the subject in September 1857. Concerned about the implications of the arrival of older migrants for the future of the colony, Duncan observed that,

on mustering the immigrants on arrival, I frequently find very elderly-looking people; the age mentioned in the nominal list being evidently not the real age of the individuals. I find them always to be nominated emigrants, and ... in by far the majority of cases, I find they have been sent for by their daughters. These girls are, in many cases, single girls in service; but it is evident that, should the parents become quite infirm – upon the verge of which many of them appear to be, that they must become chargeable on Colonial funds.⁸³

Supporting his concern about the concomitant financial implications for the colony of the arrival of ageing relatives, Duncan attached a return detailing nominated emigrants to whom the Destitute Poor Board had given relief since January 1856, stating that while ‘they are not very numerous, ... they are sufficient in number to show there is an evil in existence which may increase.’⁸⁴ Responding to Duncan’s concerns, the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration, Francis Dutton, resolved that additional precautions would be taken in the nomination process ‘to ensure as far as practicable ... that the persons nominating aged relatives ... should become bound to provide for their support after arrival here.’⁸⁵ Acknowledging that it would be impossible to eliminate all false reporting of age, Dutton asserted that ‘due vigilance’ on the part of officers checking immigrants as they embarked would limit ‘instances of deception’, especially ‘where the real age is so obviously greater

⁸² “Immigration Correspondence,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 18, 1858 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1858), Sub-Enclosure 4, p. 9.

⁸³ “Correspondence Relating to Immigration, Extract of immigration agent’s report for quarter ended 30 September 1857,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 26, 1858 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1858), p. 2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* For explanation regarding the connection between nomination and assisted migration see pages 52 and 53 in this dissertation.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

than the age set down in the nominal list'.⁸⁶ Some officers clearly did carry out their duties, even when applying the regulations resulted in the separation of parents and children; one mother, for example, was initially accepted for the voyage on the ship *Northern Light* as an assisted emigrant with her two daughters, but was unceremoniously 'dismissed from depot for mis-statement of age.'⁸⁷ It appears though that few officials were as diligent in screening those embarking or new arrivals as Dr. Handasyde Duncan, who 'conducted something like a royal commission on every vessel as it arrived, questioning surgeons, matrons, passengers, crew and immigrants.'⁸⁸

Duncan's vigilance was necessary in a period of active migration; historian Frank Crowley observes that 'almost as many government immigrants arrived in the ten years from 1850 to 1859 as were assisted in the succeeding sixty.'⁸⁹ Despite Duncan's concerns and perhaps due to his vigilance, immigration returns for 1857 show that only nineteen males and fifteen females (.85%) out of a total of 3965 assisted immigrants from thirteen ships were aged between 50 and 70 years upon arrival in the colony.⁹⁰ Some applicants for emigration, particularly those involved in agricultural labour, reported their chronological age accurately but still aroused suspicion because they looked ten or so years older, reflecting the hardship of

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ "Immigration Returns for year 1857," *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 14, 1858 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1858), p. 6.

⁸⁸ Douglas H. Pike, *Paradise of Dissent* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967), p. 163.

⁸⁹ Crowley, "The British Contribution to the Australian Population: 1860-1919," p. 66.

⁹⁰ Table D. Return showing the Ages of the Assisted Immigrants who have arrived in South Australia during the Year 1857, "Immigration Returns for year 1857," *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 14, 1858 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1858), p. 3.

their working lives and possible lack of nutrition.⁹¹ Apart from those who sought to misrepresent their age to secure a passage, some applicants for free passage openly declared that they were indeed older than the desired and stipulated age. Thomas Allen, a gardener, was 49 years old and married; his wife was 44 years old and their daughter was ten. William Brixton, 47, also a gardener, was married but childless, while Richard Smith, a 52 year-old carpenter, was single. Even older at 55 years, Giles Abbott was a farm labourer with a 53 year-old wife.⁹² In these and other similar cases, emigration agents may have relaxed the restrictions, judging that these individuals would make a worthwhile contribution to the colony in areas short of labour and were not likely to become dependent.

A primary purpose of assisted migration was to provide much needed labour, and while, as described, some individuals who did not meet the criteria were permitted to migrate, debate among politicians about the assisted migration programme was ongoing and found its way into newspapers. Fear of poverty emerges as a consistent theme in articles, letters and cartoons on the subject. In a letter to the editor of *The Figaro* in 1877, for example, 'Economist' expressed concern about the numbers of migrants, warning that if the government continued to '[p]itch shipload after shipload of free immigrants into the Adelaide labor market ... there will soon be starvation where now there is ill disguised poverty under a decent exterior.'⁹³ In the same year concern about the suitability of migrants is clearly conveyed in a cartoon depicting a range of dubious characters

⁹¹ This observation, while made in the 1870s, would have applied in earlier decades too. "Report of the Select Committee of the House of Assembly on Immigration; together with Minutes of Evidence and Appendix," *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. III, no. 102, 1877 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1878), p. 35.

⁹² SRSA, PRO CO 386/149-151, Register of Emigrant Labourers Applying for a Free Passage to South Australia, 1836-1841.

⁹³ Letter to the Editor from 'Economist,' *The Figaro*, 10 March 1877, p. 2c.

including criminals, a blind man, an aged fellow with a wooden leg and crutches and two elderly women, the cartoonist stating ‘We are harassed with doubts as to the propriety of getting much more of THIS class’.⁹⁴

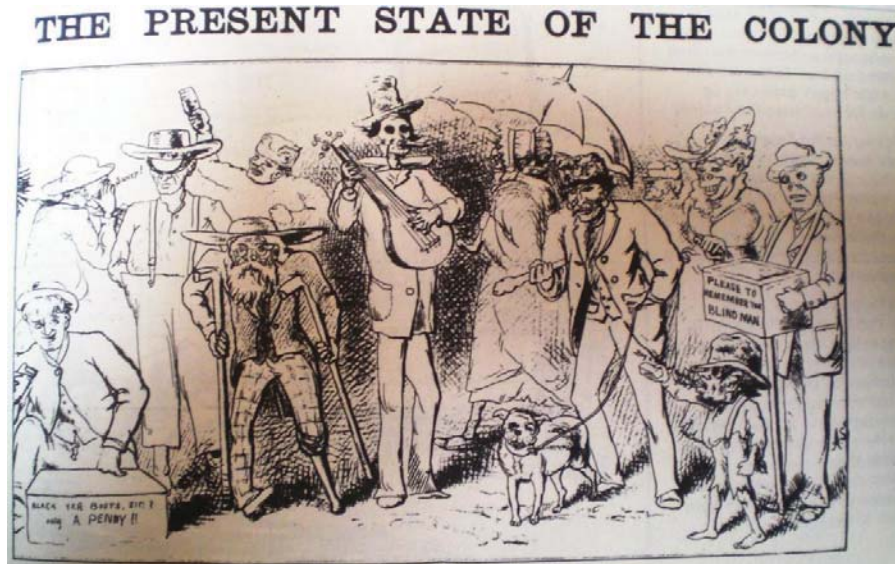


Figure 7 “Yes, Immigration Is What We Want,” *The Figaro*, 1877.⁹⁵

Governor Grey, writing to Lord Stanley regarding the background to and need for the 1843 Maintenance Act [Destitute Persons Act], no. 11, explained that one factor necessitating the Act was that the ‘Colonization Commissioners in many instances sent out old and infirm couples who had a large number of children’.⁹⁶ Another, Grey stated, was that government practice of giving charitable aid to all those who requested it meant that ‘children who were in extremely comfortable circumstances refused to support their parents, openly stating that their doing so was never contemplated in the regulations issued by the Commissioners’.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ “Yes, Immigration is What we Want,” *The Figaro*, 1877, in Jonathon King, *The Other Side of the Coin: A Cartoon History of Australia* (Sydney: Cassell Australia, 1976), pp. 52, 53.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ SRSA, GRG 2, *Despatches, Grey to Stanley, 1841-1843*, vol. 2, 17 February 1843, p. 441.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Age-related restrictions related to assisted emigrants but no such limitations could be imposed upon free migrants or officials. It is worth considering, then, the ages of leading officials in the colony. While Hindmarsh was appointed at age 57, and Daly, who died in office, was the oldest of the governors of nineteenth-century South Australia when he commenced office at 63, these men were unusual in their age. Of the fourteen governors presiding from the colony's inception to the turn of the century, most were younger than 50 when they assumed office and three were less than 40 years of age. The youngest, Governor Grey, was 29 years old when he became governor in 1841.⁹⁸ A similar picture emerges among other colonial officials, the youngest of whom, the Colonial Manager Samuel Stephens, was 28 years of age. While the Colonisation Commissioners were men in their forties and fifties, the Colonial Chaplain, Charles Howard, was 29, Robert Gouger, the Colonial Secretary, was 34, John Brown the Emigration Agent was 35 and Charles Mann, the Advocate-General, was 37. The young colony was, for the most part, led by young men. Nevertheless, older men of independent means also came to the colony. Unassisted migrants attracted to the colony included those who had established themselves elsewhere and saw opportunity to increase their prosperity. One such individual, Mr. Wade, a Tasmanian of substantial property who moved to South Australia, wrote a letter to the *True Colonist* in Hobart advising that, 'Men of capital would ... find it advantageous to settle their flocks and herds in South Australia [as] the return on such beautiful pasturage would be considerably greater than here.'⁹⁹ Wade explained to his readers that money from the land sales would be used to secure 'a sufficient supply of useful servants, under thirty years of age'.¹⁰⁰ He, like other independent and older

⁹⁸ Grey, incidentally, was the longest-lived of these governors, dying at 86 years of age. Of the remainder, several lived into their seventies, Musgrave dying at the earliest age, at 60.

⁹⁹ Gouger, *South Australia in 1837*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

settlers, contributed through his enterprises to the colony's social and economic development and to the employment of young colonists.

*

Despite difficulties in ensuring that assisted migrants met the stipulated age requirements, the early demographic structure of the colony did conform, more or less, to the desired features. While older people were not eagerly sought out, the enthusiasm for the growth of young families in the new colony is reflected in Napier's comment that, 'In Australia we shall welcome the arrival of children with "blessed be he who has his quiver full of them"'.¹⁰¹ He envisaged that, 'The colony would be an immense nursery', where 'For many years the proportion of children to grown up people would be greater than was ever known since Shem, Ham and Japhet were surrounded by their little ones.'¹⁰² While Napier painted an exaggerated vision, as Douglas Pike observes, 'The province got its newly-weds and until 1870 half its population was under twenty-one.'¹⁰³ Assessment of the success or failure of the Wakefield scheme does not fall within the scope of this study. Suffice it to state that, although Wakefield's vision was not completely realised, elements of the plan were implemented. The migration programme established a relatively youthful population characterised by a reasonable balance of the sexes when compared to the population of other colonies. Older individuals were excluded for reasons already outlined. One of those reasons grew from fear of pauperisation and related to future provision for the old; colonists desired an easier old age than would be possible in the 'old country'.

¹⁰¹ Charles James Napier, *Colonization: Particularly in Southern Australia*, p. 11.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 266.

¹⁰³ Pike, *Paradise of Dissent*, p. 497.

Few of those who left Britain to settle in South Australia returned. However, there was considerable mobility among new arrivals to South Australia, especially in the 1850s, when many sought their fortune in the gold fields. Such movement exacerbated familial dislocation, as pointed out by Wilfred Borrie, ‘tend[ing] to break relationships between parents and children at a relatively early age and to keep separated the three-generation family group or the community of brothers and cousins.’¹⁰⁴ The absence of older people was certainly felt by many young people as they sought to establish themselves in the colony. Such isolation and family dislocation had a number of effects. Borrie observes, for example, that the act of migration and the associated shift away from family ‘tended to make the two-generation family of parents and children a tightly knit unit during the early history of Australia.’¹⁰⁵ Some colonists wrote longingly of contact with their relatives, while some reassured parents that they had found ‘surrogate’ parents. Writing to her parents in London in November 1837, 25 year-old Anne Cooke assured them that she and her husband Peter would soon be able to pay back the money Anne’s parents had lent them to make the voyage, as Peter had secured ‘a most excellent place’ working as a butcher with a Mr Neale and Anne was doing household work for Mrs Neale.¹⁰⁶ Anne went on to reassure her parents, writing, ‘they are such good people to us, they are like parents to us’.¹⁰⁷ Development of social networks became all the more important in the absence of older family members. A further effect of isolation and familial dislocation was, as Borrie suggests, a weakening of reliance on tradition. Most immigrants belonged to the lower-middle and labouring classes and brought ‘with them the

¹⁰⁴ Wilfred D. Borrie, “Observations upon the Family in Australia,” *Australian Quarterly*, XXV (1953), p. 44.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Gouger, *South Australia in 1837*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

habits, customs and social attitudes of the groups from which they came.’¹⁰⁸ However, the influence of their new social and physical environment, different in many ways to that in their place of origin, resulted in adaptations, and Borrie speculates that many ‘families were quickly conditioned by the environment in which they were established [rather] than by the habits of their immediate ancestors’.¹⁰⁹

American historian John Demos asserts that the proportion of aged individuals within a community and the extent to which inter-generational contact occurs determines whether old age assumes ‘intrinsically “special” and exotic [qualities] ... within the larger frame of social experience’.¹¹⁰ The evidence for a number of cities in colonial New England suggests that there were sufficient numbers of people aged over 60 for old age not to be ‘intrinsically unusual’.¹¹¹ In the early years in South Australia, however, old people were few and far between. Those old people who did venture to cross the seas were predominantly unassisted migrants, mainly men of means, often accompanied by their spouses. Whether their relative scarcity gave them special qualities in the context of a young colony remains to be established. By the end of the nineteenth century, the ageing had a stronger presence in demographic terms in South Australia, significant contributing factors to the change in age structure being declining fertility, lower mortality rates in later years and poor economic conditions that prompted many unemployed to seek work elsewhere. Some attributed the decline in the birth-

¹⁰⁸ Borrie, “Observations upon the Family in Australia,” p. 44.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 45.

¹¹⁰ John Demos, *Past, Present and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 145.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

rate to ‘the increasing unpopularity of marriage’.¹¹² Consistent with the pattern since the inception of the colony, there was a preponderance of males in the general population in 1899 (187,251 to 175,646), although in the metropolitan area females outnumbered males by 4,240 (among a population of 147,616).¹¹³ Just as the demographic structure of early colonial South Australia had an effect on the place of old people within that society, so shifting age structure within South Australia carried implications for the experience of the ageing at the close of the nineteenth century. As outlined in this chapter, old people’s presence was not sought in the early years of colonisation. Some came to the colony through deceitful means, hoodwinking the Colonisation Commissioners and their agents and frustrating their aims, and some arrived as unassisted migrants. Overall, though, South Australia was indeed a ‘society without grandparents’ in the first decades.¹¹⁴ Scarcity, however, does not necessarily signify either value or veneration. It is to an exploration of the ways in which early South Australian society regarded its older members and of the particular social and cultural context in which those perceptions developed that the next chapter turns.

¹¹² *The Adelaide Observer*, 5 August, 1899, p. 281a.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Douglas Pike, “‘Founding a Utopia’; A Society Without Grandparents,” *Melbourne Studies in Education* (1957-58), pp. 57-67.

3 IMAGE, EXPERIENCE AND OLD AGE, 1830s – 1850s

Just as the desired demographic profile of the emerging colonial society could not be assured, so the cultural landscape could not be determined or controlled absolutely. Historian Joseph Powell observes that as new colonies go through a process of rapid evolution and adaptation to ‘their strange environments’, the images they hold in relation to their circumstances change too.¹ The colony of South Australia was initially a dependent culture in many ways. In practical terms, especially in the early years, the settlement was reliant upon Britain financially. The parent country controlled the appointment of officials, the introduction of legislation and the management of government until the advent of responsible government in the 1850s. The values and mores of the new colony could be considered largely derivative too, as administrators and colonists alike brought their attitudes and understandings with them. William Shaw, writing in 1854, advised his readers not to expect ‘startling disclosures’ as he believed that Anglo-Saxon migrants would, ‘so far as circumstances ... permit, carry with them abroad all their characteristics, and, in the course of time, convert the land of their adoption, in most respects, into another England.’² Countering Shaw’s contemporary view, along with Hartz’s modern theory concerning the transfer of values from parent to infant colony,³ is the observation that these imported attitudes entered a dynamic process of response and adaptation in the new environment. Examination of attitudes to old age and the ageing within the emerging culture of the colony provides opportunities to observe continuity and consonance with the culture of the country of origin, along with points of contrast. Glimpses of attitudes to

¹ Powell, *Mirrors of the New World: Images and Image-Makers in the Settlement Process*, p. 18.

² Shaw, *Land of Promise*, p. iv.

³ See discussion in the previous chapter regarding the Hartz ‘fragment’ theory.

old age in South Australia in the 1840s and '50s reveal both a culture of dependence, attitudes prevailing in Britain being reproduced in the colonial environment, and of differentiation, colonists defining themselves anew in response to the physical and social environment of the new settlement. It has already been established that any transfer of culture, and therefore of image, could not be entire and that efforts to construct image could not be guaranteed success, as other influences play their part in shaping attitudes and mores within any society. Images and attitudes associated with the ageing in the first decades of colonisation, some closely correlated with those prevailing in Britain, are found in documents arising through official correspondence and documents, publications expressing and defining popular culture, and in private correspondence and writings. Thus, administrators and migrants acted both as image-makers and shapers, and, on occasion, as image-breakers.

A range of interacting factors shaped the perceptions regarding old people within early colonial society in South Australia, the images the old themselves held about ageing and the realities they faced in the early years of colonisation. Among the strongest influences were attitudes prevailing in Britain and carried intact into the colony and views promoted and disseminated at both official and private levels regarding the purpose of migration, the desired characteristics of potential migrants, and the nature of the new colony. Further significant influences were the physical and social environments of the colony itself. To understand and trace the perceptions about and the place of older people in the culture and society of South Australia in the first decades of colonisation it is necessary to consider perceptions in relation to the colony and to the purpose and nature of settlement there. Diverse primary material assists in identifying and evaluating existing and developing attitudes and views. Sources including correspondence between officials, public documents, sermons, newspaper articles,

handbooks for emigrants, fiction, poetry, artwork, letters, diaries and journals are useful in attempting to gauge the experience of old people and to gain a sense of the place they occupied in the public imagination, both in those first years of settlement and over the following decades as the demographic profile gradually changed. Some consideration has already been made of documents generated at an official level by those involved in conceiving the notion of a free settlement in southern Australia and in developing associated regulations, in particular those relating to migration.⁴ In assessing these sources recognition of silences in the materials, such as the omission of discussion of opportunities for older people in the new community, is revealing too. As established in the previous chapter, individuals aged over 60 were few and far between in the first years of colonisation, and their scarcity ensured neither veneration nor contempt.

The ‘image-makers’ and ‘image-shapers’ in the land of plenty

Early planners and administrators sought to be and were the ‘image-makers’ of South Australia in that they had a clear vision of the nature of the settlement they strove to establish. This is consistent with Joseph Powell’s view; in tracing shifts in the development of images relating to nineteenth-century Australia Powell identifies the educated elite as key image-makers and consumers of image.⁵ A primary aim in creating and conveying images relating to the new British settlement was to promote South Australia as attractive to migrants, especially for the young and vigorous. Related publications included carefully worded phrases that aroused the interest of investors and potential migrants alike, the writing often complemented by favourable illustrations of the South Australian landscape created by such artists as Colonel

⁴ See discussion in previous chapter.

⁵ Powell, *Mirrors of the New World: Images and Image-Makers in the Settlement Process*, p. 70.

William Light, the first Surveyor-General of Adelaide, George Fife Angas, the founder and main investor of the South Australian Company, and watercolourist S. T. Gill, who arrived in the colony in 1839. In particular, landscape artist William Westall's engravings created strong interest in the potential for settlement.⁶ While publicity in the form of lectures aimed to attract the interest of those with both the means and potential financial motivation to invest in the new colony, such lectures reached ordinary people as well, along with other forms of promotion such as brochures, newspaper articles and posters of the kind shown in Figure 8. The working class too became consumers of image produced at an official level, and, as hoped, many young people responded through the decision to emigrate.

⁶ Tracey Lock-Weir, *Visions of Adelaide: 1836-1886* [published to coincide with the exhibition of the same title, 28 October 2005 – 5 February 2006] (Adelaide: Thames and Hudson, 2005), p. 14.

FREE EMIGRATION
TO
PORT ADELAIDE,
South Australia.

An opportunity now offers itself to all **MARRIED** persons, of useful occupations, particularly to **AGRICULTURAL LABORERS, CARPENTERS, BUILDERS, STONEMASONS, SHEPHERDS, and BLACKSMITHS,** of obtaining a

FREE PASSAGE
TO
PORT ADELAIDE,
IN
South Australia.

A FREE COLONY, where there are no convicts sent, and where every person who emigrates is as free as he is in this country.

Besides the classes of persons enumerated above, Bakers, Blacksmiths, Braziers and Timmen, Smiths, Shipwrights, Boat Builders, Wheelwrights, Sawyers, Cabinet Makers, Coopers, Curriers, Farriers, Millwrights, Harness Makers, Boot and Shoemakers, Tailors, Tanners, Brickmakers, Lime Burners, and all persons engaged in the erection of buildings are always in great request. The applicants must be able to obtain a good character as honest, sober, industrious men. They must be real laborers going out to work in the Colony, of sound mind and body, not less than 15 nor more than 30 years of age, and married. The rule as to age is occasionally departed from in favor of the parents of large families. As a general rule, each child is considered as extending the age one year. The sisters of married applicants are allowed to go free, if of good character.

The province of South Australia is a delightfully fertile and salubrious country, in every respect well adapted to the constitution of Englishmen, and is one of the most flourishing of all our colonies. *It is well watered*—and there have never been any complaints from the colonists of a want of this valuable element; on the contrary, the letters from Colonists who have written home are very satisfactory on this point. It should be borne in mind that complaints of a scarcity of water do not relate to Port Adelaide, but to other settlements not connected with *South Australia*.

Emigrants wishing to obtain a free passage this year may now have that opportunity if they apply **IMMEDIATELY** to

Mr. I. LATIMER, Truro,
who is empowered by her Majesty's Colonization Commissioners to engage for that fine first-class teak-built ship the

JAVA, of 1200 TONS.

This ship's accommodations are unusually spacious and lofty, and are so arranged as to insure the comfort of all the passengers. She will carry *two Surgeons, and two School-masters*, the latter of whom will be regularly employed in teaching the emigrants and their children. The vessel will call at **PLYMOUTH** to take in Cornish passengers, on or about the 16th of **OCTOBER**; but in order to ensure a passage, application should be made forthwith. Every kind of information, and the necessary papers may be obtained of Mr. Latimer.

E. HEARD, PRINTER, BOOKBINDER, &c., BOSCAWEN-STREET, TRURO.

in great request. The applicants must be able to obtain a good character as honest, sober, industrious men. They must be real laborers going out to work in the Colony, of sound mind and body, not less than 15 nor more than 30 years of age, and married. The rule as to age is occasionally departed from in favor of the parents of large families. As a general rule, each child is considered as extending the age one year. The sisters of married applicants are allowed to go free, if of good character.

Figure 8 Emigration poster advertising free passage to South Australia.

Note: The Java left England in October 1839 and arrived in Adelaide on 6 February 1840, many passengers having died on the journey.

As the colony became established the positive image of South Australia, initially conveyed through public documents including posters displayed in villages and towns throughout England and Ireland and designed to encourage the migration of the labouring

poor, was reinforced by the periodic publication of emigrants' handbooks.⁷ One writer who emphasised the potential for ordinary working people to flourish in the colony was T. Horton James. In James' view, 'labour is the best capital you can have', high wages meaning that 'a commonly conducted man can maintain himself and family in greater plenty and abundance than a gentleman'.⁸ Although he considered the 'worst place' among the colonies to be 'perhaps better for the young and enterprising than stopping at home', James did caution that in South Australia 'The country is too new for respectable families, going without any fixed plan for their future means of support'.⁹ In other words the young and hardy could flourish in the colony, but those who could not endure the physical and economic challenges encountered in a new settlement should not risk the journey. While the lot of the ageing working class was miserable in Britain, they were not encouraged to start anew in South Australia. Hyperbole characterised some publications, even those purporting to present 'plain matter-of-fact description of the ... colony'.¹⁰ Francis Dutton, writing in 1846, eagerly claimed that 'In South Australia there are no bush-rangers' and boldly asserted that, 'The great abundance of animal and vegetable food of every description in South Australia, will support an immense and concentrated population', further describing the colony as 'stand[ing] among the Australian convict colonies, like an oasis in the desert'.¹¹ James too considered the absence of 'any

⁷ See for example: *South Australia in 1842*; Shaw, *Land of Promise*; Frederick Sinnett, *An Account of the Colony of South Australia* (London: Robert K. Burt, 1862); William Marcus, *Handbook for Emigrants Proceeding to South Australia* (Adelaide: W. C. Cox, Government Printer, 1873).

⁸ T. Horton James, *Six Months in South Australia; with Some Account of Port Philip and Portland Bay, in Australia Felix; with Advice to Emigrants; to Which is Added a Monthly Calendar of Gardening and Agriculture. Adapted to the Climate and Seasons* (Adelaide: Public Library of South Australia, 1962), first published in 1838, p. 38.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 161.

¹⁰ Francis Dutton, *South Australia and its Mines, with an Historical Sketch of the Colony under its several Administrations, to the Period of Captain Grey's Departure* (London: T. and W. Boone, 1846), preface.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 147, 314.

presuming saucy' convicts gave South Australia a 'vast ... superiority' over other colonies.¹² The financial difficulties experienced by the colony in the early 1840s, which led to poor employment conditions and culminated in the colony's bankruptcy and the suspension of assisted migration from mid-1840 to late-1845, did not seem to diminish the enthusiasm of these and other writers.

The writing of migrants for the most part reinforced and extended the images promulgated at an official and public level. Thus, the business of image-making belonged not only to the educated elite but, by intention or inadvertently, became the province of the ordinary colonist too. Young migrants expressed their optimism and hope that South Australia was indeed the 'promised land', a place where it would be possible to live a healthy and long life. While some envisioned that older relatives, friends and acquaintances could benefit too, most accepted and reiterated the official view that the new British province was a place for the young. Older relatives agreed, and James Redin, writing to his daughter Catherine in Adelaide in early 1839, remarked that he thought that his son Tom would 'soon send me over a bag of money to place out at Interest for him when he grows old and returns to England to enjoy the sweets of his Labours'.¹³ Redin, like many other parents, saw the possibility of a different experience of old age for his children. That the goal of the majority of colonists was to fulfil a 'very simple utilitarian dream' is borne out by the content of their diaries and letters to family and friends.¹⁴ That dream, to 'obtain a good livelihood, and save a little property for old age',¹⁵

¹² T. Horton James, *Six Months in South Australia*, pp. 39, 42.

¹³ SLSA, PRG 807, Catherine Chambers, *Chambers family: Summary Record* [Letter from father, James Redin, 1839].

¹⁴ Powell, *Mirrors of the New World: Images and Image-Makers in the Settlement Process*, p. 71. See examples given in the previous chapter; in particular, the correspondence of William and Sarah Pearce to Mr. Clark and

seemed unattainable in Britain, and its expression correlates with the evocation of Australia in general and South Australia in particular as a ‘veritable Arcady’.¹⁶

The vision of South Australia as a possible utopia, a land of plenty for the common people, as alluded to in James’ and other migrant publications, took hold in the public imagination, as evidenced in private writing of the period. The notion found poignant expression in Henry Crosby’s letter to his brother John in Yorkshire, written in Henry’s second year in the colony in 1850. Crosby, clearly weakened through prolonged illness, had had to turn to friends for assistance and warned his friends and relatives in England that, ‘people must not come over here thinking they can live without working for I can assure you it is not the case.’¹⁷ Yet despite his difficulties Crosby wrote, ‘if I am spared my health again we shall still be able to gain an honest livelihood *in this the land of plenty*’.¹⁸ Presumably he was not spared his health as this was his last letter. While some, like Henry Crosby, could not fulfil their dream of a life of plenty or at least of basic comfort and discouraged others from crossing the ocean or qualified their recommendation, others further reinforced the images already prevailing about the young colony, using phrases in letters home such as ‘we are in the beautiful promised land of Australia’.¹⁹ Joseph Orchard, writing from Adelaide to his father, brothers and sisters, and ‘all inquiring friends’ in 1848, enticed those contemplating migration by stating, ‘You will do well, dear friends, not to stay at home to starve; here is *plenty* of

Stephen Goldsack to Mr. James in Capper, *Capper's South Australia*, pp. 165, 166, 175. See also SLSA, D 3716(L), George Ewbank, *Letters from George Ewbank* [1850 – 1856].

¹⁵ Capper, *Capper's South Australia*, p. 166.

¹⁶ Powell, *Mirrors of the New World: Images and Image-Makers in the Settlement Process*, p. 71.

¹⁷ SLSA, D 3238(L), Matthew Henry Crosby, *Letter from M. H. Crosby*, 1850.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, [Italics my emphasis].

¹⁹ SLSA, D6029/64(L), Honor Marshall, *Letters from Cornish settlers*, 1849-1904.

work, *plenty* of meat, and *plenty* of money.’²⁰ He went on to reflect, ‘I bless God that I am come here, and I do wish I was here before I hope to see some of you over; do not stay at home to work for nothing’.²¹ The barely literate Benjamin Boyce, who jumped ship in December 1839 in order to marry and live in South Australia, expressed similar views, declaring, ‘i am shure that if labren people ad the least idea of the colney they would not work hard in ingland to starve whear in the collnes thear is *plenty* for whe ave *plenty* of wheat and mutton and beefe and every think that whe can wish for’.²² Even those who chose not to migrate carried the impression that their relatives and friends had travelled to an Arcady in the south.

Responses to the image

While the strongest impressions of life in the new settlement were positive, some writers in both public and private spheres challenged the vision of South Australia as a land of plenty and a land of promise. Among both old and young there were those who regretted having uprooted themselves from their homeland and wished they could return.²³ Mary Thomas, who was 49 years old when she arrived in the colony in 1836, later expressed a lack of enthusiasm for her ‘long residence in the southern hemisphere’, supposing that ‘this is generally the case with those who emigrate at an advanced time of life’.²⁴ The desire to return to England, ‘if it

²⁰ SLSA, D 6029/27(L) G10 ff., John Orchard, *Letters from Cornish settlers*, [1848], [Italics my emphasis].

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² SLSA, D 4308/1-3(L), Benjamin Boyce, *Letters from Benjamin Boyce*, 1842 – 46, [Italics my emphasis and original spelling retained].

²³ See, for example, William Belt’s correspondence to his sister Elizabeth Ponsford, 7 March 1853, in which he notes that ‘There are so many of the Colonists homeward bound or talking of returning to England’, SLSA, D 5363(L), William Charles Belt, *Correspondence of William Belt and family*, 1833 – 96.

²⁴ Evan Kyffin Thomas, ed., *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas (1836-1866): Being a Record of the Early Days of South Australia* (Adelaide: Thomas, 1915), p. 84.

be only to die there', is a recurrent theme in Mary's letters to her brother George.²⁵ Her sentiments provide some evidence in support of Robert Gouger's comment regarding the contrast between the distaste of the old and the enthusiasm of the young for the challenge of migration.²⁶ Some family members urged older people to overcome their reluctance to emigrate for health reasons. Samuel Davenport, for example, repeatedly expressed concern about his father's health in letters home in the 1840s, adding postscript remarks like the following:

If your asthma still troubles you greatly, have you any thought of coming here? This climate would certainly benefit you. You could have a nice estate and residence at little expense and would enjoy the exercise of your judgment and experience in colonial interests.²⁷

Although he had invested in the colony and encouraged his sons to migrate there, George Davenport did not respond to these enticements. His son's comments provide an example of the promotion of South Australia as an attractive place to settle, even for older people, on the basis of its climate. While Davenport's observations were made in private correspondence various publications also praised the suitability of the colony's climate for invalids, remarking, for example, that lives had been saved by the 'dry, pure, and salubrious atmosphere.'²⁸ Promoting the health benefits of the South Australian climate, *The Adelaide Chronicle* published a letter in early 1842 written by a French man who declared to his friends that, 'the climate is so healthy that there exist no local diseases in the colony', giving the

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 152. Mary Thomas died a widow of 87, her wish unfulfilled, at her residence in Hindley Street in 1875.

²⁶ Gouger, *South Australia in 1837*, p. 10.

²⁷ Brian S. Baldwin, "Letters of Samuel Davenport, Chiefly to his father George Davenport, 1842-1849," *South Australiana*, VI (1967), p. 78.

²⁸ William Harcus, ed., *South Australia: Its History, Resources, and Productions* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1876), p. 21.

example of an aged man who left England because he despaired of his health and who, like the writer, completely recovered in South Australia with no need of medicine.²⁹

Exceptions aside, in both public and private spheres old people were generally discouraged from contemplating migration to South Australia. Even so, on the basis of 30 days of uneventful sailing on the barque the *Winchester*, emigrant architect William Prescott considered that nothing should ‘deter old or young from taking a trip to the Colony’.³⁰ Days later, a number of deaths occurred on the ship, possibly changing Prescott’s view. When a ‘monstrous’ shark followed the ship in the vicinity of the Cape of Good Hope sailors attributed its presence to the impending death of ‘a poor old woman of seventy-six’.³¹ Others were well aware of the dangers ship travel held for the old. In his letters home Benjamin Boyce referred to the long and difficult sea voyage and recommended that his parents should not undertake the journey, remarking, "i hope i shall see sum of you as quick as you can cum but i would not advice you farther and mother to venter so long a gorney as you are a gitting old now".³² Having advised his parents not to attempt the voyage, as though he felt it his bounden duty to caution them, Benjamin immediately went on to suggest ways in which they would benefit and to instruct them regarding provisions to take on the ship should they decide to venture forth. Of the unassisted migrants who brought family members with them, some found it a costly and often trying enterprise. Henry Watson from Chichester, Sussex, travelled

²⁹ *The Adelaide Chronicle and South Australian Literary Record*, 5 January 1842, p. 2c, d.

³⁰ Colin Kerr, ‘A Exelent Coliney’: *The Practical Idealists of 1836-1846* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1978), p. 17.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³² SLSA, D 4308/1-3(L), Benjamin Boyce, *Letters from Benjamin Boyce*, 1842 – 46.

with his wife, two young children, a maid and both his parents, William and Martha Watson.³³ Watson's correspondence with his sister and brother-in-law reveals that the journey involved 'sore trials ... beyond belief', resulting in part from the cramped conditions, as all seven travelled in one cabin, and in part from the prolonged illness of Watson's mother, who was 'snappish, so ungrateful and exacting'.³⁴ Despite the difficulties, which drove Watson to observe that his parents were like two additional and difficult children, his letters also provide glimpses of ordinary family interaction, his daughter Charlotte, for example, 'sitting on her grandpapa's knee' in her Sunday best and being drenched by sea spray.³⁵

Thus, although they comprised the absolute minority, old people were among the early colonists, more often as unassisted than as assisted migrants. Some took a risk and made the decision to emigrate with relatively little knowledge and no experience of their destination, while in later years particularly others made a considered decision after making one or more business-based visits to the colony. William Begg, for example, who was responsible for starting the South Australian Stevedoring Company at Port Adelaide and made several business trips to and from London and Australia over many years, decided at the age of 52 in 1873 'to take my family and settle in Adelaide'.³⁶ In some cases extended families including older members planned to emigrate together. In the early 1840s the father-in-law of Eliza Randall (née Wickes) suggested that the family emigrate but died before Eliza, her husband and two sons, her sister and her husband, along with Eliza's parents and some servants,

³³ Such a venture required substantial funding, as prices ranged from £50 to £70 for cabin passengers, an intermediate passage costing approximately £35. Kerr, *'A Exelent Coliney': The Practical Idealists of 1836-1846*, pp. 21, 25.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 34.

³⁶ SLSA, D 5721(L), William Begg, *Reminiscences of W. Begg*, c. 1880.

departed.³⁷ Those who did venture to take the long voyage and were older than the majority of early migrants were noticed by their ship-mates, some of whom expressed admiration of their stoicism, sympathy for their difficulties or bemusement. John Hogarth, a passenger on the *Delhi* in 1839, remarked upon the presence of two elderly Scots on the voyage. One, aged over 70, travelled with the rest of his large family to follow his son who had emigrated two years earlier. The other, aged about 65, was a wealthy landowner emigrating for political reasons.³⁸ Arthur Gliddon, a passenger on the *Africaine* in 1836, commented in a letter written on board to his brother on the presence and habits of a Mr. Deacon, whom he considered to be ‘a rather old man very changeable and fidgetty’.³⁹ Deacon, who at 47 years of age was ‘much older than the young people who were the majority of the settlers’, continued to irk Gliddon, who later in the voyage accused the older man of drowning his cat and described him as ‘a man of taciturn and unsociable habits’.⁴⁰ However his fellow emigrants perceived him Deacon was among those older migrants considered of value in the establishment of the colony; his experience in running a business in London, Deacon’s Coffee Shop and News House, led the South Australian Company to employ him to establish one or more coffee shops with the aim of diverting the ‘labouring classes [from the] demon rum’.⁴¹

Language used in public documents reveals an emphasis on the value of youth and vigour within a new society, linked with rhetoric relating to hope for a new beginning, in

³⁷ Eliza Randall, *Mrs. David Randall’s Reminiscences*, George Cummins Morphett, ed. (Adelaide: Pioneers’ Association of South Australia, 1939).

³⁸ Kerr, ‘*A Exelent Coliney*’: *The Practical Idealists of 1836-1846*, p. 114.

³⁹ SLSA, D 3227/1-2(L), Letters from A. W. Gliddon, 1836.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Penelope Hope, ed., *The Voyage of the Africaine: A Collection of Journals, Letters and Extracts from Contemporary Publications* (South Yarra, Victoria: Heinemann Educational Australia, 1968), p. 110; Kerr, ‘*A Exelent Coliney*’: *The Practical Idealists of 1836-1846*, p. 65.

particular for the labouring poor. Some documents identified desirable characteristics of potential colonists in plain language. One of the ‘leading principles’ controlling the means by which public land could be purchased by private individuals, for example, stated that the resultant emigration funds were to ‘be expended in the conveyance to the province, from Great Britain or Ireland, of young healthy poor persons of both sexes, in equal proportions.’⁴² Such emphasis is evident not only in correspondence between officials and in public documents relating to migration but in newspaper reports about the growth of South Australia.⁴³ The old had little place in the rhetoric of colonisation. In this respect the South Australian experience appears to be in contrast to the early American experience, as described by Andrew Achenbaum. While concurring with others in rejecting the notion of a ‘golden age’ of ageing, wherein old age guaranteed authority and adoration, and dismissing facile connections drawn between phases in American history and shifts in the status of the ageing, Achenbaum does surmise that in the early period of settlement at least Americans found the old ‘invaluable in shaping the cultural and social life of their new land’ and entrusted them accordingly with significant social roles.⁴⁴

While the South Australian Company and the Colonisation Commissioners welcomed independent older migrants like Deacon, who could bring their own resources and experience to the settlement, the issue of dependence is a recurring element in references made to old people in both public and private documents in the 1830s, ’40s and beyond. Implicit in the process of colonisation are the qualities of determination and hope for the new. Consequently

⁴² Gouger, *South Australia in 1837*, p. 2.

⁴³ In emigration posters for example. See SLSA, D 6029/21(L), Free Emigration to Port Adelaide, South Australia, poster, *Letters from Cornish Settlers*.

⁴⁴ Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience since 1790*, pp. 4, 10, 11.

dependence was both undesirable and to be feared in a colony settled with a view to relieving Britain of its labouring poor and to offering opportunities for prosperity. Many regarded independence as the key to the success of individuals and of the colony as a whole, and one incentive encouraging young people to migrate to the colony was the prospect of a different experience of old age. Colonists believed that by dint of hard work and sober habits they would be able to accumulate sufficient means to live comfortably in their old age, a virtual impossibility for an ordinary labourer in Britain. Such sentiments are evident in songs and poetry written by and about emigrants. In “The Emigrant’s Song”, published in *The Adelaide Chronicle* in 1839, a young man writes to his love of his refusal to accept a miserable future in Britain, declaring that by emigrating they can create a different future that will ‘cost us but one parting pain’, for:

I cannot wed you here, love;
 I will not let you share
 A life of hopeless poverty,
 A lifetime of despair
 I could not bear to see that brow
 Grow early knit with care,
 Nor yet to see thy youthful cheek
 The lines of sorrow wear,

Instead, the poet believes,

... years bestow’d on hopeful toil,
 Like happy hours shall flee;
 And we’ll be the Lords of our own soil
 In the Isles beyond the sea.⁴⁵

So the perception that old people were likely to be or to become dependent led to fear, the presence of the ageing easily being construed as posing a threat to the prosperity of the new colony. In the public arena, especially at government level, the image of old people as having the potential to be dependent, frail, decrepit burdens, as ‘useless mouths’, prevailed.

⁴⁵ *The Adelaide Chronicle and South Australian Literary Record*, 10 December 1839, p. 4.

Rhetoric relating to the creation of a different reality for older people in the future and comments made about the potential of unskilled older people to become reliant upon charity and to mar the image of a prosperous and independent colony highlight the often ambivalent and contradictory nature of attitudes to the ageing often observed by historians.⁴⁶ Whether attitudes and their expression in public and private literature tilt towards the negative or the positive depends on a range of factors; in the case of South Australia the risky process of colonisation, which generated fear of dependence and consequent failure, created an emphasis on negative images of the ageing. Just as the parish in the ‘mother country’ had to support its aged and infirm as a last resort and resisted assuming burdens perceived to belong to another parish, so the colony’s early administrators expressed reluctance to assume responsibility for old people who would contribute little or nothing to a colony struggling for financial credibility and independence. In contrast to the most visible constructed image many old people were independent, resourceful, physically able and worked in some form until shortly before death. Some, like the old couple who migrants Anne and Peter Cooke worked for when they arrived in the colony, offered assistance and employment to others, and assumed the role of ‘parents’.⁴⁷ Such arrangements did not always end well though; Benjamin Boyce went to work for and lived with a childless couple who ‘ust to make me as thear son’, only to find that they were financially unreliable, being fined for selling alcohol without a licence and eventually owing Boyce over £49.⁴⁸ He left, noting that ‘now my pore old marster is a bout

⁴⁶ Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience since 1790*, p. 3.

⁴⁷ See discussion in previous chapter regarding Anne and Peter Cooke, Gouger, *South Australia in 1837*, p. 105.

⁴⁸ SLSA, D 4308/1-3(L), Benjamin Boyce, *Letters from Benjamin Boyce*, 1842 – 46.

dun'.⁴⁹ What became of Boyce's well-meaning but financially struggling older benefactors is unknown.

The experience of early immigrants was often in contrast to the images they encountered before departure for the colony, and old people in particular suffered discomfort and illness as a result of extreme heat, hastily constructed accommodation and unreliable water quality. Commenting on the cramped conditions endured upon arrival with his aunt, uncle, cousins and grandmother, Thomas Frost wrote, 'it is a mystery how we managed to exist'.⁵⁰ The arduous task of unloading goods from the ship took weeks for some, and, as Edward Austin reflected about his own family's settlement near Macclesfield, 'No good, kindly son had gone providentially beforehand to prepare the way, no "Joseph" to send word to his old father to "Trouble not about"'.⁵¹ Instead, having 'No fatherly government to appeal to', the Austin family and others like them had to rely on 'the roughest fare' and to deal with 'Rough clothes to work in, rough tents to sleep in, rough tools to work with, rough material to work on, often, rough men to deal with'.⁵² While the Frost family were soon able to move into a four-roomed house shipped out from England, Thomas noted that many others lived in improvised accommodation that included mud or reed huts and holes cut into the banks of the Torrens.⁵³ Robert Gouger described the Torrens in 1838 as providing 'a never-failing stream of delicious water';⁵⁴ in fact, the quality of the water, which often had to be rolled in barrels to a suitable point of distribution, was frequently poor and directly contributed to widespread illness. The

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ SLSA, PRG 1158/1-3, Thomas Frost, *Autobiography of Thomas Frost, Diaries of Thomas Frost 1825 - 1910*.

⁵¹ SLSA, D 3377(L), Edward Austin, *Reminiscences of Edward Austin*, n.d., pp. 5, 6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵³ SLSA, PRG 1158/1-3, Thomas Frost, *Autobiography of Thomas Frost, Diaries of Thomas Frost 1825 -1910*.

⁵⁴ Gouger, *South Australia in 1837*, p. 18.

entire Frost family suffered bouts of dysentery, and not long after the death of ‘poor afflicted cousin Maria ... [Thomas’] poor old Grandmother ... passed away after a time of great suffering’.⁵⁵

Older people in early writing

The old do not figure strongly in literature in any country at any time. South Australian literature of the nineteenth century is no exception, especially in the first years of settlement. Nevertheless, the characterisation of the elderly in contemporary fiction gives some indication as to the status of old people and to images associated with ageing. Novels were slow to emerge in South Australia, the first novel associated with the colony, *The Emigrant: A Tale of Australia*, by W. H. Leigh, being published in 1847.⁵⁶ It was initially more practical to establish a newspaper or periodical than to publish a complete book,⁵⁷ and in the early years of colonisation fictional pieces appeared in serialised form in local newspapers. Authors of such pieces tended to include old people as peripheral rather than as central characters, if at all. In J. A. W.’s “An Australian Adventure”, a tale of bushranging published in serialised form in 1841, an old woman is described as ‘a confounded old hag’, and an old man with spectacles is said to have ‘solemnly and dogmatically ejaculated’ regarding the ‘cut-throat’ nature of the captured bushranger Donahue.⁵⁸ These somewhat insubstantial references aside, old people do not feature in the story. Newspapers that featured a “Poet’s Corner” published many songs and verses with a romantic and sometimes nostalgic emphasis. Some of these treated the topic of

⁵⁵ SLSA, PRG 1158/1-3, Thomas Frost, *Autobiography of Thomas Frost, Diaries of Thomas Frost, 1825 -1910*.

⁵⁶ Morris E. Miller, *Australian Literature: From its Beginnings to 1935*, vol. I (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1973), p. 402.

⁵⁷ Paul Depasquale, *A Critical History of South Australian Literature 1836-1930* (Warradale: Pioneer Books, 1978), p. 16.

⁵⁸ *Adelaide Chronicle and South Australian Literary Record*, 22 December 1841, p. 4d.

old age. One such piece, simply entitled “Song”, exposed the loneliness and grief that people could experience as they aged and lost old friends. The anonymous poet wrote of returning to his or her childhood home,

With the wrinkles of care on my brow,
And the chill of old age in my blood,

only to ask ‘But the friends of my youth, where were they?’ and to realise ‘I was left in life’s winter alone!’⁵⁹ Other published verse mocked the elderly, one example in Bentley’s Miscellany playing upon the notion that the promise of wealth could prompt a proposal of marriage, which may later be regretted but had to be honoured to avoid breach of promise:

’Twas when I wooed the Widow Stokes,
Who did not say me ‘nay;’
And, though I’ve found her wealth’s a hoax,
Still I must wed today!⁶⁰

Old people featured little in published works, and their voice is hard to trace in unpublished records too. Many of those who came to the colony as assisted immigrants were illiterate; in 1857, for example, 73.4% of assisted immigrants could not read or write.⁶¹ As is widely recognized, the availability of sources limits and shapes all efforts of historical exploration and the most prolific historical materials tend to come from the literate within society. Although the clearest and strongest voices in early South Australia, whether on the subject of farming practices or social or personal observations, were indeed those of the

⁵⁹ *The Adelaide Chronicle and South Australian Advertiser*, 7 January 1840, p. 4e.

⁶⁰ *The Adelaide Independent and Cabinet of Amusement*, 4 November 1841, p. 4c.

⁶¹ Table F. Return showing the number of Assisted Immigrants arrived in South Australia during the Year 1857 who can and who cannot read and write, “Immigration Returns for year 1857,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 14, 1858 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1858), p. 3.

literate,⁶² colonists who were semi-literate also had the desire and made the effort to write to relatives and friends. Sometimes they did so by dictating to a sympathetic and more literate friend, neighbour or relative. Some colonists recorded their stories despite having weak writing skills,⁶³ making observations about their experiences and engaging in the ritual of writing home which, as historian Eric Richards observes, ‘represents one of the few moments when the working man would record his own thoughts, possibly his view of the world, in a direct manner.’⁶⁴ Among understandings about old age that emerge through private correspondence of early migrants to South Australia is the notion that as an individual aged he or she grew closer to God. This belief seems to have traversed the seas intact, emerging in letters both to and from the home country and later in art and poetry. Older people who lacked the capacity to write were even less likely than the young to record their thoughts and impressions. Although colonists’ diaries and letters include descriptions of shepherds, for example, providing glimpses of the way these often older and frequently isolated rural workers lived, the shepherds themselves do not appear to have left any written record.

Given the very small proportion of old people living in South Australia in the early years of colonisation, those who were older may have appeared more conspicuous in a young population. A further consequence of the relative absence of old people was a heightened awareness of ageing, people being perceived as being old at an earlier age than may have been the case in a community with a higher proportion of old people. As Robert Bruce observed in

⁶² For discussion of this point see, for example, Kerr, *‘A Exelent Coliney’: The Practical Idealists of 1836-1846*, p. 168, and Richards, “A Voice From Below: Benjamin Boyce in South Australia, 1839-1846,” pp. 65-75.

⁶³ See, for example, the record of Abraham Bairstow’s experiences, SLSA, D 6353(L), Abraham Bairstow, *An Old Colonist’s Experience of South Australia* and D 4308/1-3(L), Benjamin Boyce, *Letters from Benjamin Boyce*, 1842 – 46.

⁶⁴ Richards, “A Voice From Below: Benjamin Boyce in South Australia, 1839-1846,” p. 65.

his *Reminiscences of an Old Squatter*, ‘in those early days of settlement anything over a thirty-year old man was looked on in the light of a fossil by his companions’.⁶⁵ For the purposes of interpretation of the demographic features of society, 60 or 65 is deemed to mark the onset of old age, but no such rule can sensibly apply when gathering evidence regarding the perceptions of individuals about their own ageing or that of others. Such perceptions are, by their very nature, subjective. Just as older individuals may have been more noticeable to the young in the early stages of settlement, when they were scarce, so physical and overt signs of ageing may have seemed particularly significant. Physical milestones associated with ageing were a common topic of discussion in correspondence with relatives and of reflection in diary entries and journals. As he approached 50 years of age in April 1844, Charles Everard wrote to his sister, ‘Your sister Catherine desires me to inform you that I am getting an old man, hair turning grey, obliged to wear spectacles, soon tired and all that’.⁶⁶ Such observations did not prevent Everard from being active; he declared that he became ‘soonest tired of doing nothing’ and his letter includes an account of a 70 mile horseback ride.⁶⁷

Life events also shaped individuals’ perception of their position in the life cycle. In 1841, at 53 years of age, Mary Thomas reported to her brother George in England that, ‘For my part I begin to consider myself an old woman, having two sons young men, ... a daughter married, and myself a grandmother.’⁶⁸ A passenger on the *Buffalo* noted in his diary, ‘This day I attained the age of thirty years, therefore cease to be a young man, an awful and painful

⁶⁵ Robert Bruce, *Reminiscences of an Old Squatter* (Adelaide: W. K. Thomas and Co., 1902), p. 204.

⁶⁶ SLSA, PRG 208/1, Charles George Everard, *Everard family: Summary Record*, 1835-67 [Letter to sister, 16 April, 1844].

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Thomas, ed., *The Diary and Letters of Mary Thomas (1836-1866)*, p. 159.

reflection being still a bachelor'.⁶⁹ Although he could hardly have considered himself old, he did consider himself to have made the transition from youth. Factors including the views of others, observation of physical changes such as development of maladies like rheumatism and deterioration in eyesight and comparison with the experience of others all influenced the ways people perceived their own ageing and the ageing of those close to them. Some aged more quickly than others, and those whose circumstances changed, leaving them without support, were particularly vulnerable. In his account of his experiences as a colonist Abraham Bairstow made numerous comments about family members. He mournfully observed, for example, 'my poor old mother died, fairly worn out with hard work. She was only forty-eight years of age.'⁷⁰ The family had migrated in 1839, but Bairstow's father died, leaving the mother with four young children. Although she remarried she clearly had a difficult life. Hard work could cast people as old in their own and their family's eyes.

*

Few people aged over 60 were active participants in the early stages of colonisation in South Australia. Those who did emigrate in the capacity of unassisted migrants often came with extended family, just as those who thwarted the efforts of the Colonisation Commissioners by deceiving emigration agents about their age often did so in an effort to be reunited with family. Some regretted the decision and wished they could return home, as a few did. Others thrived, finding some measure of truth in the descriptions of a land of plenty, and some simply made the best of their situation. The old, like the very young, were particularly vulnerable to the extremes of the new environment. References made in contemporary accounts to the

⁶⁹ Mary Broughton, *Chronicle Cameos* (Jamestown, S.A: Nadjuri Australia, 1977), p. 41.

⁷⁰ SLSA, D 6353(L), Abraham Bairstow, *An Old Colonist's Experience of South Australia*.

deaths of elderly relatives attest to this. Looking beyond 60 years as the demographically convenient marker of old age, it is evident that colonists identified themselves in various ways as moving towards or entering old age, especially through noting physical changes and the advent of life-course events. Such changes did not necessarily signal withdrawal from active participation in work and family life but did cause individuals to share their fears about the future, concerns about health and feelings of loneliness with family members and friends. Views held about the role of older people in the young society and about the nature of old age itself are expressed in some early works of South Australian fiction, in which the characterisation of old people provides evidence of continuity with themes developed in England and Europe over the previous century. For the most part the old assume a peripheral role, often being caricatured as slightly ridiculous, avaricious, garrulous or pompous. In contrast to such depictions some accounts and discussions, particularly in newspapers, presented old age as a time when individuals could be ‘a comfort to their families, and an example to the generation ... growing up to succeed them’.⁷¹ While the materials that contain reference to older people in this early period are fragmentary the range and contrasting nature of views expressed across the available sources illustrates ongoing ambivalence evident in attitudes to the ageing in the first decades of colonisation. Such contrasts in representations can still be observed over the course of the following decades in a cultural context that, while retaining many connections with Great Britain, increasingly came to reflect the particular social, political and economic features of the colony of South Australia. Those distinctive and developing characteristics would shape the experience of older people and their place in the maturing society.

⁷¹ *The Adelaide Independent and Cabinet of Amusement*, 1841, p. 4a.

4 CHANGES IN IMAGE AND EXPERIENCE, 1850s – 1870s

Shifting contexts

The middle period of settlement in the nineteenth century, the 1850s to 1870s, represents a time of expansion both in the population and in the economy of South Australia and in the cultural development of the community. Concomitant social changes led to shifts in the place, status and perceptions of the ageing. Changes in the demographic context also influenced the place of older people within this young society. Whereas the main source of population increase had been immigration up until 1850, a high rate of natural increase from that point combined with ongoing migration, both assisted and unassisted, continued to boost the population and maintained the high proportion of young people within the community. By the 1870s, with a population of over 320,000, South Australia had developed and consolidated ‘position and status’ and according to an editorial in the *Yorke’s Peninsula Advertiser* was ‘no longer a puling weakly infant, requiring nursing’, but had become a ‘vigorous youth ... giving promise of a strong and powerful maturity.’¹ As this description demonstrates, use of age-related metaphor to describe the nature and development of the colony, commonly observed in the early years, continued in later decades. The expanding population supported greater diversity of publications, journalists and authors producing writing in novel, verse, short fiction, essay and anecdotal form. Several publications had a fleeting presence in the South Australian literary world, and most periodicals relied in part on material from Britain and Europe. Nevertheless, this literary material in the guises described allows glimpses of the

¹ Editorial, *Yorke’s Peninsula Advertiser*, 8 October 1872, p. 2b.

presence of older people in the South Australian community, of the circumstances they experienced and of contemporary attitudes towards the ageing.

The impact of gold

The advent of the gold rushes in the early 1850s generated ripples of change in the demographic structure and the economy of the developing colony of South Australia, inevitably affecting the place of the old. As the population approached and quickly passed 50,000, the critical point at which responsible government would be granted, in itself a development signalling greater independence for the colony, men left the colony in large numbers,² travelling overland or in crowded ships to seek their fortune in Victoria. In the remaining population women and children predominated. The ageing remained in the absolute minority, as census information reveals, but their presence became more obvious in the shifting circumstances of the 1850s and their numbers increased as the early colonists grew older; the utilitarian dream that some had so clearly articulated in the early years of the colony began to be tested in the lives of those ageing colonists. Migration to the gold fields left its mark upon the daily lives of those left behind, whether young or old. Writing to her sister in December 1852, Penelope Belt remarked that, ‘such a thing as a cabbage is not to be had in the town at any price owing to the Country people having left their gardens last year for the diggings’.³ In the same year the Chamber of Commerce reported that, ‘it seemed the props of our material prosperity were about to give way. The streets of Adelaide were deserted, houses

² Alexander Tolmer reported that over 15,000 people left the colony over a short period. Alexander Tolmer, *Reminiscences of an Adventurous and Chequered Career at Home and at the Antipodes*, vol. II (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1882), p. 120.

³ SLSA, D 5363 / 6(L), William Charles Belt, *Correspondence of William Belt and family*, 1833 – 96, Letter from Penelope Belt to her sister Elizabeth Ponsford, 8 December 1852.

were abandoned by their tenants, [and] there was a general arrest put on all business’, to the extent that ‘ruin was staring everyone in the face’.⁴ The Bullion Act, which enabled conversion of gold into currency, and the advent of Inspector Alexander Tolmer’s gold escort, which allowed safe conveyance of diggers’ findings, averted the general financial crisis. Nevertheless, many individuals and families struggled, and Tolmer, in an ideal position to note changes in the community, observed that some were ‘left in a state of absolute beggary, ... starvation staring them in the face [and] dependent on the charity of their neighbours’.⁵ Older people found these circumstances particularly trying.

While most of the gold seekers were young, older men also tried their luck, in some cases impeded by the physical ailments of old age. As Alexander Tolmer distributed gold from the first gold escort in March 1852, an ‘elderly female ... lingered’, explained that her husband had ‘difficulty ... picking out the gold without his spectacles’ and asked if the Commissioner would deliver them to him, being most dejected when he refused.⁶ Catherine Helen Spence’s fictional account of life in Adelaide at the time of the gold rushes, closely modelled on the author’s observations of daily life, details how some young women paid visits to ‘widows’ of the diggings, checking on their well-being, giving them company and cheering their spirits in the absence of their husbands.⁷ When old Mr. Fielding travelled overland to the diggings, leaving his 60 year-old wife behind, she worried that ‘walking four hundred miles and camping out every night’ would exacerbate his rheumatism and thought

⁴ Tolmer, *Reminiscences of an Adventurous and Chequered Career*, p. 120.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁷ See Spence’s comment regarding the content of her novel, referred to in note 84 of this chapter. Catherine Helen Spence, *Clara Morison: A Tale of South Australia During the Gold Fever* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1971), first published in 1854, p. 257.

that, as ‘A wife’s first duty is with her husband’, she should have accompanied him.⁸ Mrs. Fielding’s daughter, who had come to stay while both women’s husbands were away, disagreed, telling her mother that she ‘could never have borne such a journey’.⁹ The same impulses of hope for better circumstances drove the lengthy trek to the goldfields as led people to make the decision to migrate to Australia. Just as the young cautioned the old against becoming migrants, so they warned their elders about the perils of the journey and of the difficulties of life in the goldfields. Those left behind looked to family for assistance and developed neighbourhood networks of support.

Analysing the nature of South Australia’s population, Australian historian John Hirst identifies the high proportion of old people residing in Adelaide compared to the country as the ‘most unusual’ feature of the distribution of population in South Australia.¹⁰ The reverse of this phenomenon is evident in other nineteenth-century Western societies; Charles Booth discovered, for example, that many individuals left rural areas in England to seek higher income and better conditions in the city, but returned to their villages in old age in the knowledge that their limited means would go further there.¹¹ In South Australia by contrast significant numbers of old people sought the relative security of the city, knowing that some provision would be made for them there. Support mechanisms such as the outdoor-relief programme did operate in the country as well as the city, offering rations to the old and to invalids. Those who needed greater assistance, including old people with no independent

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 257, 258.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

¹⁰ John B. Hirst, *Adelaide and the Country 1870-1917: Their Social and Political Relationship* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1973), p. 7.

¹¹ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, First Series, vol. III = *Poverty* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), first printed in 1902, p. 134.

means and no family, had access in Adelaide to the indoor relief offered by the Destitute Asylum; no comparable institution existed in country areas.¹² As Hirst notes, many ‘bushmen, shepherds, labourers and domestics from the country spent their last days in Adelaide’,¹³ probably reflecting their need for institutional support. In 1876, 4.6 per cent of those living in Adelaide were aged 60 or over and 3.7 per cent of the country-based population fell into that category; while overall numbers of the ageing remained low within the maturing colony of South Australia, the proportion living in Adelaide remained higher than that living in the country throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.¹⁴

Economic promise associated with mineral discoveries in the colony reinforced the view evident even prior to colonisation that in South Australia ordinary people could live ‘in respectability and comfort which could hardly be dreamt of in the old country.’¹⁵ Writing in the 1870s William H Marcus expressed the widely held view that those who were willing to work and who had their health would simply not experience poverty as it was ‘understood and felt in the older countries of Europe’.¹⁶ In the early 1850s lawyer and migrant William Belt expressed a more moderate view in correspondence to his sister Elizabeth in England, remarking that, ‘progress to greatness and fortune in the Colonies is slower than you conceive it to be’, and that, ‘Colonial life seems full of ups and downs’, and reporting that ‘so many’ colonists desired to or did return to England.¹⁷ Belt commented on the ‘enormously high’ cost

¹² Hirst, *Adelaide and the Country 1870-1917*, pp. 7, 8. See further discussion in Chapter 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

¹⁵ H Marcus, ed., *South Australia: Its History, Resources, and Productions*, p. 89.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁷ SLSA, D 5363(L), William Charles Belt, *Correspondence of William Belt and family*, 1833 – 96, letters from William to his sister Elizabeth Ponsford, 9 August 1852, 7 March 1853.

of living, while conceding that house prices were reasonable, but despite his reservations he did consider there to be ‘ample field for young people to get on here if they will do everything for themselves.’¹⁸ Concurring, Josiah Boothby judged that the combined advantages of ‘[e]xhaustless natural resources, a salubrious climate, indomitable industry and enterprise in her people, and a freedom and stability in her institutions’ led to South Australia’s continued high ranking among Britain’s dependent colonies.¹⁹ Robert Harrison, however, in evaluating the findings of the 1860 census, questioned the health-giving characteristics of the South Australian climate. He noted, for example, that of 2,336 deaths in a population of approximately 124,000, fifty-seven percent, or the ‘extraordinary number of 1349 [were] infants under 2 years of age, [who] paid the penalty of having been born into a paradisiacal climate’.²⁰ The same census attributed the deaths of only twelve people to old age, and only 157 deaths occurred among those aged over 50 years. Pointing out that in a new colony ‘the proportion of aged people is so much smaller ... than in Great Britain’, and that the majority of migrants to South Australia ‘have been ... in the prime of life’, Harrison observed that comparisons regarding mortality should be made with care, and that claims of a ‘salubrious or even ... partially healthy climate’ were unsound.²¹ Harrison’s view of the effects of the colony’s climate is made clear in his comment that of the 159 deaths attributed to ‘debility’,

¹⁸ SLSA, D 5363(L), William Charles Belt, *Correspondence of William Belt and family*, 1833 – 96, letter from William to his sister Elizabeth Ponsford, 9 August 1852.

¹⁹ Josiah Boothby, “Statistical Sketch of South Australia,” in Marcus, ed., *South Australia: Its History, Resources, and Productions*, p. 313.

²⁰ Robert Harrison, *Colonial Sketches: Or, Five Years in South Australia, with Hints to Capitalists and Emigrants* (London: Hall, Virtue and Co., 1862), p. 133.

²¹ *Ibid.*

which were recorded separately to the twelve cases of death due to old age, many could be considered, in ‘plain English’, to have “‘baked to death’”.²²

Economic change and development also prompted the legislature to revisit the issue of management of immigration to South Australia in the early 1870s. The resulting Act indicates continued recognition of the need to match the profile of immigrants with the needs of the colony. Whereas earlier regulations had set an age limit of 30 years for assisted migrants, legislators now relaxed age restrictions: at this point in the colony’s development, artisans, labourers, miners and gardeners ‘under fifty years of age’ were in particular demand, along with single domestic servants or widows up to the age of 35 years.²³ Many additional conditions remained unchanged, emigrants being required, for example, to be ‘sober, industrious, of good moral character ... [and] within the ages specified’.²⁴ Potential emigrants testified to the latter on their application form and had to obtain a certificate from a physician or surgeon confirming that they ‘appear[ed] to be of the age set against his or her name’ and that they would be ‘capable of earning a livelihood in the Province’.²⁵ Despite changes in the upper age limits set for assisted migration the legislation still screened out older people, judging them a risk for the prosperity of the colony and a possible future burden.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Harcus, *Handbook for Emigrants Proceeding to South Australia*, p. 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Class and work

The values and ambitions of the ‘founding fathers’, several of whom never travelled to the colony, and of the early colonists, largely selected according to criteria already outlined, had determined significant characteristics of the colony of South Australia in the initial stages of settlement, including ongoing emphasis on the role of the young. The development of social and political institutions in the 1850s and beyond reflected not only these founding ideas but the influence of the social and physical environment occupied by the colonists. These factors in turn influenced the experience of older people in South Australia. Among the most profound determinants of the nature of an individual’s experience of old age were class and wealth, the two often but not necessarily being connected. As research regarding different cultures and times shows,²⁶ those who were of independent means had the opportunity to live a more comfortable life in their later years. Those who lacked independent means and who had little or no family or social support were vulnerable on various fronts. Such vulnerability could be exploited by the unscrupulous. Robert Harrison in his *Colonial Sketches* gave the example of a ‘vile myrmidon of a low solicitor’, who ‘force[d] ... a poor old man in a state of semi-dotage’ to take a loan of ten pounds.²⁷ He took all of his deeds, including his will, as collateral security, charged interest at 80 percent and issued a writ with three pounds ten shillings costs when the old man did not meet his repayments.²⁸ Harrison, advising capitalists as to good practice, considered this incident to represent widespread extortion through small loans and described it as ‘disgusting and abominable ... traffic’.²⁹

²⁶ See, for example, discussion of the links between class and authority and class and life expectancy in Troyansky, *Old Age in the Old Regime*, pp. 19, 20.

²⁷ Harrison, *Colonial Sketches*, p. 146.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 146, 147.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

Many old people had to continue to work. One option for widows was to offer board. In a letter to his aunt in 1862 D. J. Adcock, a printer's apprentice, described how he resided at the home of Mrs. Phillips, 'a Widow Lady' whose three sons still lived with her, with three other young men, including the son of a squatter who had come to Adelaide 'for his Education'.³⁰ The income she gathered from her boarders may well have enabled Mrs. Phillips to retain her independence. The practice of taking in boarders was not exclusive to older women. The young also found that boarders could provide necessary income when their circumstances changed. When Emily Churchward found herself widowed with young children, she initially moved into smaller, rented premises and let out her own house, only to move back some years later and take in lodgers. When she found that there were too many people in her own house, she rented a room in the house across the road, 'where two old sisters, Mrs. Fry and Miss. O'Hara lived.'³¹ These elderly women pieced together a living by sewing for shops, earning 'three shillings and sixpence a dozen for Crimean shirts', by giving music lessons and by renting out the front room to supplement their income.³² Single older women had to be resourceful to secure a dependable and respectable income, and to that end some opened schools. One elderly widow, Miss Gilbert, ran a Select Seminary for Young Ladies, described by day-student Emily Padman as a 'Bear-garden' rather than a 'Seminary'.³³ If the description is accurate it may have been with relief that Miss Gilbert later left the school to marry a retired Methodist minister in Ireland. While Miss Gilbert ran her school single-handedly, others, like cousins Miss Small and Miss Love, collaborated; these elderly spinsters

³⁰ SLSA, D 3353(L), D. J. Adcock, *Letters from D. J. Adcock*, 24 October 1862.

³¹ SLSA, PRG 452, Emily Churchward, *Churchward family: Summary Record*, 1859-1955, p. 113.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 28.

ran ‘a small, but select, private school at Beaumont’.³⁴ Ingenuity, collaboration and hard work enabled young and old to support themselves in straitened circumstances.

Ageing women with few resources faced particular challenges, as the poignant account by Emily Churchward, née Padman, of the lives of a local family reveals. Emily described a regular passer-by near the Padman house at Wattle Grove [now Wattle Park] in the early 1860s as ‘a poor, bent old woman called Mrs. Flynn, who dragged a rough hand-cart up Kensington Road for I know not how many miles.’³⁵ Mrs. Flynn’s widowed daughter, Mrs. Mullins, washed linen for a living, and her ageing mother would assist by carting it. Mother, daughter and grandsons lived in a small cabin and kept goats and chickens to help maintain their food supply. The boys would sometimes ‘throw stones on the roof to frighten their granny’.³⁶ When the young Emily Padman visited the old woman, she ‘found her bed-ridden and twisted with rheumatism’, keeping two bamboo sticks to hand to enable her to both stir the fire and chase the chickens out.³⁷ A wad of old clothes filled holes in the window, and Mrs. Flynn’s fingers ‘were twisted into all sorts of shapes, while a dirty ragged shawl covered her shoulders, and old skirts her legs.’³⁸ After her first visit Emily called on the old woman weekly, providing, she thought, ‘the one bright spot in that old woman’s life’.³⁹ Each time she would bring a religious tract and would sing a hymn and pray for her after tending to the physical needs of the old lady as best she could. In response Mrs. Flynn would ‘cover her face with her twisted fingers, while the tears ran down her cheeks, and she would invoke the best of

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Divine blessings' on Emily.⁴⁰ Over what period Emily's visits took place is not clear, but eventually Mrs. Flynn entered the Destitute Asylum, where 'warm and clean, and not alone in her pain and grief [s]he lived to a very great age.'⁴¹

Loneliness was an ever-present issue for the old, as is evident in the account of Mrs. Flynn's experience. Ageing inevitably brings isolation as individuals face life-course events such as the death of a spouse, of siblings and of friends and neighbours of a similar age. The migration process exacerbated such circumstances. One consequence of migration was that some of those ageing in South Australia had few relatives living nearby. Some colonial families remained intact but some children of colonists ventured to other colonies or moved elsewhere within South Australia upon marrying, leaving an ageing parent or parents at risk of social isolation. Older relatives remaining in Britain felt the absence of family members acutely as they aged. The intensity of such loneliness is evident in the letters of John Craig to his niece in South Australia. At 75 years of age Craig remarked in one letter that 'We are All Alive yet But verry frail', one sister being 'Confined to Her Bed Since November Last', another 'Still Able to Move About' and his own 'Pains [being] Verry Hard on Me'.⁴² At this point Craig, still running a post-office after nearly three decades, 'thank[ed] God' that he was 'Not Depending on Aney Friends'.⁴³ In later letters Craig reported that his sister had died, he suffered badly from rheumatism and that without 'one friend in this Country to do Any thing

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² SLSA, D 7056/6(L), Unsigned letter from John Craig, Seaford, to Mary Eliza, 27 February 1888, William Anderson, *Letters to William Anderson*, 1846 – 1911.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

for us' his niece could see 'How Lonley We Are'.⁴⁴ Several letters ended with a plaintive plea for Craig's niece to 'Rite Soon'.⁴⁵ Craig's loneliness arose in part from the migration of younger relatives to South Australia, just as those who migrated experienced similar dislocation from the support of family members who remained in Britain. As a consequence older people often had to look to others for companionship. Forging new friendships was one way old people alleviated their isolation. When the Casey family emigrated from Ireland in 1854, the father initially worked as a reaper, later buying cows and eventually building a slab house on a rented farm at Riverton, establishing his family there. Maurice Casey, writing of the death of his father sometime after 1860, observed that his mother 'used to feel pretty lonely on her own', but that she then 'discovered' a neighbour with whom she used to 'talk Irish and ... sit ... by the fire knitting sox for their families and smoking clay pipes (doo deens)'.⁴⁶

The occupation of shepherding highlights several of the practical and social difficulties faced by ageing individuals, particularly older males working in a rural setting, in nineteenth-century South Australia. Isolated from charitable and social support that was more readily available in the city and finding continuation of their work challenging as they aged, shepherds often experienced loneliness. Though a common occupation for middle-aged and older men in the nineteenth century, shepherding did not lead to comfort in old age. R. H. Gennys proffers this description of a 'typical' Australian shepherd in the mid-1800s: 'A man, generally, of mature years, with bronzed and weather-beaten face, long and straggly locks and

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ SLSA, D 6548(L), Maurice Casey, *Reminiscences of Maurice Casey*, 1934, p. 3.

unkempt beard, his keen grey eyes looked out from under shaggy brows at the stranger who might accost him.⁴⁷ Living conditions were basic, shepherds often living in bark huts that were ‘neither comfortable nor picturesque’ and sleeping on ‘a sheet of bark on, perhaps, some old boxes; a pillow of grass, or, maybe, his spare clothes rolled up’.⁴⁸ There is an element of pathos in Gennys’ tribute to shepherds as he asks, ‘Is there no monument, no picture, no poetry to commemorate their watchful, lonely toil? Poverty without ambition seldom raises these.’⁴⁹ In fact, shepherds did occasionally appear as the subject of poetry and art. S. T. Gill, well known for his pictorial records of life on the goldfields, completed numerous drawings and watercolours recording life in South Australia. Among these works is a watercolour entitled *Shepherd and Sheep near Burra*, in which the shepherd appears in the foreground clad in shepherd’s hat and warm coat with staff in hand, his shadow long beside him, his dog running ahead and his sheep grazing on the hillside ahead.

⁴⁷ R. H. Gennys, “Shepherds and Shepherding in Australia,” *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, XI (1925), p. 282.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 288.



Figure 9 Art Gallery of South Australia, 625D1, *Shepherd and Sheep near Burra*, n.d., black and brown watercolour wash on paper, artist: S. T. Gill.

In contrast to many of Gill's works, in which the subject is central and appears either face-on or in profile, the viewer sees only the shepherd's back, accentuating the solitary nature of his life; he is the sole human figure in a sweeping landscape.

Travellers who encountered shepherds sometimes commented on the nature of the meeting in diaries or letters and occasionally in published works. Robert Bruce, a self-described 'old squatter' who met numerous shepherds through his work, wrote several pieces that were initially published in the late 1850s in the columns of such newspapers as Adelaide's *Quiz* and Port Augusta's *Dispatch*, later being gathered into Bruce's published *Reminiscences*. Writing of time spent with an old shepherd he worked with in the Flinders Ranges, Bruce emphasised the man's skill in handling ewes and lambs and his decency, describing him as 'a

quiet, decent old fellow, a trifle sardonical perhaps, but industrious and trustworthy.⁵⁰ Bruce obviously held the shepherd in high regard and even penned a poem in his honour:

‘John D., my Vandemonian,
A decent chap were you,
....
You were a chip of British oak,
A tough old bit of stuff.
For emu’s gizzard you had got –
Though gammy legged were spry –
I think on dumplings from your pot,
And sighing say good bye’.⁵¹

‘Old John’ had only one leg, leading Bruce to surmise that this could be the legacy of a mishap in the ex-convict’s poaching days.⁵² Bruce described another shepherd he encountered working near Aroona in the colony’s north as ‘a withered old Irishman’.⁵³ As Gennys observed, the lot of the aged shepherd was not an easy one for ‘When weakness and age compelled them to leave their sheep and dogs, some died by the roadside, many in the public hospitals and asylums, and a few passed their last days as pensioners of the more grateful squatters.’⁵⁴ Only a few shepherds were able to change their work in middle age or later, ‘forg[ing] their way to good positions or affluence.’⁵⁵ A letter from the South Australian Company’s Colonial Manager on 20 May 1842 provides an example of assistance offered to an older shepherd; presumably others also received help. No detail is given of the shepherd’s actual age, and given that he had migrated only six years earlier at the start of colonisation, it seems likely that he was still relatively young in chronological years. Nevertheless, the shepherd, Chandler, was ‘the oldest shepherd in the Company’s employ, having come out in

⁵⁰ Bruce, *Reminiscences of an Old Squatter*, p. 189.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 195. Note also Bruce’s incorporation of old shepherds with a convict past in his novel *Benbonuna: A Tale of the ‘Fifties’* (Adelaide: W. K. Thomas and Co., 1900).

⁵³ Bruce, *Reminiscences of an Old Squatter*, p. 106.

⁵⁴ Gennys, “Shepherds and Shepherding in Australia,” p. 288.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

the *John Pirie* [in 1836]. He has conducted himself well, and by way of encouragement, he has been permitted to enclose two acres, which he has laid out as a garden'.⁵⁶ Chandler grew maize, potatoes and onions, winning several prizes at the horticultural show for his produce.

Shepherds lived a primarily solitary life and had to fend for themselves. Frequently described as weathered and toughened, resilience and knowledge of the bush enabled them to help others. John Wrathall Bull described how when a previous employee who had stolen a goose from him attacked him, his 'old shepherd Miles, who, as usual, had his pocket pistols with him', came to his assistance.⁵⁷ Isolation and tension between Europeans and Aboriginal groups on occasion led to dramatic situations. One such incident, the cause unknown, occurred in March 1842 when Mr. Biddle, who ran a sheep station near Port Lincoln, visited his shepherd, Jas. [James] Fastings, who he employed along with 'an aged married couple of the name of Stubbs'.⁵⁸ Apparently a large group of Aborigines attacked and speared first a dog and then the shepherd, who fell upon Stubbs, who nevertheless managed to fire shots, killing one attacker and wounding another. Speared, Biddle died quickly. Meanwhile, 'the poor old woman ... had secreted herself under one of the beds; she was sixty-nine years old'.⁵⁹ She was dragged out and stabbed with shears, her husband surviving by feigning death. Apart from their involvement in dramatic incidents, shepherds often assisted travellers, 'act[ing] the part of a good Samaritan' for the likes of Richard Clode, one of many who set off for the gold diggings in Victoria in 1851 but who met misfortune, wading through swamp after 'infernal

⁵⁶ *South Australia in 1842*, p. 27.

⁵⁷ John Wrathall Bull, *Early Experiences of Colonial Life in South Australia* (Adelaide: Advertiser, Chronicle and Express Offices, 1878), p. 204.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*; Tolmer, *Reminiscences of an Adventurous and Chequered Career*, pp. 265, 266.

swamp', chin deep in places, undergoing 'hardships not to be described' including walking barefoot for around one hundred miles because his leather boots hardened and made his feet raw.⁶⁰ Clode rested for a few days at a shepherd's hut near the Glenelg River.⁶¹

Married men who brought their wives to live in the usually remote shepherd's hut led a less solitary existence. In describing his experiences in conducting the gold escorts of the 1850s, Alexander Tolmer noted that at every station he stopped at, 'a woman "hut-keeps," while the husband is minding the sheep.'⁶² At times the wife rather than the shepherd was the lonely one, remaining isolated while the shepherd visited town. As a young man Henry Hussey took a break from his work in the printing business to shear sheep and walked with the shepherd, 'rather an elderly man', from Adelaide to the shepherd's hut near Meadows, arriving before dark on the second day, having stayed in Mr. Reynell's diary the previous night.⁶³ The shepherd's wife was clearly angry with her husband, 'letting her "old man" know her mind' and even knocking his pipe out of his hand, an outburst borne 'meekly and quietly'; Hussey surmised that Adelaide must have 'proved so attractive to him that he stayed there too long, and spent too much money.'⁶⁴ The life of the isolated rural worker, although harsh and unpredictable at times, provided a living for many older individuals.

⁶⁰ SLSA, D 3105(L), Richard Clode, *Letter from Richard Clode*, 1852.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Tolmer, *Reminiscences of an Adventurous and Chequered*, p. 130.

⁶³ Henry Hussey, *More than Half a Century of Colonial Life and Christian Experience* (Adelaide: Hussey and Gillingham, 1897), p. 74.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Traces of image, archetype and stereotype

While stereotypes associated with ageing are readily identifiable in early modern Europe,⁶⁵ for example, for several reasons no significant body of material is apparent in South Australia in the 1800s. In a sparsely populated society the quantity of material published was relatively small and during the first decades of colonisation much of what was published related to the pragmatic concerns associated with building a new society. Thus, the literature generated produced traces rather than distinct bodies of image, archetype and stereotype. Some images recur more frequently than others, a measure of continuity and endurance of existing European stereotypes. The notion that old people are prone to miserly behaviour, for example, appears in a range of publications, including articles and anecdotal material in newspapers and journals, in published works about the colony and in fiction and light verse. In his book of *Colonial Sketches*, peppered with sarcastic observations regarding the philanthropic nature of many South Australians, Robert Harrison devoted a chapter to a description of the life of “A South Australian Miser”, an old woman who had ‘few relaxations’ other than ‘avarice and the exercise of exceptional meanness’,⁶⁶ and opened a chapter entitled “A Christian Philanthropist” with the couplet,

‘So for a good old gentlemanly vice,
I think I must take up with avarice.’⁶⁷

Harrison’s depiction of the miserly old woman was merciless. He named her Mrs. Screwmear and gave numerous examples of her meanness: she resented visitors, as they expected tea to be made and she would only make weak tea in an ‘infinitesimal’ tea-pot; she

⁶⁵ See for example, Covey, *Images of Older People in Western Art and Society*.

⁶⁶ Harrison, *Colonial Sketches*, p. 95.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

monitored the use of matches closely, demanding that a servant be dismissed if she exceeded expected use; she presided over the production and sale of eggs equally fiercely and judged that as her husband was a ‘poor man’, who earned ‘a few thousands a year’, he could not ‘indulge in the luxury of an egg for breakfast’; denied herself and others the use of a candle in the evening, going so far as to repeatedly extinguish a lantern lit at her husband’s request; and found various ways to avoid bestowing hospitality in the form of food or wine on any visitors.⁶⁸ When her servant protested that her teeth would not cope with the old crusts she was given Mrs. Screwemnear simply told the girl to soak them.⁶⁹ In short, Harrison considered this character, however closely based on reality she was, to be ‘an ancient receptacle of misery’, who was ‘a curse to herself, [and] ... to others’.⁷⁰ The reasons for Harrison’s scathing views are not made clear; he clearly sought to entertain and seemed bent on exposing flaws in the notion of South Australia as a utopian or Arcadian destination, in this case through emphasising undesirable characteristics of the inhabitants. Despite professing to be unbiased in his observations Harrison made numerous embittered comments throughout the book, causing some consternation among the Adelaide establishment.⁷¹

As the range and type of publications gradually expanded in South Australia, several had a fleeting presence because they failed to secure a solid readership.⁷² The routine inclusion of substantial overseas content reflected both the desire to maintain cultural

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-93.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 95.

⁷¹ A copy of Harrison’s text held in the National Library in Canberra bears a pencilled inscription alluding to the strong reactions elicited, stating, ‘Every copy available was purchased and destroyed by the Angas family.’ Harrison, *Colonial Sketches*, endpiece.

⁷² For comprehensive discussion of the varied fortunes and qualities of South Australian periodicals, journals and newspapers see Depasquale, *A Critical History of South Australian Literature 1836-1930*, pp. 99-118.

continuity and the need to supplement local material. Commenting on the habits of the South Australian press, Robert Harrison remarked that at times when there was little news to report, ‘an interchange of small wit takes place, with figurative allusions to old women, scavengers, and servants of dirty work’.⁷³ Certainly newspapers and journals frequently included light-hearted sections containing anecdotes and jokes in which old people sometimes featured. The editors of one journal, subtitled “A Humorous, Literary, and Critical Journal”, professed its aim to be to provide a forum for the satirist to ‘indulge in a vein of criticism wholly free from vulgarity, yet pregnant with hints for the eradication of recognised abuses, superstitions, follies, and fanaticism.’⁷⁴ Despite this assurance, some stories served to perpetuate stereotypical images of the old, including loss of beauty, a tendency to be quick to anger, and the propensity to gossip. In a section entitled “Whimsicalities”, for example, came the light-hearted but mocking observation, ‘It is said that old bells can be made as good as new ones. Old belles can’t, though the resources of art are very marvellous.’⁷⁵ The author of an article about the detrimental effect of uncontained fury on one’s health referred to ‘a good old man ... afflicted with a disorder which made perfect calmness necessary to his life’, who would frequently say, ‘Twon’t do for me to get mad’, his resulting good humour attributed in part to ‘the Christian spirit in the aged man’, but also providing ‘an example of character beautified and softened by a warning infirmity.’⁷⁶

⁷³ Harrison, *Colonial Sketches*, p. 145.

⁷⁴ *The Peep-Show*, 28 February 1877. This journal commenced publication in February 1877 as *The Peep-Show*, assumed the title *The Figaro* the following month, and appeared as *The South Australian Figaro* in October of the same year.

⁷⁵ *The Peep-Show*, 28 February 1877, p. 4a.

⁷⁶ *The South Australian Figaro*, 13 October 1877, p. 5a.

Mockery of older women appeared in a range of forms and was not confined to the press. Amidst verses that compare English and Australian customs and behaviour relating to courtship, for example, Charles Thatcher's *Colonial Songs*, a collection developed during his time at the diggings and widely circulated thereafter, contains a song called "Taking the Census", which declares that,

All the elderly females are furious,
They don't like to tell their real age.⁷⁷

Stating that he had seen the census papers, Thatcher proceeded to give examples of women lying about their age, including 'that elderly dame, Mother Baggs', who claimed to be 27 despite having five children, and the unfortunate 'Miss Fluffen', 'a regular frumpish old maid' who claimed to be 32 but 'if she's a year she's forty'.⁷⁸ Thatcher also noted a tendency, which 'struck [him] as queer ...[and] made [him] grin', to disguise one's occupation:

My wash'woman, old Mother Archer,
Beneath occupation I found,
Had described herself as a clear starcher.⁷⁹

Unrelenting, another woman is described as being 'so old, sirs, She's getting a most complete fright.'⁸⁰

Old men did not escape Thatcher's jibes, and in a song entitled "Blatherskyte" in which he notes both young and old will spin stories to impress others, he describes how it is common, in a public bar, to

See that old fellow blowing away
Of what he has done, of what he can do,

⁷⁷ Charles Thatcher, *Thatcher's Colonial Songs: Forming a Complete Comic History of the Early Diggings* (Facsimile edition, Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1964), first published in 1864, p. 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

And the things he has seen in his day.⁸¹

While images of old women as gossips who seek to cover up their true age and who trick men into marrying them, of old men as full of bluff and bluster about their achievements and of both sexes as miserly in old age recur in various literary forms and over time from the point of settlement, strong counter images are difficult to find in the early and middle periods. However, positive images do appear in brief snippets used to fill space in newspapers and journals, along with sketches and anecdotes that mock the old. One such light filler, appearing in the “Facts and Scraps” section of *Yorke’s Peninsula Advertiser*, concerned advice given by ‘a wise old man’ on the occasion of his retirement to his son. The old man told his son to ‘remember that common sense is the best thing you can bring to bear on every affair in life except love-making.’⁸² The respected and venerated older people of Achenbaum’s colonial America are not readily observable in publications of mid nineteenth-century South Australia. That the young did value advice of the old is more evident in private correspondence than in publications.

Silences within the literature of the colony are significant when considering the place of the ageing in colonial society. Few of the many characters that people the novels of Catherine Helen Spence and Matilda Jane Evans, who wrote under the pseudonym Maud Jeanne Franc,⁸³ are elderly. When describing her 1850s novel *Clara Morison* to her publishers in London, Catherine Helen Spence noted that ‘the domestic life represented in my tale is the sort of life I

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁸² *Yorke’s Peninsula Advertiser*, 8 October 1872, p. 3f.

⁸³ Note that Matilda Jane Evans first used the pseudonym Maud Jean Franc, later adopting the spelling Jeanne, by which she is generally recognised. Barbara Wall, *Our Own Matilda: Matilda Jane Evans, 1827-1886, Pioneer Woman and Novelist* (Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 1994), p. 33.

have led so that it may be considered a faithful transcript of life in the Colony.’⁸⁴ On that basis it is worth noting that the majority of the characters in the novel are young. Mr Campbell, to whom Clara’s father first referred her for support and guidance, is of a comparable age to Clara’s father, making him middle-aged.⁸⁵ Mrs. Handy, whose husband is away at the Californian gold-fields, and who runs the boarding house where Clara stays on her arrival in the colony, is probably of a similar age. At 31, Charles Reginald, writing to his fiancé, reports that seeing ‘a white hair among [his] raven locks ... set [him] moralizing on the departure of youth’.⁸⁶ Older figures appear only incidentally and infrequently, as an old woman shopping for handkerchiefs for her husband for example,⁸⁷ and the main concerns of characters within the novel revolve around such issues as marriage, employment and business.

Maud Jeanne Franc’s novels, with such titles as *Emily’s Choice* and *Minnie’s Mission*, also concerned dilemmas and portrayals of everyday domestic life, coloured by the author’s over-riding preoccupation with matters spiritual and her concerns regarding temperance. Romance interests featured, young protagonists sometimes facing moral dilemmas regarding the spiritual qualities of a partner. As biographer Barbara Wall observes, the events and themes of everyday life in the colony informed Evans’ works.⁸⁸ In this context, although the elderly made only a passing appearance, the circumstances of the older characters that do feature give some insight into those faced in actuality. As in Spence’s fiction, and accurately reflecting the experience of many individuals in the colony, characters in Franc’s novels have

⁸⁴ Spence, *Clara Morison*, p. xii.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁸⁸ Wall, *Our Own Matilda*, pp. 115, 169.

to put aside awareness of class and their previous social standing, accepting compromise to secure a living. While young, educated women often became governesses, like Clara Morison in Spence's novel, some had to take work as domestic servants, as Clara did initially, or to earn a living through sewing. As Franc's work reveals, older women of genteel background sometimes became housekeepers. Mrs. Benson, for example, 'a widow "accustomed in other days to good society" ... worked in uncongenial circumstances as a housekeeper for rich Mrs Norton in *The Master of Ralston*.'⁸⁹ Franc's fiction also attests to the fact, already noted, that another common means of maintaining an income for older women who had their own house was to take in lodgers. In Franc's novel *Silken Cords and Iron Fetters*, Mrs Layton, described as being 'long past middle age, small of stature, thin, almost to emaciation of form, but every inch a lady, in spite of a meagre purse and uncongenial work and surroundings', subsisted in this way until receiving an inheritance from an English relative.⁹⁰ Inheritance provided relief for another of Franc's characters, Mrs. Delaney, in *Two Sides to Every Question*, after her husband's alcoholism led to his undignified death by the Torrens, and she had been reliant on boarders, not only for her own financial well-being but to provide husbands for her three daughters.⁹¹

Strong views regarding morality influenced the nature and content of publications in the colony and, as Paul Depasquale explains in his appraisal of South Australian literature of the nineteenth century, 'some moralists considered works of fiction to be spiritually poisonous'.⁹² This concern, combined with the practical and financial difficulties associated with publishing,

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 123, 124.

⁹² Depasquale, *A Critical History of South Australian Literature 1836-1930*, p. 69.

contributed to the low numbers of novels published in South Australia in the mid-nineteenth century. Maud Jeanne Franc's works, some of which explore the dilemmas facing older people, exemplify the deep moral commitment and concern that Paul Depasquale identifies. Awareness of the role of moral issues also influenced the choice of material included in the various ephemeral periodicals published. Journalist and publisher John Stephens, a Wesleyan Methodist, included material he considered edifying in his publications, including stories and articles addressing the stages of life. In addition to launching the *Adelaide Observer* and running the *South Australian Register*, Stephens attempted to challenge and educate Adelaide readers through publishing the *Adelaide Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, which became one of many short-lived publications in Adelaide in the mid to late nineteenth century. John Stephens initiated the *Miscellany* in 1848 with the assistance of an anonymous donor who contributed over £400.⁹³ In publishing the final edition of the three-penny weekly publication nearly twelve months later, Stephens, clearly disappointed, explained to his readers that he had hoped that South Australians 'would support *one* literary publication attempted upon a popular basis, and embodying, with the talent of the colony, selections from the best and most esteemed authors of other countries.'⁹⁴ Stephens included a diverse range of articles and short stories in the *Miscellany*, no doubt hoping to interest a wide readership, and this paper, like others in the colony, sourced some of its material from overseas. *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*, for example, provided numerous articles including a piece entitled, "What is Life?", which philosophically concluded 'Live: for life is thought!'⁹⁵ A further set of articles on the stages of life appeared in a regular series called "Etchings of Life", the pieces on

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 267. Depasquale suggests that the donor and probable editor was Stephens' less controversial banker brother Edward, who was credited with establishing the Methodist Church in Adelaide.

⁹⁴ *Adelaide Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, 1848-1849, weekly, edited by John Stephens, 21 July 1849, p. 410.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 August 1848, p. 20.

“Youth”, “Maturity” and “Age” each having a different author.⁹⁶ The editor selected pieces he thought relevant to his readers, but his readers did not necessarily concur.

The publication of a short story entitled “Old Wisdom” in the paper in early 1849 is representative of the style of content selected by Stephens, whose interest in promoting and circulating stories with a moral message was well known and led to controversy on occasion.⁹⁷ “Old Wisdom”, set in Alsace, uses one story to introduce another that has the characteristics of a fairy-tale and taps into themes and stereotypes relating to old women that had been articulated over centuries in Europe. When a young man experiencing trouble with his employer meets with others in a tavern, his acquaintances ask ‘Old Wisdom’, an old Anabaptist whose sermons they regularly attended, to regale them with a ‘nursery tale’.⁹⁸ The old man, who is ‘far advanced in life’ and whose ‘countenance was venerable, and yet full of cheerfulness’, obliges.⁹⁹ The story that follows concerns the fate of a young man on a journey who encounters three women; a young woman half-asleep in a chariot, representing Sloth, a young woman holding a javelin, representing Hatred, and finally an ‘old woman clad in rags, and with a rugged mien’, who represents Intemperance.¹⁰⁰ The young man, Otto, first gives up an eye to Hatred, who in return turns his enemy into a blind and infirm beggar. Next he yields his arm in return for a ride in the chariot with Sloth. Finally Otto, now hungry and thirsty, sacrifices half his brain in return for a flagon of wine from Intemperance, the ‘old hag [having first] induced him to taste the liquor ... [which] appeared ... so delicious, that his resolution

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21 July 1849, pp. 390-399.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 March 1849, pp. 70-75.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

gave way, and he acceded to the bargain.’¹⁰¹ Having thoughtlessly succumbed to the temptations offered by the three women, Otto is reduced to the status of a beggar for the rest of his days. The moral fable, delivered by an old man regarded as wise, presents women as temptresses, the old woman representing the most grotesque figure and offering the final blow of humiliation to the central character. That such tales, frequently encountered in various forms in Europe,¹⁰² also appeared in South Australian publications indicates that they still held some relevance for a population keenly interested in moral development. However, the relatively short duration of Stephens’ publication suggests limited public demand for such material. It is difficult to ascertain whether stories like “Old Wisdom” simply provided diverting entertainment or resonated strongly with readers.

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Fluctuations in the composition of the population and in economic circumstances and social conditions continued to characterise the colony throughout the 1850s, ’60s and ’70s, all influencing the experience of the ageing. The gold rushes of the 1850s in particular had an effect, leading some older people to travel further in search of wealth and leaving others in vulnerable circumstances. Throughout the period many of the old continued to work, some continuing to farm or run businesses begun years earlier, others turning to itinerant labour or drawing upon existing skills and resources to earn a living. Many older women ran schools and boarding houses or took in washing and sewing, sometimes pooling resources with others to manage successfully. Shepherding was a common occupation for older men, and

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 74.

¹⁰² See, for example, discussion in Jennifer Jones, *Myth, Misogyny and the Old Woman in Early Modern France*, (Honours thesis, University of Adelaide, 1988), p. 20.

consideration of the conditions shepherds experienced reveals the hardships older workers in rural settings faced, including long periods of isolation and at times physical hardship and limited access to support. The place of the old in popular culture continued to be characterised by ambivalence during these decades, although a preponderance of lightly derisive representations in contemporary publications indicates that the negative view dominated. Old people appeared infrequently or as peripheral characters in fiction and then often as caricatures portraying weaknesses such as avarice or miserliness in exaggerated form. In the sphere of private communication individuals voiced their concerns about the ageing process, expressed their loneliness and identified physical and social markers of old age. Observations made in this chapter confirm that factors including the capacity to work, access to resources, the strength of social networks and physical well-being profoundly influenced the experience of ageing. However independent, wise and good-hearted older people were, they would still be subject to mockery and derision in the realms of fiction and popular culture.

5 INHERITANCE AND THE OLD

The usefulness of wills and probated estates

Wills and related sources provide rich evidence for historians of the ageing. At an individual level a will provides a snapshot in time, yielding information ranging from the extent and content of real and personal estate to the level of literacy of the testator and the nature of his or her relationships with family members and others. On a broader scale, wills can provide insight into patterns of inheritance and the distribution of wealth within a community across such measures as age, sex and marital status. Where major longitudinal studies of wills have been undertaken, significant findings have been possible. English historian Keith Wrightson, for example, used wills to trace the shifting dynamic of inter-generational relationships in England in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹ David Troyansky examined the several roles of testaments in rural and urban France in the eighteenth century in influencing the 'economy of the household', including as a means of securing support for a widowed spouse.² In the South Australian context consideration of probated estates in selected years over the course of the nineteenth century after 1844, when probate records were first kept, yields information that provides insight about the place and role of older people in the family and in the developing colonial society. In particular the wills contain information about distribution of wealth and inter-generational relations. Wills allow gleaning of information about assets held by older people and about how they intended them to be redirected after their death. Less directly and consistently, even incidentally, testaments reveal attitudes held by the

¹ Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1982), pp. 102, 111, 112.

² Troyansky, *Old Age in the Old Regime*, pp. 131, 139-143, 146-148.

ageing about property and family and, in the case of younger individuals, attitudes towards older people. Some wills give additional glimpses of everyday life of older men and women, making reference to and acknowledging, for example, assistance received in old age from neighbours, employees and friends. Such material complements evidence garnered from more readily available sources including letters, diaries and newspapers, thereby adding to understanding of attitudes held by and about older people and of their experience.

The status of wills and probated estates as a valuable and reliable source depends upon factors such as consistency of record-keeping at any given time, changes in record-keeping over time and, accordingly, detail contained in the documents. In 1844, when records were first kept by the Probate Registry Office, only two wills were proved in the Supreme Court of South Australia, one written by a female, the other by a male.³ Each provides limited information about the testator. One shows that Helen Stuart, a Scottish migrant, left all of her ‘real and personal property’, amounting to no more than £50, to her spinster daughter Jemima with whom she had resided.⁴ The other indicates that Edward Turner, a farmer of Hindmarsh Town, left all furniture and interest from his estate, the value of which was not recorded, to his son Charles, stipulating that the estate be shared equally among his nine children after eight

³ In addition to formal records, the Registrar, Mr. Faunce-de-Laune, had located a few earlier wills of prominent people, including Colonel William Light.

⁴ Will of Helen Stuart, *Probate Book 1*, p. 1, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide. Neither name appears in the *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915* (Adelaide: South Australian Genealogy and Heraldry Society, 2000). However, discrepancies in spelling are not uncommon, especially in the earlier records, and a Helen Stewart, sixty-five year old widow and resident of Adelaide is recorded as having died on 25 April 1843. The only Jemima Stewart whose death is recorded died in 1875 at 85 years of age, a spinster and resident of Adelaide. She could only be the Jemima Stewart named in Helen Stuart’s will if both names were incorrectly recorded in either the probate record or the Register of Deaths, and if she were a step-daughter rather than a blood relation, as the two women were only twelve years apart in age in 1843. This kind of dilemma is not unusual in the materials examined.

years.⁵ As in the vast majority of probate documents in the nineteenth century, neither will recorded age at or date of death, the latter detail not appearing consistently until much later.⁶ Such omissions, typical of records from this period, limit analysis. One means of overcoming this difficulty is to cross-link identifying information in probate records with information recorded in registrations of deaths.⁷ Discrepancies in spelling and missing records, however, thwart accurate linkage; just as inconsistencies characterise early probate records, records of deaths are less complete in the first decades of settlement. The number of wills lodged with the Probate Registry Office remained low for several years, reflecting the youth of the population in the early stages of colonisation, the likelihood that many had not accumulated sufficient wealth to merit the proving of a will and the tendency of older migrants who died in possession of significant real and or personal estate to arrange for their affairs to be administered in Britain. As the colony expanded in population and wealth the proportion of older people in the population grew, and the numbers of wills and intestate estates proved in the Supreme Court gradually increased, five appearing in the records in 1847, nine in 1849 and nineteen in 1851. Seventy-nine records of estates appear in the books for 1855 and a comparable number, 81, in 1861. Ten years later, in 1871, 161 estates went to probate and by 1891 the number had burgeoned to 715.⁸ To examine all South Australian probate records generated in the nineteenth century is impracticable. A realistic approach for the purposes of

⁵ Will of Edward Turner, *Probate Book 1*, p. 2, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁶ The age at death was not recorded in probate records until after June 1914, and then inconsistently. Martin Shanahan, *The Distribution of Personal Wealth in South Australia, 1905 to 1915* (Ph.D. thesis, Flinders University, 1991), p. 163.

⁷ Located in the *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915*.

⁸ The system of collation of wills in the 1800s involved retrospectively binding the wills into large leather-bound volumes. While some clusters of records appear in chronological order, others do not. Consequently, it was necessary to examine more than fifty-five volumes to ensure inclusion of a cluster of 1871 wills found tucked among the 1885 wills, for example.

this study involved randomly sampling the records in selected years.⁹ The resulting information enables some observation about choices made by individuals and within and across the groups sampled.

In addition to issues of consistency raised by vagaries of record-keeping it is important to acknowledge that probated estates represent a small proportion of deceased estates in any given year. The process of probate was necessary when other parties became involved, when real or other substantial property had to be distributed, when further assets came to light or if relatives or others wished to contest the will or estate. Consequently most wills did not find their way into the Probate Office, instead remaining tucked in wardrobes or being deposited with the Public Trustee's Office,¹⁰ executors having implemented them informally. The proportion of probated estates relative to overall deaths, higher in South Australia than in other colonies,¹¹ increased from five percent in 1855 to seventeen percent in 1891, the increase reflecting increased wealth and better record-keeping (see Table 2).¹² While neither directly representative of the living population, nor indeed of the entire deceased population in each year considered, the probated population has characteristics helpful to historians of old age; records left by testators, like diaries and letters, provide useful information despite being produced by a small proportion of the population.

⁹ See Appendix, Explanation regarding sampling method of probated estates, for discussion of the sampling process.

¹⁰ It was not possible to gain access to wills held in the Public Trustee's Office for this study.

¹¹ For discussion of the possible explanations for the higher incidence of probate in South Australia, including the possibility that a higher percentage of testators had wealth to dispose of in the colony, see Shanahan, *The Distribution of Personal Wealth in South Australia, 1905 to 1915*, p. 206.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 544. The steady increase continued, approximately 30 percent of the population being probated by the early 1900s.

Table 2 Probated Estates as a Percentage of Deaths, with Differentiation by Sex, 1855, 1861, 1871 and 1891.

Year	Population			Deaths			Probated Estates			Deaths Involving Probated Estates (%)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1855	97387	48843 (50.16%)	48544 (49.84%)	1663	888 (53%)	775 (47%)	79	76 (96%)	3 (4%)	5	9	0.4
1861	130627	67254 (51.48%)	63373 (48.52%)	1962	1095 (56%)	867 (44%)	81	77 (95%)	4 (5%)	4	7	0.1
1871	188817	96919 (51.33%)	91898 (48.67%)	2378	1352 (57%)	1026 (43%)	161	139 (86%)	22 (14%)	7	10	2
1891	319804	164248 (51.36%)	155556 (48.64%)	4211	2252 (53%)	1959 (47%)	715	544 (76%)	171 (24%)	17	24	9

Sources: *Probate Record Books*, Supreme Court of South Australia; “Statistical Register of the State of South Australia for the Year 1908. Compiled from Official Records. Statistical Summary of South Australia from its Foundation. 1836 - 1908,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 3, 1909 (Adelaide: Acting Government Printer, North Terrace, 1909).

Census data shows that the number of males living in South Australia exceeded the number of females by less than three percent throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.¹³ Yet there is a stark difference between numbers of male and female estates that went to probate. In both 1855 and 1861 males accounted for an overwhelming 96% of probated estates and females for a mere four percent, the gulf reflecting the traditional role of the male as property owner. In 1871 eighty-six percent of the probated population were male. The introduction of the Married Women's Property Act, 1883-84, led to a fundamental shift in married women's capacity to control and dispose of their property as they saw fit, and by 1891 females accounted for almost a quarter of probated estates.¹⁴ The critical clause in the Act provided that, 'A married woman shall ... be capable of acquiring, holding and disposing by will or otherwise, of any real or personal property as her separate property ... as if she were a *feme sole*, without the intervention of any trustee.'¹⁵ As a result, an increased proportion of estates of female testators warranted the scrutiny of the probate process.

As established, information gleaned from probated wills must be considered with the understanding that the material does not represent the general community but reflects choices and characteristics of individuals representing particular groups within the community. As is often the case in historical records, the experience of wealthy males is accessible through written records while that of poor people, particularly women, leaves less obvious traces. Probate records hold information about the property and decisions relating to property of older

¹³ Census data for 1855, 1861, 1871 and 1891, as presented in "Statistical Register of the State of South Australia for the Year 1908," *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 3, 1909 (Adelaide: Acting Government Printer, North Terrace, 1909).

¹⁴ In 1911 nearly one-third of probated estates belonged to women. Shanahan, *The Distribution of Personal Wealth in South Australia, 1905 to 1915*, p. 66.

¹⁵ Married Women's Property Act, 1883-84, no. 300, s.1, in Helen Jones, *In Her Own Name: A History of Women in South Australia from 1836* (Kent Town, S.A: Wakefield Press, 1994), p. 17.

and wealthier individuals, who comprise a disproportionately high percentage of the probated population.¹⁶ The relatively high proportion of older individuals in the probated population is evident in Table 3, which shows that in 1855 people aged over 60 comprised less than two percent of the population yet contributed around twenty percent of the probated estates sampled. Ten years later, when 1.7% of the population were 60 or older, the proportion is similar but in 1871 both figures are higher, with 3.5% of the population aged 60 or more and one-third of probated estates belonging to those aged 60 and over. The presence of the aged in the probated population is even more striking in 1891 when 54% of sampled estates belonged to those 60 or over, double the proportion of registered deaths of those in that age group, and 5.3% of the living population were aged 60 or over. Another feature of the probate records is that a high proportion of females whose wills went to probate were widows, who were more likely than single and married women to leave property, especially real estate, which required the attention of the probate process.¹⁷

¹⁶ Shanahan, *The Distribution of Personal Wealth in South Australia, 1905 to 1915*, p. iii.

¹⁷ Two of the three women whose estates went to probate in 1855 were widows; Janet Grieve's marital status is not recorded. All bar one female probated estate in 1861 belonged to widows, fourteen of 22 estates belonged to widows in 1871, and sixteen of 30 in 1891.

Table 3 Proportion aged over 60 in the general population, among probated estates and in the deceased population (records for the latter showing proportion aged over 50 for 1855, 1861, 1871)

Year	Percentage of population aged over 60			Testators and intestates aged over 60* in sampled probated estates			Aged 60 or over at death (50*** or over in 1855, 1861 and 1871)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1855	1.63	1.26	1.45	2 / 21 (9.5%)	3 / 3 (100%) 2/3 widows	5/24 (20%)**	61 (6.8% of male deaths)	51 (6.6% of female deaths)	112 (6.7 %)
1861	1.8	1.5	1.7	4 / 21 (19%)	1 / 5 (20%) 4/5 widows	5/26 (19%)	100 (9.1% of male deaths)	54 (6.2% of female deaths)	154 (7.8%)
1871	3.7	3.3	3.5	9/30 (30%)	8/22 (36%) 14/22 widows	17/52 (33%)	245 (18.1% of male deaths)	167 (16.3% of female deaths)	412 (17.3%)
1891	5.3	5.3	5.3	22/42 (52%)	17/30 (57%) 16/30 widows	39/72 (54%)	609 (27% of male deaths)	516 (26.3% of female deaths)	1125 (26.7%)

* Where available information suggests that the testator was aged 60 years or over at death, that individual has been included in the above figures. For example, where adult grandchildren are mentioned, and the testator's spouse is known to be aged over 60, the testator is likely to be aged 60 or over.

** The percentage for this year is distorted by the low number in the female sample.

*** The Births, Deaths and Marriages statistics record age at death in the following categories for 1855 and 1861: under 2, 5, 10, 30 and 50 years, '50 and above', and 'Age unknown'.

Sources: Census data; *Probate Record Books*, Supreme Court of South Australia; "Statistical Register of South Australia for 1871. Compiled from Official Records," *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 9, 1871 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1872). "Statistical Register of the State of South Australia for the Year 1908. Compiled from Official Records. Statistical Summary of South Australia from its Foundation. 1836 -1908," *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 3, 1909 (Adelaide: Acting Government Printer, North Terrace, 1909).

The nature of wealth described in the probate records

Value of estates varied widely, from a few pounds to many thousands. Inventories, some detailed, identify assets to which individuals attached value, either sentimental, like family portraits, functional, like household linen and crockery, or financial, like bonds, real estate and money. Assets that contributed to the overall wealth of an individual, then, did not consist only of land and money but included items of diverse description. Some testators went to considerable effort to distribute their valued items among beneficiaries evenly, thereby preempting and circumventing quarrels. The diversity of the value and content of estates reflects the range of material resources available to individuals in the colony. Nineteenth-century statistician Timothy Coghlan remarked on the wide diffusion of wealth in colonial South Australia, unparalleled elsewhere in Australia.¹⁸ Economic historian Martin Shanahan's research, however, establishes that, 'distribution of personal wealth in South Australia at the turn of the century was highly unequal', with ten percent of the population owning nearly 70 percent of the colony's wealth, fewer than 100 people controlling more than twelve percent of the wealth, and the vast majority of adults owning less than £250.¹⁹ Shanahan's findings, along with analysis of others such as Christopher Nance, John Daly and Eleanore Williams,²⁰ suggest Coghlan's observation regarding the relatively broad distribution of wealth in South Australia is based on perceptions of equality rather than on evidence, the more obvious

¹⁸ Timothy Augustus Coghlan, *A Statistical Account of the Seven Colonies of Australasia 1899-1900*, (Sydney: Government Printer, 1900), p. 322.

¹⁹ Shanahan further estimates that one-third of South Australia's wealth was owned by less than one percent of the population, while five percent controlled sixty percent of the wealth. Shanahan, *The Distribution of Personal Wealth in South Australia, 1905 to 1915*, pp. iv, l, li.

²⁰ Christopher Nance, *The South Australian Social Experiment 1836-71: A Study of Some of the Aspects of South Australia's Early Social Development* (M.A. thesis, Flinders University, 1977), p. 238; John A. Daly, *Elysian Fields: Sport, Class and Community in Colonial South Australia, 1836-1890* (Adelaide: J. A. Daly, 1982), p. 229; Eleanore Williams, *A Way of Life: The Pastoral Families of the Central Hill Country of South Australia* (Adelaide: Adelaide University Union Press, 1980), pp. 2-3, cited by Shanahan, *The Distribution of Personal Wealth in South Australia, 1905 to 1915*, pp. 25-26.

inequalities evident in England in the mid to late nineteenth century softening contemporary views of the South Australian experience.²¹ Nonetheless, stratification by wealth did characterise South Australian society. In general terms, posits Shanahan, it is accurate to state that, ‘women were poorer than men; that single women were poorer than widows; that the young were poorer than the old; that Irish-born were poorer than the English-born or the Scottish-born; and that wealth was concentrated among pastoralists, graziers and merchants.’²² Probate records provide detail of the wealth of many representatives of these groups, revealing well-established holdings of some older individuals and the poignantly pitiful possessions of some of the young. However, the numbers of older people that swelled the facilities of the Destitute Asylum or sought outdoor relief caution against forming the impression that being old meant being comfortably off in colonial South Australia.

Whether older people possessed wealth and concomitant influence or had few material resources and were among the more vulnerable members of the community depended on variables including family circumstances, behaviours including thrift and prevailing social mores. Variables such as length of time in the colony and the number of children in a family also played a part but an individual’s occupation was the ‘single most important factor “explaining” inequality.’²³ Ways in which individuals distribute their wealth during their lifetime and upon death can both influence and reflect the nature of family structure; just as access to wealth can determine when people marry, establish an independent residence and begin a family, so wealth remains a determinant of quality of life as people age, influencing

²¹ Shanahan, *The Distribution of Personal Wealth in South Australia, 1905 to 1915*, p. 62.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. li.

the capacity, for example, to maintain a separate residence if desired and to independently obtain adequate food and clothing. Older people of means in South Australia had the power to affect the material well-being of relatives, and the probated estates examined show how they chose to do so. The reverse occurred with far less frequency. Through their choices migrants both perpetuated patterns of wealth distribution repeated over centuries and acted in ways reflecting recent changes in modes of production and family structure in England. According to anthropological historian Alan Macfarlane, long-standing principles in English law relating to inheritance of property meant that ‘property ... always descended and never ascended ... [and] even the elderly did not have rights in their children’s property.’²⁴ Of particular relevance to the South Australian experience are near contemporary comments by English administrator Richard Burn regarding obligation between generations. Made in the late eighteenth century, Burn’s observation that, ‘natural affection descends more strongly than it ascends’, excused grandchildren from providing support to their grandparents.²⁵

The reverse is evident in many traditional societies where, as John Caldwell’s research shows, children are regarded as ‘an economic and social advantage’ and the ‘net flow of assets is upwards, from children to parents’.²⁶ Illustrating this, Lutz Berkner’s study of seventeenth-century Austrian peasantry found that adult children contributed to the economic well-being of the family unit and ‘parents regard[ed] their children, like a maturing orchard, as a protection

²⁴ Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1986), p. 99.

²⁵ Richard Burn, *The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer*, 4 vols., 16th edition, (1788), pt. 3, p. 657, cited by Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, p. 82.

²⁶ John Caldwell, “Fertility and the Household Economy of Nigeria,” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, VII, no. 2 (1976), p. 243, cited by Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, p. 38.

in their declining years'.²⁷ The influence of westernisation transformed the nature of wealth flow, a marker of modern societies in the nineteenth century being movement of assets downward from parents to children. Rather than being perceived as assets children came to be viewed as 'a problem, a burden, a cost', and 'reciprocally turn[ed] their old people into burdens, problems and costs.'²⁸ Perhaps more marked in the nineteenth century and beyond, such a view of the elderly is not peculiar to the industrial era.²⁹ As Richard Smith comments, in pre-industrial England 'children were not necessarily an important source either of labour or of security in old age'.³⁰ Using evidence from wills Keith Wrightson observes that parents supported and assisted children as they entered adult life but that children 'were rarely expected to contribute to the maintenance of their parents in their old age', and parents 'rarely expected economic aid in their turn'.³¹ Shifts in family structure from the late eighteenth century included increased emphasis on the newly formed family unit rather than on the family of origin and a diminished sense of responsibility for ageing parents.³² Yet over many centuries immediate and wider family had not assumed exclusive responsibility for the support of needy ageing members in England; Macfarlane explains that a combination of assistance from 'parish, guild, manor, Church and state', along with private charity from the rich, met the needs of the poor from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries.³³ This legacy is important in the

²⁷ Lutz K. Berkner, "The Stem Family and the Developmental Cycle of the Peasant Household: An Eighteenth-Century Austrian Example," *American History Review*, LXXVII (1972), p. 414, cited by Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, p. 72.

²⁸ Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, pp. 74, 75.

²⁹ For discussion of examples of the perception of older relatives as 'useless mouths' in early modern France, for example, see J. Jones, *Myth, Misogyny and the Old Woman in Early Modern France*, pp. 36 – 43.

³⁰ Richard Smith, "Fertility, Economy, and Household Formation in England over Three Centuries," *Population and Development Review*, VII (1981), p. 618, cited by Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, p. 79.

³¹ Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 112, 114.

³² Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, p. 108.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 106, 107.

South Australian context because colonists held the expectation that family members were not solely responsible for the well-being of ageing relatives.

Distribution of wealth: Honouring, protecting and controlling kin and acknowledging friends

Choices made by older testators in the sampled probated estates about the destination of their assets are not surprising, particularly in the context of long-standing patterns of wealth distribution in England. A primary concern common to testators throughout the period was to honour, protect or control relatives through distribution of property. The value of property subject to probate varied widely, ranging from twenty pounds to £10000 in 1855, from ten pounds to £30000 in 1861, and from ten pounds to £14000 in the 161 estates that went through probate in 1871, the contrast in size and nature of estates reflecting diversity in the probated population. By 1891 the number of probated estates in South Australia was more than quadruple that of 1871, and the percentage of estates generated by females had increased by ten percent. The 715 estates that went to probate in 1891 ranged in value from one pound to £78318, an even greater contrast than in previous years. Overwhelmingly married testators left the majority or entirety of their wealth to their spouse in the first instance and then to children and grandchildren. Widowed testators nominated children and sometimes siblings as primary beneficiaries, older single people nominating siblings, other kin or friends. Letters of administration granted in cases of intestacy generally mirrored these primary pathways of wealth distribution, next-of-kin assuming responsibility for payment of debt and distributing any remaining wealth.

While the sampled estates conform overall to the pattern described above, and in 1855 testators known to be married, all males, left their estate to their spouse in the first instance, unconditional arrangements were few. Several stipulated terms of spousal inheritance in ways that reflected prevailing social mores, using phrases such as, ‘for her own use and benefit provided she continues a widow’, and, ‘no further benefit’ upon remarriage.³⁴ Wills of male testators that went to probate in 1861, 1871 and 1891 evidence similar preoccupations; husbands left their estates first to their spouse and then to children, grandchildren and other kin, many stating that a widow would forfeit her right to the estate should she remarry. Variations in conditions include those that demonstrate the perceived need to protect the interests of vulnerable kin. Farmer Joseph Chivell, for example, followed the usual pathway of inheritance from wife to children to grandchildren but stated that if his wife remarried the 66 acre estate should be sold, one-third going to the children and two-thirds being for wife Bertha’s ‘own use and benefit absolutely’.³⁵ In some instances death rather than remarriage intervened. Thomas Batten’s wife Susannah was to retain the estate, valued at £100, as long as she remained a widow; she died three years after her husband, aged 61 years.³⁶

Batten’s circumstances illustrate that many who neared or had entered old age remained actively engaged in work and family life, were still responsible for growing children and needed to provide for them. Two of Batten’s children were adult, one daughter married and his son a ‘licensed victualler’, but the third was an ‘infant’ when his father died.³⁷ Accordingly some older testators emphasised the widow’s obligation to raise and maintain children still in

³⁴ Joseph Chivell, 0229, *Probate Books 1855*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

³⁵ Friedrich Friensdorf, 02112, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

³⁶ Thomas Batten, 0226, *Probate Books 1855*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

their minority. Richard Tiller named his eldest son as executor and left his estate to his ‘dear wife’ in trust for the children.³⁸ Seeking to secure his children’s future, Francis Finey, a licensed victualler aged 66 when he died, added to the clause that his wife would inherit ‘as long as she shall continue my widow’ the condition that she would lose access to the estate upon ‘refusal or neglect’ to maintain and educate the children.³⁹ Finey made special mention of son James, ‘a cripple ... likely to be afflicted with lameness through life’, wanting to ensure that he would be provided for should the trustees judge him ‘unable to support himself’.⁴⁰ While Finey still had young children when he died, he also had two grandsons and initially included them in his will, leaving £100 to each, the money to be invested during their minority. In the *codicil*, written three years after the original document and shortly before his death, Finey adjusted this, leaving £50 pounds to one grandson only.⁴¹ Whether this decision reflected recognition of the actual size of his estate, worth £200, or was made in reaction to particular behaviour of his grandchild is unknown. Detail contained in wills varies, some leaving unsolved puzzles, others making the motivations and concerns of the testator clear. Malcolm McLennan, ‘gentleman’, made his intentions clear in relation to disposal of his substantial estate, valued at £10500.⁴² He left a legacy of £300 to his nephew and all of his plate, household furniture and an annuity of £100 to his wife Linzie. He made provision for children and grandchildren but excluded any issue of his grandchildren from benefit.⁴³ Having provided for immediate family, McLennan was in a position to direct his trustees to divide £1000 among his brother’s children and to hold money in trust for other siblings and their

³⁸ Richard Tiller, 0705, *Probate Books 1861*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

³⁹ Francis Finey, 0710, *Probate Books 1861*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Malcolm McLennan, 0741, *Probate Books 1861*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

offspring.⁴⁴ The detail and scope of McLennan's will reflects the capacity of older individuals of means to influence many lives.

Whether wealthy or of modest means, some took care to bestow their worldly goods on those they thought would benefit most. Thus 80 year-old Henry Lock divided his estate equally among his sons and daughter but left his daughter Edith 'all the furniture and effects of [his] bedroom', while 70 year-old farmer John Richards gave equal shares of his horses and farm implements to his sons, the daughters inheriting money instead.⁴⁵ Some took particular care to provide for an elderly spouse or parent, sometimes by influencing domestic arrangements. Henry Dawson, a gentleman approaching 60, made detailed provisions concerning his £4560 estate, including the direction that £50 annually be paid to his aged mother while she continued to reside with his wife.⁴⁶ Farmer James Flower, who died at 77 years of age, left land to his daughter but stipulated that his wife should have use of the house and furniture, together with quarterly payments of £52 from his £780 estate.⁴⁷ John Cook, 82 year-old retired store-keeper, left his personal property to his wife Sarah and his real estate in trust to his son, specifying that Sarah should have 'use and benefit' of the property until her death, whereupon half would go to their son and half to their grandchildren, children of a son who had died.⁴⁸ Family dynamics, often unexplained, left their mark in the arrangements of some wills. Farmer Edward Taylor, married with eight children and one grandchild when he died at 71, left an estate of £115 and followed conventional pathways of distribution from

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Henry Lock, 012178, John Richards, 012210, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁴⁶ Henry Dawson, 011001, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁴⁷ James Flower, 011257, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁴⁸ John Cook, 011028, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

spouse to children and grandchild with one exception; daughter Fanny was to receive the paltry sum of one shilling.⁴⁹ Taylor gave no explanation for Fanny's lot, and nor did James Lewis, farmer and grazier, who excluded his eldest son from his £800 estate when he died at 79.⁵⁰ Similarly curious is the instruction in 75 year-old Johann Feder's will that trustees withhold half of his only daughter's share of her inheritance from the £1400 estate until she reached the age of 60, periodically giving her income from the other half.⁵¹ Feder apparently did not consider his daughter competent to manage her affairs. Such instructions may have been included in wills at a time of tension or misunderstanding within the family, some testators changing their instructions in a later document. Inevitably, family conflict determined the detail of some wills but most testators of all ages simply directed assets to their nearest kin. Many showed the closeness of family bonds through the nature of bequests made and language used.

Whether a widow did remarry and forgo access to her deceased husband's estate depended upon such factors as the need for security, companionship and support in raising children. The proportion of widows appearing in probate records indicates that many, especially older women, did not remarry. Some widows remained so for many years. While Robert Hailey was probably in his forties when he died, his widow Elizabeth lived on for over 30 years, shifting from Macclesfield to the city, and dying at the age of 84 in 1888.⁵² Elizabeth

⁴⁹ Edward Taylor, 011492, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁵⁰ James Lewis, 012171, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁵¹ Johann Heinrich Feder, 011593, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁵² Robert Hailey, 0228, *Probate Books 1855*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide; Elizabeth Hailey, died 13 October 1888, *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915*.

Hutchins outlived her young farmer husband John by 46 years.⁵³ Another Elizabeth, widow of draper Robert Macgeorge, died at 78 in 1880, nearly twenty years after her husband.⁵⁴ Publican John Magor was 72 when he died in January 1855.⁵⁵ His wife Alice, ten years younger, outlived Magor by thirteen years, dying in 1868 at the age of 75. Such disparity in ages was not uncommon and contributed to the higher numbers of widows than widowers in the community. Contrasts in the ages of some spouses continue to be evident in 1861 and beyond, where it is possible to obtain age-related information. For example, while Jonathan Barrans, gentleman, was 69 when he died in 1861, his wife Anne was 52 and lived seventeen years beyond her husband, thus equalling his age at death.⁵⁶ Like many widows deserted wife Elizabeth Baseby outlived her benefactor, the unrelated William Worthington Back, by many years, dying in 1904 aged 88.⁵⁷ Baseby's benefactor made clear that Elizabeth's husband Benjamin Baseby was to have no part of his £700 estate, stating that it was 'for her separate use independently of and free from the debts control or engagements of her present husband', and that she could dispose of the property at her own discretion.⁵⁸ While some deserted wives had to resort to the Destitute Asylum for assistance, Baseby's inheritance gave her independence in her old age.

⁵³ John Hutchins, 0693, *Probate Books 1861*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide; Elizabeth Hutchins, died 14 August 1907, aged 72, *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915*.

⁵⁴ Robert Forsyth Macgeorge, 0679, *Probate Books 1861*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide; Elizabeth Macgeorge, died 9 January 1880, aged 78, *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915*.

⁵⁵ John Magor, 0214, *Probate Books 1855*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Barrans, 0740, *Probate Books 1861*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide; Anne Barrans, died 1878, *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915*.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Baseby, died 7 April 1904, *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915*.

⁵⁸ William Worthington Back, 0706, *Probate Books 1861*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

Far fewer in number than their female counterparts, widowed men tended to leave their property to their children, if they had them, or to siblings. Single men also tended to honour family. 71 year-old George Griffin asked that his estate, including horses, carts, carriages and household furniture, be realised and that £30 per annum be given to his ‘nearest blood relations’.⁵⁹ Widower George Stonehouse, 63 when he died, drew upon a Protestant Union insurance policy ‘for the benefit of the Widows and Children of Protestant Ministers of all denominations’ to provide for his three daughters after his death, and, like others, specified that the resulting funds should be theirs and theirs alone.⁶⁰ Stonehouse and his daughters had lived at his step-daughter’s residence for some time before his death. The four women shared his household furniture, linen, plate and books, but step-daughter Rebecca received a larger share of the remainder of the estate, valued at £1100, to compensate for the amount the others received through the insurance policy.⁶¹ Those who benefited from goodwill of family members or others in their later years directed proceeds of their estate accordingly. Seventy two-year old widower Joseph Hornsby had lived with his daughter and son-in-law at Green Tree Hill, Munno Para, and left his estate of £300 to his son-in-law asking that he divide it equally among Hornsby’s five married daughters.⁶²

In addition to taking care of close relatives, male and female testators also considered those who had shown them kindness or good service or organisations, often religious, that they valued. Surgeon James Knipe, for example, left £40 to his servant Ann, the remainder going to his wife; given that his entire estate was valued at under £100 this amounted to a significant

⁵⁹ George Griffin, 02115, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁶⁰ Reverend George Stonehouse, 02155, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Joseph Hornsby, 0680, *Probate Books 1861*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

acknowledgement of good service.⁶³ George Griffin willed the remainder of his estate to the Congregational Trust, the Baptist-Wesleyan and Bible Christian bodies to assist ‘pious men ... as missionaries to the heathen’.⁶⁴ Friends also received consideration in acknowledgement of assistance rendered in later years. Maria Hallett, 83, left one-fifth of her £500 estate to her friend Henry Morris, the rest going to her children.⁶⁵ One of three women whose estates appear in the probate records of 1855, 73 year-old widow Susanna Hinds followed the expected pattern in leaving her substantial estate, valued at £2000, to her children, a son and two married daughters, and then her grandchildren, but her *codicil* included a bequest of ten pounds to Mrs. Jessica Shenton, ‘a small acknowledgement for kind attention to me at various times’.⁶⁶ The assistance Jessica Shenton offered Susanna in her later years is not specified, but the reference provides a glimmer of insight into ways in which the ageing were able to retain their independence and of how old people appreciated such assistance. Although most wills were primarily concerned with distribution of assets, some testators included instruction about the manner of mourning expected. Jane Breeze wanted a simple funeral and plain gravestone,⁶⁷ while Catherine Keys asked that her daughter be given ten pounds ‘immediately’ to purchase a mourning ring. Sarah Hart also requested that her executors purchase ‘a plain and inexpensive mourning ring ... as a mark of my respect and appreciation of their services’.⁶⁸

⁶³ James Frederick Knipe, 02106, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁶⁴ George Griffin, 02115, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁶⁵ Maria Hallett, 011209, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁶⁶ Susannah Hinds, 0235, *Probate Books 1855*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁶⁷ Jane Breeze, 02139, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁶⁸ Catherine Keys, 02168, Sarah Emma Maria Hart, 02203, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

In each sample group some testators over-estimated the extent of their estate or lost most of it between the time of writing and the time of death. A dramatic illustration of such miscalculation is evident in the will of widower and father of eight, 73 year-old William Trevena, whose estate was valued at a mere fifteen pounds but who left real and personal estate, including a gold watch and chain, to his sons, and directed them to pay £50 each to two sisters and to make weekly payments of six shillings in maintenance while they remained unmarried.⁶⁹ Four other daughters were to receive land.⁷⁰ Sixty-three year old William Snell of Moonta left his estate to his wife, ‘for her life or as long as she remains a widow’ and then to two sons, also directing them to pay his married daughter and third son £200 and £150 respectively, an obligation they would have struggled to meet given the estate’s value of £150.⁷¹ Farmer Ellis Norman similarly sought to secure the future for his wife after his death at age 69, directing trustees to pay her a weekly allowance of one pound; his estate only amounted to £40.⁷² Robert Smyth’s daughters were to inherit £200 each and his wife was to collect £60 per annum ‘for her life’.⁷³ Given the estate’s £200 value these bequests would have been impossible to meet. Another testator who hoped to pass on his business to his son and who seems to have grossly over-estimated the size of his estate was Joseph Orchard, 71 year-old owner of the Seven Stars Hotel. Although his estate was valued at less than £50, Orchard left £100 to his son and twenty pounds and his ‘best bed’ to his daughter, the remainder to be divided between his children and grandchildren.⁷⁴ He also detailed arrangements for son Joseph to rent the hotel for a year with the option to buy it, the proceeds of sale to be shared in

⁶⁹ William Trevena, 011458, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ William Snell, 011447, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁷² Ellis Norman, 012141, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁷³ Robert Smyth, 02172, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁷⁴ Joseph Orchard, 02178, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

the same way. The only elderly woman represented in the records of 1861, when females generated a mere five of 81 estates, also left specific instructions regarding disposal of her estate. Elizabeth Corse Smillie, who died at 76, initially left the bulk of her estate to her stepson but out-lived him and wrote a *codicil* detailing provision for the pathway of her estate to, for example, the grand-niece of her late husband, the niece's children, and to other kin, both laterally and downward.⁷⁵ Smillie, like others, appears to have over-estimated the value of her estate, which eventually amounted to no more than £200. In each of the cases mentioned the intention, to provide for kin, is clear.

The doubling of numbers of probated estates from 1861 to 1871 reflects the growth of the colony's population and mirrors the increase in the percentage of the population aged 60 or more. There was an approximate doubling in those aged 50 or over in the deceased population and in the proportion of testators and intestates known to be aged over 60 among the sampled probated estates (see Table 3), and the number of females whose estates required probate increased by ten percent, again reflecting shifts in social structure within the colony, more women assuming control of significant amounts of property, particularly as widows. Females were represented in each band of estate value in the sampled estates in 1861, Margaret Harriott's being the highest valued, at £900.⁷⁶ The majority of female estates in 1871 belonged to widows. Although not consistently recorded information in probate records and in the Index of Registration of Deaths confirms that a relatively high proportion of these widowed women and of married women were aged 60 or over. Detail in their wills illuminates circumstances of and decisions made by older women as death approached, highlighting elements such as

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Corse Smillie, 0729, *Probate Books 1861*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁷⁶ Margaret Harriott, 02116, *Probate Books 1861*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

closeness to family and involvement in the Church, and showing more consistencies than differences in the ways older women disposed of their property. Several features of the will of 74 year-old widow Jane Breeze bear similarity to others. Breeze intended her assets to be distributed among kin, allocating twenty pounds each to her widowed sister, her married sister, ‘for sole and separate use’, and her brother-in-law, but as in numerous other cases she seems not to have known the limited nature of her estate when she wrote her will directly before her death.⁷⁷ In addition to legacies intended for family members and the direction that her executors attend to debts and funeral expenses, including the erection of ‘a plain gravestone’ over her own and her husband’s graves, Breeze wished the remainder of her estate to be divided equally between the Wesleyan Missionary Society, the Archer Street Wesleyan Church and the ‘Wesleyan worn out Ministers and Ministers widows fund’.⁷⁸ Presumably, her £50 estate did not extend to meet these philanthropic intentions.

Like Jane Breeze, 70 year-old widow Catherine Hughes initially wanted her estate divided between her two siblings, ‘share and share alike’.⁷⁹ In addition, she left her household furniture to her executor, John Adams, ‘for his kindness to me in my illness’.⁸⁰ In a *codicil* written four years later Catherine left her house and land in North Adelaide to David Hughes, a saddler of Gundagai in New South Wales. In a second *codicil* Hughes revoked the legacies to her brothers and left her estate to David Hughes, who had become a publican.⁸¹ The nature of this relationship is not clear, but Hughes may well have been Catherine’s brother-in-law or

⁷⁷ Jane Breeze, 02139, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Catherine Hughes, 02176, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

son. So although the terms of the will changed in Catherine Hughes' later years, perhaps reflecting family conflict, she still observed convention in directing her estate primarily to kin, and in acknowledging the assistance of a friend. Christina Cook, a widow who died in her mid-seventies, gave detailed and thoughtful instructions as to how her goods and assets should be divided among her seven children. Son Charles was to inherit 'one of my cows now running in my paddock and also my eight day clock and my sitting room furniture and also my Testament'.⁸² John was to receive his mother's bookcase together with two cases of stuffed birds and two volumes of the Bible. Daughter Mary Ann, who lived with her mother, inherited a cow, the table in the best room, her mother's prayerbook, all kitchen and dairy furniture and utensils, seven silver spoons, all the poultry and fowls, a chest of drawers, linen, clothing and the bed and bedding in Mary Ann's room. Another son, William, inherited his late father's box and a table, and son Robert received an easy chair, a bow chair and a 'simple chair'. Married daughter Christina inherited her mother's bed and bedding, and Elsie, another married daughter, inherited three cows 'for her own use absolutely'.⁸³ The estate itself was valued at £100, and any residue was to be divided equally among the seven children. Cook clearly made some effort to match the available goods to the needs and interests of each child. Others left more simple directions; 84 year-old widow Phoebe Francis simply stated that her sons were to inherit the estate in 'equal parts'.⁸⁴

Whether simple or detailed, a recurring theme in wills of women and men in the later years sampled is the care taken to protect the interests of female beneficiaries. Sixty-three year

⁸² Christina Cook, 02182, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Phoebe Francis, 02142, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

old widow Sarah Chaston, who distributed her £250 estate among her two sons and three married daughters, was emphatic about protecting female interest in her will, declaring, ‘The husbands of my daughters have no claim whatever on the share of my daughters’ property’.⁸⁵ Figure 10, an excerpt of Chaston’s will, illustrates the care and detail taken in determining the destination of assets. Widow Margaret Harriott described her daughter’s inheritance as ‘an inalienable personal provision’, which was therefore ‘free from the control ... of her husband’.⁸⁶ Similarly, shipwright Thomas Storrow’s widow was to have ‘sole and separate use’ of the estate, ‘free from the debts, intermeddling or control of any husband’, and the estate of 62 year-old farmer Thomas Ryan was for wife Honora’s ‘use ... without impeachment’.⁸⁷ Ryan also specified the timing of one married daughter’s inheritance, stating that it should be delivered in instalments after harvests, and excluded another of his six children from the will on the basis that he ‘had already received a portion from me’.⁸⁸ Frederick Fesenmeyer took particular care to allocate funds from his substantial estate, valued at £4500, to ensure that his three daughters would retain their independence, a portion being invested for eldest daughter Annie, for example, ‘so long as she shall remain unmarried’.⁸⁹ These examples demonstrate that wills were clearly an instrument of control as well as of benefaction, older people retaining the capacity to influence the lives of family members through the way they disposed of their wealth and through associated conditions imposed.

⁸⁵ Sarah Chaston, 02159, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁸⁶ Margaret Harriott, 02116, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁸⁷ Thomas William Storrow, 01717, Thomas Ryan, 02173, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁸⁸ Thomas Ryan, 02173, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁸⁹ Frederick Ruppensberger Fesenmeyer, 02129, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

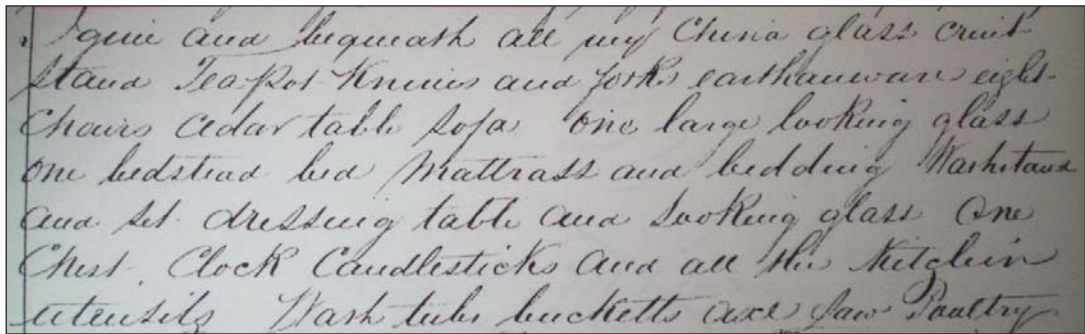


Figure 10 Excerpt from Sarah Chaston's will, Sarah Chaston, 02159, Probate Books 1871, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

Widows again predominated in the records of female testators of 1891 and with two exceptions these women left their worldly goods to their children. Elizabeth Smith, a widow aged 60, left her estate of £100 to her brothers in Bristol, England, and to the Adelaide Children's Hospital, the latter suggesting that if she had had children they may have died.⁹⁰ Seventy-five year old Maria Muller may also have been childless, as she left her £300 estate to siblings and or friends.⁹¹ Distribution of assets sometimes hinged upon gender, 64 year-old Eliza Weller, for example, dividing her real estate between her sons and leaving household furniture and effects to her daughters.⁹² Those with one child, like 79 year-old Mary Horner, had no need to consider such divisions.⁹³ As evident in previous years the downward flow of wealth through inheritance included grandchildren. In small estates the direction was often simple, 64 year-old Emma Sallis and 80 year-old Anne Sutton nominating first children and then grandchildren as beneficiaries of their £100 and twenty pound estates respectively.⁹⁴ In larger estates conditions could be more complex. Like Sallis and Sutton, Ann Glover wanted

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Smith, 011505, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁹¹ Maria Margretha Muller, 012200, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁹² Eliza Weller, 011514, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁹³ Mary Horner, 011576, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁹⁴ Emma Sallis, 011517, Anne Sutton, 011486, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

her £640 estate to pass to her children and then to her grandchildren, with all to share in division of furniture and household effects, but included specific instruction regarding the investment of a portion for one grandchild and the division of other money for the children of her deceased daughter.⁹⁵ Older female testators who still had children who were minors had to consider the needs of grown children, grandchildren and younger children. One such woman, 61 year-old widow Margaret Fraser, appointed a trustee to manage her younger daughter's affairs, gave £25 to each grandchild and instructed that the residue of the estate be divided among her seven other children.⁹⁶

Wills and probate records often recorded the occupation of testators. As wills were not necessarily written close to death information such as the description of the testator's occupation was not necessarily accurate, some individuals having ceased to practise their occupation as they aged. Many, however, continued working until death. Few women listed an occupation, being described more often in terms of marital status. One exception was Sarah Hart, licensed victualler of Tea Tree Gully; having outlived two husbands she continued the work she had shared with the last.⁹⁷ A diversity of occupations characterises the males in the probate records. Seventy one year-old George Griffin was a watchmaker by trade.⁹⁸ Seventy three year-old gardener Richard Harrison left an estate of £800, Frederick Fesenmeyer, who died at 62, worked in the civil service, and Reverend George Stonehouse was a practising

⁹⁵ Ann Glover, 011196, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁹⁶ Margaret Fraser, 011221, *Probate Books 1891*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁹⁷ Sarah Emma Maria Hart, 02203, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

⁹⁸ George Griffin, 02115, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

minister when he died at age 63.⁹⁹ The numerous farmers listed, including 70 year-old widower John Waddell, 62 year-old Thomas Ryan and 73 year-old Robert Smyth,¹⁰⁰ may well have had little choice but to continue to work in their old age, possibly with their children's assistance. Offspring who did assist an ageing parent in their work sometimes inherited the occupation. Robert Smyth's sons, for instance, inherited his land at Tea Tree Gully and may well have continued to farm it.¹⁰¹ In some instances a child had already assumed the parent's occupation and continued to share the residence, an arrangement of mutual benefit. The parent's death, however, could result in sale of the property or in redistribution of assets among several children. Margaret Harriott, for example, inherited farm property in Noarlunga from her husband and lived there until her death with her daughter Agnes and son-in-law Peter, who farmed the land.¹⁰² Upon her death, another daughter was to receive rents and profits from the estate, while the farming couple received £100, a buggy and harness and household effects already in their possession. Four other daughters were to benefit from the remainder of the £900 estate.¹⁰³ The complexity of such arrangements had the potential to create tension among family members.

Misers, senility and wills

The language and content of most wills sampled counters contemporary images of the ageing as miserly that are readily identified in contemporary fiction, anecdote and cartoons. Many

⁹⁹ Richard Harrison, 01684, Frederick Ruppertsberger Fesenmeyer, 02129, Reverend George Stonehouse, 02155, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

¹⁰⁰ John Waddell, 01710, Thomas Ryan, 02173, Robert Smyth, 02172, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

¹⁰¹ Robert Smyth, 02172, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

¹⁰² Margaret Harriott, 02116, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

¹⁰³ Margaret Harriott, 02116, *Probate Books 1871*, Probate Registry Office, Adelaide.

elderly testators used language such as ‘my dear wife’ and ‘my beloved’ when identifying their spouse as beneficiary. Similarly, testators often took care to ensure that their assets would be used as they intended to benefit those they identified, in most cases next-of-kin. Husbands provided for ageing widows, ageing parents for children and grandparents for grandchildren. Testators sought to protect the interests of female beneficiaries in particular and *codicils* demonstrate that assets had often been distributed during the testator’s lifetime, showing generosity and response to need. Although many wills provide evidence countering the image of old people as misers, a few reinforce the view through their content and, on occasion, through related legal argument. One such case is that of Heinrich Burmeister.¹⁰⁴ While the case itself was not heard until 1909, the pertinent events unfolded over a period stretching from the mid-1800s to 1907 and provide an example of how wills, especially when contested, can not only illuminate issues relating to the effect of old age on testamentary capacity and show the power of testators in life and beyond to affect the lives of their relatives but can also provide insight into family life, remarriage and even character. Burmeister died in 1907 aged about 90, having written seven wills and one codicil between 1893 and 1906. He named his children and grandchildren as sole beneficiaries in all bar the final two, in which he gave half his £9000 estate to cousins in Germany with whom he had had no contact for over 30 years. Described as ‘eccentric, selfish, miserly, reticent to an extraordinary degree, [and] harsh and arbitrary to his family’, Heinrich Burmeister suffered from impaired memory and senile decay causing mental and physical effects.¹⁰⁵ Not surprisingly the judgment found that senile decay could be taken into consideration in assessing the capacity of a testator.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ “Ponder and Others v. Burmeister and Others [no. 210 of 1907],” *The South Australian Law Reports, 1909* (Adelaide: W. K. Thomas & Co., 1909), pp. 62-113 .

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

An outline of Burmeister's life, given in the course of the three week trial, is useful as it describes choices he made in response to life course events, which may be representative of the choices of others, and because it reinforces the distinction between miserliness associated with old age and long-standing character traits. The two are easily blurred in the sphere of popular culture. Judge C. J. Way's judgment divides Burmeister's life into three periods: his family life up to 1878, when he separated at age 60; his solitary years up to age 80; and the final period of senile decay until his death in 1907.¹⁰⁷ Emigrating from Germany around the age of 30, Burmeister married and had five children. After his wife's death, he remarried at 52, his second wife being 34 years his junior; Burmeister would have benefited from having a young wife to raise his children. Such unions would not have been uncommon in the colony, but all children from this marriage died in infancy or early childhood.¹⁰⁸ He treated his wife poorly, refusing to allow friends' visits and physically assaulting her. Case notes detail examples of his miserly nature, including his refusal to allow his wife to have a sewing machine or pram. Through business and success at the gold diggings in the early 1850s Burmeister accumulated sufficient savings to purchase property and to retire in 1876, when he separated from his wife and moved to the country, giving no assistance to his family. He reunited with his wife but refused to allow the children to live at home. The couple travelled to Germany, Burmeister in first-class, his wife and new-born child in steerage.¹⁰⁹ Further examples of his poor treatment of his wife include his omitting to inform her of her father's death until they were returning to Australia. Burmeister then booked a passage to Adelaide

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

and left the boat on a pretext, having only booked tickets for his wife and child. Two years later, Burmeister wanted her back; she refused.¹¹⁰ This difficult old man had few if any friends; one old German man who had borrowed money from him visited him on a fortnightly or monthly basis, and he visited another man of similar age to himself with whom he had had financial dealings.¹¹¹

The course of events that unfolded in Burmeister's later years shows that he did not become a miser or a difficult man because he was old; he had always been so. Senility exaggerated these characteristics, posing problems for his family and predisposing him to become more erratic. Burmeister rejected conciliatory gestures from his children and led a solitary existence throughout most of his old age. During the final period, struggling to maintain his house and attend to his personal needs, Burmeister asked his daughter to leave her husband and family to care for him. Albertina accommodated this request by moving into his house with her family, leaving their own house untenanted and falling into disrepair.¹¹² The arrangement became untenable, and his son Frederick then employed a house-keeper for his father. Frederick 'tried to mitigate his father's loneliness by visiting him fortnightly', inviting him to his home at Christmas and on birthdays and making him 'little presents, such as a clock with chimes, a chair for sitting on under his verandah, and ... articles of clothing which the old man's penuriousness prevented his buying for himself.'¹¹³ Burmeister's complaints about his children, detailed in evidence relating to alterations to his various wills, include such comments as: 'They care nothing for me, only for my money'; 'They would like to have had

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 70.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

my property years ago'; and 'They are disappointed that I am living so long'.¹¹⁴ On their own, such comments support the image of old man as cantankerous miser. Considered in context, they provide consistent illustration of Burmeister's difficult and confrontational nature.

In Burmeister's case various witnesses proffered clear evidence of senile decay and Judge Way concluded that there was 'a great body of evidence as to the enfeeblement of the deceased's mind from extreme old age and from disease'.¹¹⁵ Way emphasised that, 'old age alone does not deprive a man of the capacity of making a testament', while '[e]xtreme old age raises some doubt of capacity, but only so far as to excite the vigilance of the Court'.¹¹⁶ In finding the later wills invalid as the testator was not 'of sound and disposing mind' when he made them, the judge referred to a comparable case in which the testator's eccentricities had 'increased through indulgence in drink' as he aged, leading to 'violent outbursts of temper'.¹¹⁷ This man had excluded family members from his will, with the exception of a sister to whom he left £100, and had given £90,000 to various charities.¹¹⁸ Way also mentioned the disputed will of an 86 year-old woman who initially left her estate to her two nieces, one of whom then persuaded her to exclude the other, despite the fact that the other niece lived with and cared for her aunt.¹¹⁹ The former case, like Burmeister's, illustrates how age could exacerbate existing difficulties of character while the latter shows the vulnerability of the ageing to the influence

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹¹⁶ "Kinleside v. Harrison, 2 Phillim. 449 at 461-2," *The South Australian Law Reports, 1909* (Adelaide: W. K. Thomas & Co., 1909), p. 92.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99, 101.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

of family members. All show the importance of testaments in documenting the nature of inter-generational family relations.

*

Wills comprise one of the few relatively consistent and quantifiable sources likely to provide evidence of the nature of social and economic relationships between generations. South Australian probated wills provide strong evidence of downward movement of wealth between the generations.¹²⁰ They also give insight into the strength of social relationships among family members. Choices made by old people in disposing of their wealth, occasionally accompanied by explanation, and by younger people whose decisions affected the lives of ageing individuals are evident in information gathered from the sampled probated estates at selected points in the colony's history. This material reveals decisions made regarding distribution of assets after death, but transfer of wealth between generations is not confined to that single point, rather being an ongoing process embracing the raising and education of children, assistance provided to children making the transition to independence and possibly marriage and assistance or gifts made to adult family members.¹²¹ Reliance of family members on access to parents' assets caused tension within some families and sometimes led to increased vulnerability for elderly individuals, even those who ostensibly seemed well provided for in old age. Diarist John McConnell Black expressed concern about his mother's financial circumstances, for when Ellen Black was 69 her architect son, Alfred, lived with her, paying no board and apparently consuming most of her money. John wrote that 'Poor mother' wanted

¹²⁰ In the sampled probated estates studied here and in Martin Shanahan's study, which concerns the period 1905-1915. See Shanahan, *Distribution of Personal Wealth*.

¹²¹ Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 112.

her £90 annuity paid directly to her ‘so that she may have a little pocket money’, but as things stood her income of £500, including regular loan repayments John made, seemed to ‘go into Alfred’s hands’, ‘simply disappear[ing] in Alfred’s undertakings’.¹²² The understanding that individuals tend to acquire assets through their working life and that wealth diminishes in later years as people draw on their wealth in old age, has implications for the subjects of this study.¹²³ Numerous testators in the sampled probated estates over-estimated their wealth, detailing bequests that could not be made. Of these several outlived the will by a number of years so that by the time of death the assets described had diminished considerably. When a testator distributed assets before death, he or she often added a *codicil* explaining this. In the absence of such explanation it seems reasonable to conclude that the testator either miscalculated the extent of assets at the time of writing the will or drew upon those assets in the concluding years of life. When wealth diminished to a point where little or nothing remained, old people in South Australia turned to family members or to government assistance.

¹²² John McConnell Black, *The Diaries of John McConnell Black*, Marjorie Andrew and Shirley Clissold, eds., vol. II (Adelaide: Board of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide and State Herbarium, 1991), p. 45.

¹²³ See, for example, Anthony F. Shorrocks, “The Age-Wealth Relationship: A Cross-Section and Cohort Analysis,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, LVII (1975), pp. 155-163.

6 CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN IMAGE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

As the nineteenth century progressed, demographic and cultural characteristics peculiar to South Australia and deriving from the unique process of systematic colonisation used to establish the colony receded in importance in determining the experience of the ageing and perceptions of their role in society. Whereas those aged over 60 had comprised less than .5% of the population in 1844,¹ by the late 1880s that proportion had grown tenfold.² Gradually, South Australia's demographic structure came to resemble that of other western societies. Consequently, older people became more visible in the community both in the literal sense and in terms of the influence they exerted through involvement in business, politics, cultural activities and family life. Predictions made at the start of colonisation regarding prospects of a better old age for ordinary working people were put to the test in the latter decades of the nineteenth century as the early colonists aged. Just as expectations of a poverty-free society proved to be naïve, so colonists' experience of old age in South Australia was not uniformly comfortable, and contrary to the widely held view of optimistic emigrants of the early years like young William and Sarah Pearce, not everybody who was 'industrious and willing to work, sober, and steady' could 'obtain a good livelihood, and save a little property for old age.'³

¹ General Colonial Statistics, Government Census Return, for 1844, Allen, *The Royal South Australian Almanack and General Directory for 1845*, p. 149.

² Those aged 60 and over constituted 4.1% of the population in 1881 and 5.3% in 1891.

³ Capper, *Capper's South Australia*, pp. 165, 166.

Mirroring demographic reality, in the early years of colonisation the aged had little public presence. By the 1880s though the various realities of their lives began to register more strongly in public forums including the parliament and local publications. Alongside comment about the circumstances of older people came reiteration of existing images and expression of emerging images across such media as popular literature, editorial comment and art. Long-standing representations, portraying the old as miserly for example, continued to appear in works of fiction and in anecdotal form in newspapers. Some images presented in these ways were frivolous in nature, while others drew more closely on observation and experience of the ageing and, to an extent, had the power to shape that experience. The image of the worthy and useful older person, for example, reinforced through anecdote, poetry and short stories, informed prescriptive literature that sought to guide and remind young people of how they should treat and care for the elderly. Changes in social structure led to increased emphasis on particular images. Politicians and others who engaged in debate about provision of assistance variously called upon representations of the ageing as worthy, needy, indolent or lacking in foresight in presenting and supporting their arguments.

The following chapter examines images of the old across a range of written and visual sources accessible to the contemporary population. Factors affecting representations of old people and their experiences include the story teller's tendency to exaggerate in the interests of entertainment stereotypical portrayals masking the diverse realities of life. The circumstances of the ageing varied considerably, interacting factors including economic circumstance, health, character and the strength and structure of immediate and extended family networks all affecting the length and quality of life. So the ageing were neither uniformly impoverished nor

financially comfortable, neither all ailing nor physically healthy. Rather, the elderly occupied diverse roles in South Australian society, some flourishing, some making do and others struggling to eke out an existence. Personal and public accounts of their lives attest to this, and the constructed images of popular culture capture this diversity too. Common understandings and perceptions about the old and their role in society also shaped experience, prescriptive literature impressing upon the young the importance of treating old people with courtesy and kindness and instructing the old regarding ways of improving their physical and spiritual quality of life. Accounts in everyday texts captured some of the range of experience of the old, reporting philanthropic activities of the wealthy, evident in donations to Cottage Homes for the aged for example, and the daily struggles of the aged poor, visible in their need for outdoor or indoor relief, petty crimes, abandonment by adult children and occasional suicides. Similarly, newspaper pieces, poetry and fiction alike presented a multiplicity of images relating to the ageing, readers encountering misers, lechers and philanthropists, lonely figures and honourable old colonists.

The aged were not welcomed into the colony of South Australia. Once there by dint of the progression of time, they became the subjects of both veneration and concern. The economic, political and social context of late nineteenth-century colonial South Australia resulted in heightened focus on imagery and rhetoric that idealised and romanticised the old, veneration coming not because the elderly were considered wise and intrinsically worthy of respect, but primarily because they had contributed so much to the process of colonisation and to the growth of the settlement. In the often exaggerated language of the period writers sought to express gratitude to those who had worked to establish prosperity in the colony, often facing difficult circumstances themselves and continuing to do so in old age. Alongside veneration of

this nature there existed a body of prescriptive literature that held that the elderly deserve respect on the basis of their experience and wisdom, a belief not specific to South Australia, but having a long tradition in both Europe and America. Juxtaposed against such imagery and a consistent topic of discussion in parliament, editorials and letters to the editor was rising concern about the practical problems of providing for the gradually increasing numbers of old people, many of whom became dependent in old age. The 'problem' of old age eventually attracted sufficient concern to become the focus first of a Select Committee, then of a Royal Commission.

Sources useful in establishing the nature of representation of old people in the late nineteenth century include diaries and letters, sermons, art works and photography, novels, anecdotes, jokes, biographical accounts, newspaper reports, poetry, and short stories. Diaries and letters, which are private rather than public documents, can illustrate the extent to which popular representations of or understandings about the ageing are taken up by individuals. Publication of sermons in newspapers ensured dissemination of ministers' ideas beyond the church, relatively few being released in book form. Visual sources, comprising sketches, paintings and photographs, often commissioned by and representing the elite, depict a relatively narrow band of the ageing, although some artists chose a broader range of subjects, and photography became more affordable as the century progressed. Practical and financial difficulties associated with publication of substantial works in the early years of the colony eased somewhat, leading to release of more South Australian novels. When authors included old people in works of fiction, and often they did not, the elderly most commonly appeared as peripheral figures and as caricatures, exhibiting the flaws of character so strongly associated with old age. While publication became a more practical proposition as the colony developed,

expanding the types of texts written by South Australians and accessible to them, newspapers and periodicals continued to play a key role in reflecting, expressing and influencing popular culture and ideas. Content relating to old age in these publications is particularly salient, as it directly influenced and reflected community values, concerns and practice.

As the topic of old age came into its own in everyday publications of the late nineteenth century, writers offered their views about the nature and experience of ageing. Material published in these texts about the topic of old age ranged from the frivolous and the entertaining to the contemplative, the instructive, the moralising and the philosophical. In newspapers, as in novels, short fiction pieces and light entertainment in the form of anecdotes or jokes frequently emphasised and exaggerated characteristics such as eccentricity or miserliness. However, the range of representations of old people was greater in newspapers than in novels and included more consistent emphasis upon positive qualities. As in earlier decades some material published came from overseas; just as local editors included news stories taken from overseas' papers, so poetry and fiction from England or America frequently found its way into papers like *The Adelaide Observer*, *South Australian* and other colonies' contributions supplemented by items from publications such as *Chambers' Journal*, *Punch*, *The Century*, and *Harper's Young People*. Across pieces from all sources, several different themes in treatment of the topic of old age emerge. Generally, the sources fall into two categories; positive and negative portrayal of ageing and the aged. Some representations, of course, make no judgment at all, simply describing the activities or characteristics of old people.

Positive and sympathetic representations of the ageing

Accounts about and by the old commanded more space in daily newspapers and journals in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, reflecting their increased presence and stature in the colony. The weekly *Observer Miscellany* included serialised writing allowing detailed development of some topics, including the experiences of old colonists. Nathaniel Hailes' "Personal Recollections of a Septuagenarian", for example, appeared over several months in 1877.⁴ In a column entitled "Old-Time Memories", 'Octogenarian' recounted his experiences in the colony and began by stating that, although in his eighty-fifth year, he felt 'as sound and hearty' as he did four decades earlier.⁵ The old man described difficulties faced in the early years, remarking, 'I have had very short grass in my time', and explaining that in 1847 'South Australia grew hardly anything', except near Mount Barker, and had to bring goods in from Tasmania, a situation he exploited by selling apples to the Burra miners.⁶ The content of such pieces highlights qualities of tenacity and perseverance. Frequent inclusion of articles involving elderly South Australians and the importance of their contributions to the growth of the colony indicates the resulting respect accorded young colonists grown old.

Veneration for the ageing, largely based on the achievements of the old when young, and expressed in poetry, short stories and accounts of colonists' lives, formed part of a romantic narrative of the process of colonisation. As pioneers and old colonists aged, writers reflected on their contribution to the settlement and growth of the now well-established colony, paying homage to the old on the basis of their achievements. Lucretia Sturt

⁴ Nathaniel Hailes, "Personal Recollections of a Septuagenarian," *The Observer Miscellany*, supplement to the *Adelaide Observer*, 1877, 13 January 1877, pp. 35-37. The entries ran from January to August.

⁵ "Days that were Younger," *The Adelaide Observer*, 19 March 1899, p. 393bc.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Whittington, who considered herself the “first native-born South Australian poetess”, described the efforts and dreams of early colonists in her poem, “The Old Pioneers”.⁷ Emphasising difficulties faced in leaving the known, with the ‘old ocean dividing each tie that endears’, and in venturing into the unknown ‘wilderness vast’, Whittington echoed themes expressed repeatedly in writing relating to European settlement in Australia.⁸ Her poem articulated themes of hope, explaining how pioneers ‘Sought ... the rich promised land’, and of infancy, the pioneers taking part in ‘the birth of a nation, whose cradle there swung’, and concluded by declaring,

Their warfare is over, its victories done
Each one in his path of renown doth appear
A glorious victor, brave pioneer.⁹

In a lengthy (62 verse) poem entitled “The Pioneers”, Robert Caldwell placed similar emphasis on the achievements of early colonists now grown old.¹⁰ Observing that ‘One by one, and day by day, The Pioneers are passing away’, Caldwell outlined the challenges, difficulties and accomplishments of the first 50 years of settlement, referring to the labour associated with farming and mining and the ‘reverses’ that accompanied ‘rainless years’.¹¹ Acknowledging that the work of the pioneers enabled those who followed to prosper, Caldwell concluded his homage on a regretful note, writing,

Alas! For the hopeful toilers!
Who came in the early years!
Alas! For the sad requital

⁷ Lucretia Sturt Whittington, “The Old Pioneers,” in Anne Chittleborough, Annie Greet and Sue Hosking, eds., *Hope and Fear: An Anthology of South Australian Women’s Writing, 1894-1994* (Adelaide: The Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, Flinders University of South Australia, 1994), p. 13.

⁸ See discussion in Chapters 2 and 3.

⁹ Whittington, “The Old Pioneers,” in Chittleborough *et al.*, eds., *Hope and Fear*, p. 14.

¹⁰ Robert Caldwell, “The Pioneers,” in *The Pioneers and Other Poems* (Adelaide: Sands and McDougall, 1898), pp. 1-51.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 25, 35, 49.

Of the brave old Pioneers!¹²

Caldwell, like Whittington and others, articulated the theme of hope that had drawn young people to the colony in the early years of settlement and the theme of respect for those young colonists grown old.

Pieces written about old people rather than by them predominated, although some individuals wrote about their experiences. As old colonists aged and accounts of the lives of both men and women appeared in the newspapers, titles like “A Worthy Woman Pioneer” set the tone,¹³ the content usually including detail about the subject’s recent circumstances and activities and involvement in the early years of settlement. Growing numbers of such entries in newspapers and contemporary accounts describing the lives of old colonists indicate the desire to acknowledge the work done to develop the colony and to honour those involved before they died. One lengthy piece entitled “An Old Colonist”, for example, described the life of one of the ‘best-known and best-beloved’ people in Minlaton, ‘Granny Williams’, who remained an active member of the community in her eighties and had recently moved into her son’s house to help care for his family following his wife’s death.¹⁴ The article emphasised hardships faced and overcome, Williams and her husband ‘never daunted’ by their trials.¹⁵ Mary Chambers, the 85 year-old widow of John Chambers, who had with his brother James funded the exploration conducted by John McDouall Stuart, described how, shortly after landing in the early days of settlement, they had built and lived in a rush hut near the Patawalonga, the need to undertake household work outdoors making the ‘old pioneer colonists so healthy and long-lived [as]

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹³ “A Worthy Woman Pioneer,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 9 July 1898, p. 82a.

¹⁴ *The Adelaide Observer*, 4 October 1907, p. 764a.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

They are matured in England and get a new lease of life here.’¹⁶ Chambers’ comment reiterated the early view that South Australia would be a good place in which to grow old, the conditions offering health and longevity to young and able emigrants. For some, like Mary, who lived to 91 years of age, the hope became reality.¹⁷

Distinct from consideration of the lives of specific individuals, one enduring treatment of the theme of ageing in popular culture and philosophical works involves reflection on the stages of life, suggested in poetry published in South Australia by such titles as, “The Round of Life”, “The Seven Ages of Woman”, “Changes of Life” and “Life’s Journey”.¹⁸ As the final stage of life, old age often receives sympathetic or even positive representation. “The Round of Life” traces stages in the lives of a boy and girl who grow together, depicting children by the sea side, young lovers courting, a wife and children waiting for and welcoming her husband home from sea and finally,

An aged man in an old arm-chair;
A golden light from the western sky;
His wife by his side with her silvered hair,
And the open Book of God close by.¹⁹

The notion that awareness of death increased as people aged and that, concomitantly, they focussed more clearly on matters spiritual is evident here, as in letters and diaries of the ageing and of people making observations about elderly relatives or friends. Thus, an old man delivering a speech in Parliament with confidence and conviction has a moment ‘when his

¹⁶ “A Worthy Woman Pioneer,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 9 July 1898, p. 82a.

¹⁷ *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915*.

¹⁸ “The Round of Life,” from *Chambers’s Journal*, in *The Adelaide Observer*, 25 March 1882, p. 514e; “The Seven Ages of Woman,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 15 July 1882, p. 139b; “Changes of Life,” Duncan Campbell Francis Moodie, *Poems* (Adelaide: J. Williams, 1873), pp. 40-42; Ella Wheeler Wilcox, “Life’s Journey,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 30 May 1885, p. 1051e.

¹⁹ “The Round of Life,” from *Chambers’s Journal*, in *The Adelaide Observer*, 25 March 1882, p. 514e.

eyes grew dim ... and he felt how quick [h]e was drawing near to Him.’²⁰ Similar themes appear in “Changes of Life”, which used metaphor based on negotiating the seas in a ‘bark’ to consider the various phases of life. After the ‘shell of childhood hoist[s] its tiny sail’, and the bark is ‘impelled by Youthful hand’, before facing ‘strife, ... [in] Manhood’s ripening years’, the ‘peaceful prow glides softly into port’, and ‘Aged Man ... Infolds the thoughts his earthly pride obeyed’.²¹ Moodie repeated here the frequently expressed idea that, ‘wearied with the day of ceaseless strife’, old people are glad to ‘Gain ... the mild ev’ning of a stormy life’, when the ‘spirit freed, remounts its native skies’.²² Harry P. Gill’s 1889 etching, *An Old Man* (Figure 11), conveys in visual form some of the elements of imagery of old age expressed in poetry and fiction. The old man depicted here sits in shadow, still and steady. He has an air of contemplation about him consistent with the notion expressed in poetry that as people aged they tended to withdraw, to reflect upon their lives and to consider matters spiritual.²³ Equally, this old man could be contemplating the future, as suggested in poems such as “The Grand Old Man”, which asks what the old man, sitting in his study chair, is thinking, and remarks that rather than dwelling on the past thinking ‘Of his fifty years of fighting’, he looks forward, as ‘He holds the battle-plan.’²⁴

²⁰ “I am not so Young as I was,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 3 May 1890, p. 861a.

²¹ “Changes of Life,” Moodie, *Poems*, pp. 40-42.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²³ As in poems such as “Changes of Life,” Moodie, *Poems*, p. 42, and “The Round of Life,” from *Chamber’s Journal*, in *The Adelaide Observer*, 25 March 1882, p. 514e.

²⁴ “The Grand Old Man,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 7 November 1885, p. 905b.

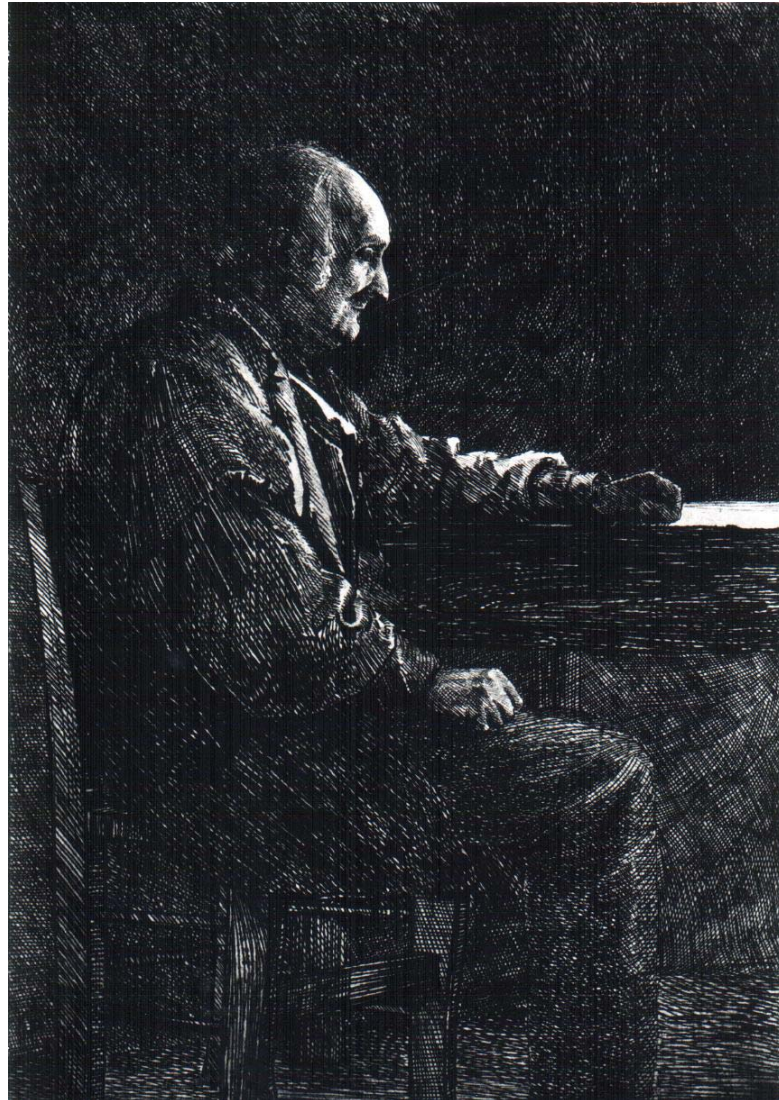


Figure 11 691G2, An Old Man, 1889, etching, artist: Harry P. Gill.

Ernest Gall's photograph of Janet Lawrie depicts an elderly woman reading in her rocking chair, her knitting by her side, an image which is representative of others and which reinforces the notion of old age as a time of contemplation (Figure 12).



Figure 12 B 47059, Mrs. Janet Lawrie [at c.80 years], 1890, photograph, artist: Ernest Gall.

Some writing that reflected on the last stages of life described how love and beauty found continued expression in old age. Rather than including old age merely as part of the cycle of life Lucy Larcom's poem "Two Grey Heads" is unusual in that it focused solely on describing and celebrating the love and life of an elderly couple. Larcom described how,

Her soul through her aged features shines
 And the sun-streams over his white locks pour;
 They are lover and bride, as of yore,
 In their cottage under the pines
 Although they are full fourscore.²⁵

²⁵ "Two Grey Heads," *The Adelaide Observer*, 13 June 1885, p. 1147a. Lucy Larcom provides an example of an American whose works became part of the everyday cultural material encountered by South Australians.

This celebratory description of ‘three-score golden years’ of marriage conveys the notion that love can still be ‘a blossoming glory’ in old age even though ‘Time’s plough-mark furrows the wrinkled face’.²⁶ The poem “After Youth” expressed a similar sentiment, stating that

When youth is o’er
The beauty of our lives is not departed.²⁷

The positive portrayal of ageing that characterised some poems expressed attitudes found also in prescriptive literature of this period. Part of a body of verse urging people to make the most of their lives, “The Lost Years” warned,

a heart grown old in a youthful breast
Is the crown of earthly woe.²⁸

Similarly, “Life Viewed with Different Eyes” encouraged readers to live life to the full. Once again taking the idea of stages of life, the poem began with an impatient boy who tossed ‘his curly head’ and pondered how he could ‘wait for [his] seeds to grow’, moved to the worker, who, ‘Slowly raising his stately head’ realised that he has ‘No time ... to toy with fate’ if he wanted to ‘climb to manhood’s high estate’, and finally turned to the old man who observed, ‘Bowing his grand, white head’, that ‘Life is short as the summer night’.²⁹ Emphasis on making the most of life rather than having regrets in old age is also evident in J. Sadler’s “Life’s Garden”, in which the poet challenged readers to look back at their lives and see that they had left some impression on the world:

When o’er thy head the weary years have passed,
And silver locks shall deck thy wrinkled brow;
When those bright eyes their lustre shall have lost,
And age shall mark where beauty dwelleth now

²⁶ “Two Grey Heads,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 13 June 1885, p. 1147a.

²⁷ “After Youth,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 19 February 1886, p. 380a.

²⁸ “The Lost Years,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 4 October 1890, p. 666e.

²⁹ “Life Viewed with Different Eyes,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 12 December 1885, p. 1145d.

When Time hath touched thee with his iron hand ...
 When life but little pleasure can command
 Wilt thou, in looking back along the way,
 See aught that thou hast planted with *thy* hands?
 Say, shall thy memory perish in a day?³⁰

The power of the individual to choose how they lived recurs as a theme in poetry and anecdote. The short poem “Two Little Old Ladies” provided an illustration of this moralistic theme, describing how two old women who shared a house reacted to life in different ways, one being ‘grave’, and the other ‘gay’, one saying she could not be happy when there was so much trouble in the world, while the other said, ‘She had not time to be sad ... When hungry children were crying for bread’, and therefore busied herself knitting and baking for others.³¹

Advice, both practical and perplexing, about how to remain positive and healthy in old age, to achieve longevity and to age gracefully abounded in the newspapers and periodicals of the late nineteenth century. Testimonials assured readers that help was at hand, 80 year-old William Tracy stating, ‘an old man is not so strong as he used to be; but he need not be unhealthy if he is careful I firmly believe that I owe my good health to Bile Beans for Biliousness.’³² Mother Seigel’s Syrup similarly received resounding endorsement from a woman who declared, ‘I am eighty years of age, and can do almost any kind of work easily and with comfort. I owe it to Mother Seigel’s Syrup and recommend the Syrup to all my friends ... especially those ... advanced in life’. Presented as a column piece, the advertisement noted persuasively that, ‘there are a good many old people in this country’, that, ‘Old age is a time when life is apt to seem a heavy thing to bear’, that old people need ‘gentle and good

³⁰ “Life’s Garden,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 7 November 1885, p. 905b.

³¹ “Two Little Old Ladies,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 16 January 1892, p. 140b.

³² *The Adelaide Observer*, 28 April 1900, p. 822b.

medicine' for their digestive and rheumatic complaints, and that, 'for curing and mitigating the ailments of old people, there is nothing in the world so good as Mother Siegel's Syrup.'³³ Length and quality of life provided the subject of articles with such titles as "Women and Long Life" and "What is the Secret of Eternal Youth?"³⁴ While some reports noted the positive effects of improved 'sanitation, nutrition and morality', moderation in eating and drinking, and 'freedom from anxieties' in extending life, other recommendations included the exhortation to love well, for 'when the husband remains a lover all his life, it follows that the wife remains young also.'³⁵ Advertisements and articles offered solutions for ailments as diverse as rheumatism, 'depression, palpitation of the heart, ... impaired eyesight and memory, ... dizziness, [and] groundless fears', and suggested ways to 'acquire health and strength, secure long life, and avoid the infirmities of old age.'³⁶ A plethora of advertisements and articles presented ways to prevent the effects of ageing, considering, for example, the 'significance and cause' of lines and wrinkles.³⁷ An advertisement for Lockyer's Sulphur Hair Restorer urged readers, 'Don't Look Old', and others stressed the importance of diet, 'simple living, plenty of sleep, exercise, and sunshine, good wholesome food and drink, and absolute cleanliness' in the search for youthful looks.³⁸

³³ "Comfort for the Old Folks," *The Adelaide Observer*, 19 November 1898, p. 1023d.

³⁴ "Women and Long Life," *The Adelaide Observer*, 2 March 1895, p. 424c; "What is the Secret of Eternal Youth?" *The Adelaide Observer*, 18 January 1896, p. 38a.

³⁵ *The Adelaide Observer*, 18 October 1884, p. 750d; "Women and Long Life," *The Adelaide Observer*, 2 March 1895, p. 424c; "What is the Secret of Eternal Youth?" *The Adelaide Observer*, 18 January 1896, p. 38a.

³⁶ *The South Australian Figaro: Literary and Critical Journal*, 10 November 1877, p. 2a; *The Adelaide Observer*, 17 September 1898, p. 597a.

³⁷ "Lines and wrinkles – their significance and cause," *The Adelaide Observer*, 5 March 1898, p. 471e.

³⁸ *The Adelaide Observer*, 29 January 1898, p. 226e; "How to Look Young," *The Adelaide Observer*, 28 May 1898, p. 1048a.

Amid the many products and strategies aimed at keeping old age at bay came advice to accept the natural process of ageing and make the most of life, as ‘each stage of life has its own charm’, and no woman should ‘regard herself as *passé* at any age, if she grows old gracefully.’³⁹ One article took this point further, advising women to use the ‘sweet calmness of later life’ or ‘lose that rarest beauty, that charm which no one can resist, which comes with happy old age’.⁴⁰ If a woman could attain that state by exercising gently, eating sensibly, ‘keeping in touch with issues of the day’ and looking ‘freshly neat’, she would be ‘of more value than any other member of her family circle, and need not sigh for any hour of past importance.’⁴¹ Instructions as to how to conduct oneself well in old age even included details of dress.⁴² Some reports celebrated the activities of those who did retain their health and energy in old age, like the 72 year-old woman who hiked up a mountain in Tasmania, waltzing with her daughter on the descent.⁴³

Negative portrayal of the ageing

In contrast to literature focussing on positive aspects of ageing, negative representations emphasise the physical deterioration, misery, regret and loss that old age can bring and exaggerate recognised attributes to present old people in caricature, as ridiculous, eccentric or miserly. As with more positive material, negative portrayals did draw upon reality and included writing of various styles, from the frivolous to the moral and philosophical. “The Seven Ages of Woman”, a frivolous piece penned by ‘Cantankerous Curmudgeon’ and

³⁹ “How Long are Women Beautiful?” *The Adelaide Observer*, 12 February 1898, p. 328e.

⁴⁰ “Growing Old Beautifully,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 27 May 1899, p. 1008c.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² “How Elderly Women should Dress,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 10 June 1899, p. 1104c.

⁴³ *The Adelaide Observer*, 23 April 1892, p. 798c.

parodying Shakespeare's work, purported to describe stages of a woman's life according to the clothes worn. So the 'Befrilled and broidered' baby became the 'trim-hosed school-girl', the 'flirt, [o]gling like Circe', 'a bride ... vested like an angel', and 'the matron ... with eyes severe, and skirt of youthful cut'. Positive representation in the sixth stage, when a woman became the,

grey yet gorgeous grandmamma,
With gold pince-nez on nose and fan as aide,
Her youthful tastes still strong, and worldly wise,

gave way to negative emphasis in the seventh stage. This final phase of life was parodied as the one,

That ends the Sex's Mode-swayed history,
Is second childishness and sheer oblivion
Of youth, taste, passion, all – save love of Dress! ⁴⁴

That some of those inspired to write about old age focussed on the misery it could bring is evident in titles such as "The Grief of Old Age", and "Too Old".⁴⁵ A tone of despair, conveyed by phrases such as 'anguish-laden brow', 'languid, listless eye', 'face so overcast', and 'time-worn soul',⁴⁶ pervaded the poem "The Grief of Old Age", which emphasised the 'merciless' process of ageing, the 'Harsh sorrow' it brought and the helplessness of others in the face of ageing:

Oh! rugged, aged cheek!
To view thy misery
Makes all my soul grow weak

⁴⁴ "The Seven Ages of Woman," *The Adelaide Observer*, 15 July 1882, p. 139b.

⁴⁵ "The Grief of Old Age," *The Adelaide Observer*, 22 March 1890, p. 571a; "Too Old," *The Adelaide Observer*, 1 February 1890, p. 235d.

⁴⁶ "The Grief of Old Age," *The Adelaide Observer*, 22 March 1890, p. 571a.

That cannot comfort thee.⁴⁷

In the melancholy piece “The Mournfulness of Life,” one of the many poems treating the stages of life, G. Wilfred Anthony drew upon Burn’s line ‘Man was made to mourn’ to tell how in later years, ‘Dreams, ambitions, one by one, Die like flowers whose day is done’, and ‘disappointment spreads his net, To catch each hope unstrangled yet’, until in old age, ‘as the head and heart grow grey ... The last faint ray of comfort’s cheer’ is chased away, and ‘the aged, deep-lined face ... Looks back on sorrows, last and first’.⁴⁸ Regret, another dominant theme, informed the poem “When I was Young”. Focussing on the good times of the past, ‘Waratah’ mused on the fact that, ‘When I was young the world was kind ... [and] the sun was bright’, and that although he had ‘prayed for life, [a] long, long life’, he wished that he had died when he was young, thus avoiding the pain of old age.⁴⁹ Expressing longing for the simplicity and joy of childhood, H. H. Blackham wrote of his desire to shed ‘life’s toil and pain’, and ‘Cast off the years that have left him grey’.⁵⁰ Others seemed resigned to the fact that ‘the days of old age are dreary’, and that therefore,

’Tis not hard to lie
In the restful grave
When the body and brain are weary.⁵¹

Inevitably, those who lived long lives experienced loss, and a range of poems treated this topic in the style of the era. Great loss experienced in old age through the death of a

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ “The Mournfulness of Life,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 12 December 1896, p. 1147b.

⁴⁹ “When I was Young,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 4 June 1898, p. 1093a.

⁵⁰ “To Childhood Back,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 19 February 1886, p. 380a. Henry Hamilton Blackham died aged 83 in 1900, *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915*.

⁵¹ “The Old Bard,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 19 March 1892, p. 572a.

spouse was the subject of the poem, “The Old Wife”.⁵² Describing an old man’s ‘sad and tender’ vigil by his ‘aged wife[‘s]’ deathbed, the verse is representative of many others, evoking images that play strongly on the emotions. The old man appeared ‘weak and tearful, trembling’, as he tried to reassure his confused wife about the time of day and the well-being of their children, long dead. The poem is both pathetic and romantic, describing the sadness of her death, the loneliness of the old man left behind, whose ‘grief grew strong and stronger’, and his own death soon after hers, so that ‘they had their “diamond wedding” in the skies.’⁵³ Sometimes the loss experienced was that of function rather than of a loved one. One poignant piece, “The Old Schoolmaster”, described the reaction of a school teacher, who, told that he is too old to continue teaching, sat at his desk ‘at the close of the day’ feeling ‘the weight of his many years’ and with ‘His form ... bent and his hair ... grey’, ‘his eyes ... dim with ... falling tears’.⁵⁴ For the teacher, whose career had been his life, it was a blow to be told he was ‘Too old! too old!’ and he remained in the empty classroom remembering his students, many of whom he had outlived.⁵⁵ The following morning, ‘the face of the master was white and still – His work was finished, his school was out.’⁵⁶ Loneliness, a feature of old age for many, inspired poetic descriptions of the lot of some aged individuals. Popular poet Mrs. T. C. Cloud, or ‘Lindsay Duncan’, wrote of the loneliness of an old sick man as he faced ‘Another dreary Christmas-tide alone!’ in his ‘wooden shanty, common, rough, and bare’.⁵⁷ The old man was ‘well on in years; deep-lined and grey’, and had ‘lost ... All that he lived for while he still

⁵² “The Old Wife,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 29 March 1890, p. 619a.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ “The Old Schoolmaster,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 27 August 1887, p. 1708a.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Lindsay Duncan, “Christmas Guests,” in Douglas B. W. Sladen, ed., *A Century of Australian Song* (London: W. Scott, 1888), pp. 150-153.

was young', having been 'driven' by 'Death and Sorrow' to 'lonely labour in an Austral clime'.⁵⁸ In his loneliness, he was 'visited' by his wife and child, who had died many years earlier, and when neighbours visited on Christmas Day, they found him 'Calm, placid, still', and dead.⁵⁹

Depictions of old people as ridiculous, unpleasant or fearsome appeared in a variety of published forms. William Hay wrote in the late 1890s and early 1900s and professed to be inspired in style by Dickens; he certainly included detailed and unforgiving descriptions in the unfinished work "The Return of Robert Wasterton". The Sandcovers, for example, were introduced as 'an aged mother and daughter of the war-horse order' who, when 'particularly enraged', would 'drive past and repast the gates of their opponents ... in a trap specially chosen ... - all rattle and loose springs – which gave ... [their] faces ... a ferocious appearance of grinding teeth'.⁶⁰ Elderly characters in Hay's fiction presented recognizable stereotypes, including 'old Sir Davy Bennet', described as an 'old fellow' attached to tradition and as a 'cheerful, successful old maniac', 'old deaf Mrs. Cottle' who appeared as a subject of mockery, being the only one to laugh at a story because she was 'told it was funny', and other elderly women dismissed lightly as 'Being only a pair of maiden old ladies'.⁶¹ Older characters were similarly cast in the young author Inez Hyland's writing. The narrator in Hyland's short love story "T. B." described herself as 'an elderly spinster, with small means and much

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-153.

⁶⁰ Ian D. Muecke, "'The Return of Robert Wasterton': William Hay's Comedy of Australian Manners," *South Australiana*, VII (1968), p. 99.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 96.

neuralgia', who was 'lank and lean [did] not smile', and strongly disliked children.⁶² Other elderly figures in this lightly humorous dream-based story appeared as an 'irate old lady ... scolding the conductor', and as a 'horrid old crab' who leered.⁶³ 'Skinflint', a widower of means inclined to snort 'vigorously', preventing conversation, wished his daughter to marry a minister called Boozeley, and angrily declared when his maid left and his daughter eloped that the latter had 'desert[ed] me in my old age, the viper', and both left him 'a lonely, lonely man in my old age'.⁶⁴

As in earlier decades, newspapers and journals included frivolous sections in which anecdotes appeared, stereotypes presented therein often typifying treatment of the old. "The Old Lady's Mistake" related the embarrassment of a 'worthy old lady from the country' who mistook an old lady leaning against a counter for a dummy and attempted to straighten her up. She attributed her mistake to her tendency to be unable 'to mind her own business', a common stereotype about old women, and said she would not forget the incident if she lived 'to be as old as Methuselah!'⁶⁵ The image of old woman as gossip applied to those of all backgrounds, an article in *The South Australian Figaro* describing the misdemeanours of a 'querulous old washerwoman, with a singular propensity for paying more attention to other people's business than to her own', who lurked around McDonald's Theatre Royal Hotel at night and made 'extravagant exaggerations and intentional misstatements'. Again, the writer used the anecdote to present the moral, 'Mind Your Own Business'.⁶⁶ The continuing notion that old people

⁶² Inez K. Hyland, *In Sunshine and in Shadow* (Melbourne: Robertson, 1893), p. 298.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 302, 308.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 302, 304, 312.

⁶⁵ *The Adelaide Observer*, 15 November 1890, p. 955a.

⁶⁶ *The South Australian Figaro*, 13 October 1877, p. 8a.

obstructed change and clung to unproductive tradition is evident in the use in the South Australian context of the imaginary figure Mrs. Grundy, first appearing in England in 1798 in Thomas Morton's play *Speed the Plough*. A writer in *The Observer Miscellany* cast Mrs. Grundy as an 'old colonist', symbolising all that constrained and prevented practical adaptations to life in the colony. Reinforcing the notion that to be old meant to be out-dated, Mrs. Grundy, 'the opponent of all important', was depicted as an old lady who dictated adherence to ridiculous conventions like following 'absurd fashions of London and Paris' that involved clothing ill-suited to the Australian climate.⁶⁷ Lawyers too, compelled to wear 'those hot and ugly wigs', could blame the 'spirit of this old lady' for their woes.⁶⁸

Descriptions of old people in fiction both perpetuated stereotypical views of the old and drew upon reality. Depiction of older characters as misers and eccentrics in the colony's nineteenth-century literature demonstrates continuity with European popular culture, in which such images had long had a firm place. As is characteristic of images expressed in art and literature, contemporary culture and observed reality informed and modified development and expression of these representations. Just as Catherine Helen Spence considered her work 'a faithful transcript of life' in the 1850s, so novelist Patrick Eiffe remarked 30 years later that many of his fictional characters corresponded to people he knew, Mr Ford, for example, being 'intended to represent an old man noted for his eccentricity and wealth'.⁶⁹ Ford, a successful

⁶⁷ "Mrs. Grundy in South Australia," *The Observer Miscellany*, supplement to the *Adelaide Observer*, 2 June 1877, p. 355.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 356.

⁶⁹ Spence, *Clara Morison*, p. xiii; Patrick Eiffe, *The Three L's: Lawyers, Land-jobbers, and Lovers* (Adelaide: Webb, Vardon and Pritchard, 1882), p. iv.

miller, hated lawyers and ‘had the reputation of being a miser through life’.⁷⁰ He remained single until he was over 50, and when he did marry, complained continually about the clothing requirements of his wife, who died within three years, leaving Ford to raise their daughter. When she reached marriageable age, Ford became wary of prospective suitors, suspecting that they were simply money-hunters. Miss Ford eventually returned to live with her father, remaining his companion until his death. The unflattering portrait of the miserly Mr. Ford, purporting to be drawn from reality, reflected and reinforced images that appeared consistently in light literature and short stories of the late nineteenth century.

The influence of local circumstance and observation is evident in fictional portrayals of older workers on the land that, while less recognisable than Eiffe’s Mr. Ford, lay equal claim to represent reality. In a short story depicting life on a typical station, the bullock-driver who brought much anticipated and overdue supplies was described as ‘a rum old chap with a face like carved mahogany, grey hair and beard, an old dirty cabbage-tree hat with a broad black ribbon and pipe stuck in it, blue shirt and moleskin trousers, and strong nailed boots – a load in themselves’.⁷¹ A complaint about the delay in delivery elicited a sharp response from ‘the old man, who is cross and tired and hungry, and who has been working for you day and night on the road, in wet and cold; but a few kind words sets him all right, and he is full of pity for you when you tell him you have been without a smoke for four days, and no sugar.’⁷² The image conveyed is of an individual craggy in looks and temperament. Robert Bruce’s novel, *Benbonuna: A Tale of the ‘Fifties’*, published in 1900 and set on and around a station 300

⁷⁰ Eiffe, *The Three L’s: Lawyers, Land-jobbers, and Lovers*, p. 27.

⁷¹ “The Sketcher, Yarns on Olden Times,” by G. B. W., *The Adelaide Observer*, 3 January 1880, p. 33de.

⁷² *Ibid.*

miles from Adelaide, introduced several older characters, none of whom supported the image of the elderly as venerable and worthy. The shepherd 'Baggs' was described as 'a squalid, ill-looking fellow, with a shock head of grizzly hair and a grey, tangled beard which looked as if they had never known a comb, while his tattered moleskin trousers and blue-checked shirt seemed equally innocent of soap.'⁷³ Baggs, a deceitful and lazy fellow, received a visit from a hawker, Paddy Consadine, 'a slightly less villainous-looking scoundrel than himself [Baggs]'.⁷⁴ Having consumed the alcohol brought by Consadine, Baggs and a visiting friend 'lay like sodden swine around the hut', and were found murdered the next morning.⁷⁵ Older shepherds, favourably described in some accounts, appeared here as indolent and unreliable. The ambivalence of attitudes to old people evident in the literature derived from long-standing traditions and stereotypes, but also drew upon observations in contemporary society.

The influence of the elderly in the late nineteenth century

Of course, elderly people really govern the world; its surface belongs to them; they make its laws and preach its sermons; endow its charities and order its dinners.⁷⁶

In contrast with images depicting the elderly as miserly, eccentric, worn-out or piteous in their plight, the above comment, by a young character in Catherine Martin's 1890s novel about family and society, highlights the reality that many colonists continued to work and exert influence in the community well beyond the age of 60. Ministers continued to preach, farmers worked the land, merchants ran their businesses, members of parliament remained in parliament and philanthropists continued their activities. The influence of the ageing also

⁷³ Robert Bruce, *Benbonuna: A Tale of the 'Fifties'*, p. 19.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 185, 193, 200.

⁷⁶ Catherine Martin, [Mrs Alick Macleod, pseudonym] *The Silent Sea*, vol. I (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1892), p. 28.

reached beyond the public sphere. In the private arena in their capacity as parents and grandparents the elderly held status and assisted family and community. Evidence of ongoing involvement of older people in public and community life appears in personal papers, in published accounts and in the visual record. Examples of the latter include photographs taken at formal gatherings around the turn of the century (Figure 13 and Figure 14). Such portraits, characterised by sombre and dignified mood, confirm through visual means the status of the old colonists. The image marking the unveiling of the Flinders and Baudin plaque at Encounter Bay is typical in that it shows a preponderance of elderly men, sporting white beards and walking sticks (Figure 13).



Figure 13 Photograph: B 17356, Flinders Plaque, [Unveiling of Flinders and Baudin plaque on the summit of the Bluff], 1902, photograph, artist: unknown.



Figure 14 B 45044, South Australian Pioneers, c.1901 [Query 1906], photograph, artist: unknown.

Few women attended such events or were photographed doing so, leaving the prevailing impression of the dominance and influence of older male colonists. However, on one significant occasion in 1871 early female colonists attended a function at the Town Hall to acknowledge pioneers, despite being told male colonists only were to attend, and an unofficial photographer recorded their presence (Figure 15).⁷⁷



Figure 15 Photograph: Excerpts from photograph taken at Town Hall, 1871. Photographer: Duryea

⁷⁷ Karin Ostermann, "The Story Behind the Photographs," *The Adelaide Review*, April 1986, p. 15.

One occupational group notable for its ongoing influence regardless of age was ministers of religion. There were no age-related restrictions in this vocation and many ministers began their careers as young men and continued to take an active part in community life until well into old age. Contemporary accounts praised the sustained ‘good work’ of such individuals.⁷⁸ The ‘highly esteemed old colonist’ Edmund K. Miller, who lived to 91, began preaching in 1848 in his early twenties and wrote of his many years’ experience as a minister.⁷⁹ Pastor Thomas Playford similarly preached and taught from the time of his arrival in the colony in 1844 until a few days before he died nearly 30 years later aged 78.⁸⁰ Some who emigrated later in life also continued to preach until death. Methodist William Orchard preached from his arrival on the Adelaide circuits in 1850 until he died, aged 72, nineteen years later.⁸¹ Another Methodist, Jacob Abbott, described as ‘a grand old Christian man, with clear intellect, aged eighty-five years’, preached 57 times in 1897, also continuing to work with benevolent institutions.⁸² Commentator William H Marcus described Bishop Augustus Short at age 70 as ‘a fine, hale old gentleman ... with a robust physique and a vigorous mind’.⁸³ Short, respected for ‘his ability, consistency, and kindness of spirit [was] a thorough man of business, with high administrative powers’, whose life had been ‘eminently useful’, and who now, ‘full of years and honour ... has the satisfaction of seeing the Church [of England] ... in a

⁷⁸ See for example, references to the work of Reverends Thomas Stow, Ridgway Newland and J. B. Austin, Bull, *Early Experiences of Colonial Life in South Australia*, pp. 300, 301.

⁷⁹ Miller’s book, *Forty Seven Years of Clerical Life in South Australia*, cited in *The Adelaide Observer*, 18 May 1895, p. 953ab; *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915*.

⁸⁰ Hussey, *More than Half a Century of Colonial Life and Christian Experience*, p. 359.

⁸¹ SLSA, D 6029/96(L), William Orchard, *Letters from Cornish settlers*, 1849-1904.

⁸² John Blacket, *A South Australian Romance: How a Colony was Founded and a Methodist Church Formed* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1899), pp. 100, 101.

⁸³ H Marcus, ed., *South Australia: Its History, Resources, and Productions*, p. 136.

high state of efficiency and prosperity.⁸⁴ Short continued active involvement and influence in philanthropic and religious matters until 1881, when poor health initiated his return to England, where he died at the age of 83.⁸⁵ After 40 years ministry in the Congregational Church in Adelaide, Francis Cox ceased active ministry in 1897 at the age of 80. The profile taken by pictorial photographer Ernest Gall in 1903, a year before Cox's death, shows a strong-minded, spirited figure (Figure 16). Cox provides another example of an elder whose influence was built upon decades of work within and beyond his congregation and who continued community involvement well into old age. Cox's work included acting as an advocate for members of the clergy, and, through the Aborigines Friends Association, for Aboriginal people. He clearly influenced his daughter, who became the first female Australian missionary in India.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Dirk van Dissel, "Short, Augustus (1802 - 1883)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, VI, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1976), pp. 122-123.

⁸⁶ Walter Phillips, "Cox, Francis William (1817-1904)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, III, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1969), pp. 484-485.



Figure 16 PRG 631/102/8, Francis William Cox, 1903, photograph, artist: Ernest Gall.

From its inception, many of the colony's leaders were young, the average age of Premiers upon first taking office, for example, being 43 years,⁸⁷ but the influence and involvement of old men in politics became increasingly evident throughout the century. The average age upon entry to parliament before 1900 was 42.4 years,⁸⁸ but numerous parliamentarians stayed on or became involved in their later years; biographical records show that of 346 members of parliament who took office in this period, 129 (37%) were aged 60

⁸⁷Based upon figures in Gordon Desmond Combe, *Responsible Government in South Australia* (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1957), pp. 188 - 200. On becoming Premier in the 1860s, Waterhouse, Boucaut and Strangways were aged 37, 34 and 36 respectively. In the 1880s Bray and Playford took office at 39 and Cockburn at 38. Of course the premiership was not the first public office undertaken by these men, and several assumed responsibility for significant portfolios at even younger ages. Strangways, for example, was 28 years old when he first became Attorney-General, and Bray became Minister of Justice and Education at age 33.

⁸⁸Based on the ages of 344 parliamentarians; the ages of two individuals could not be ascertained.

years or more, 42 (12%) were 70 or over, and 5 (1.4%) were 80 or over when they left office.⁸⁹ Seventeen (4.9%) began their term and eighteen died in office when aged 60 or over. The occupations of these older parliamentarians reflected the diversity in the community, pastoralists, medical practitioners, farmers, merchants, millers, builders, blacksmiths, tanners, coach-builders, mine owners, auctioneers and teachers all making a contribution. Only those with independent means could participate in parliament until 1887, when payment for members commenced. Charles Everard, a medical practitioner and farmer, resigned from the Legislative Council in 1869 aged 74, having served for twelve years. Charles Hare, whose various occupations included that of mine-manager near Moonta, entered parliament aged 43 and left 30 years later, shortly before his death. Clearly, age did not preclude interest in colonial affairs, a high number of those aged over 60 years being parliamentarians compared to the proportion of aged in the general population.

In business, too, the elderly remained involved and carried influence, evidence of their diverse activities appearing in sources such as newspaper articles, personal and family accounts, obituaries and wills. John Church developed a business as a ‘fancy goods merchant’ in Currie Street, working on his ‘commercial pursuits’ for nearly 50 years and only withdrawing his involvement a few years before his death at age 85.⁹⁰ Similarly, having worked as a businessman and horticulturalist from the time of his arrival in 1838, Charles Ware ceased working in his ninth decade, when he retired to live with his son at Balaklava.⁹¹ Women also maintained active involvement in various endeavours. Mary Thomas, a published

⁸⁹ My analysis, using Howard Coxon, John Playford and Robert Reid, eds., *Biographical Register of the South Australian Parliament 1857-1957* (Netley, S. A: Wakefield Press, 1985).

⁹⁰ *The Adelaide Observer*, 2 November 1895, p. 861c.

⁹¹ *The Adelaide Observer*, 18 October 1884, p. 750d.

poet, emigrated in 1836 with husband Robert, the government printer, contributed to the establishment of the colony's first newspaper, the *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register*, and managed the family's thirteen properties in Adelaide, including a leased hotel, until a few years before her death at 87.⁹² Just as colonists across a range of occupations entered parliament in middle age or beyond, some successfully took up other ventures. Dr. Charles Davies did both, entering parliament in his forties and acquiring a sheep station in his fifties, handing the property to his son upon or shortly before his death at 74 years of age.⁹³ In the colonial setting many individuals began businesses and founded organisations as young men and remained committed to their development over decades. Richard Tapley, for example, began the Mutual Insurance Company of South Australia in 1846 when he was 35 and worked in the company until his mid-seventies, retiring on an annuity in the 1880s.⁹⁴ Numerous well-to-do colonists who held positions of influence across the spheres of politics, religion and business and were generally free to choose when to withdraw from public life also contributed to the community through philanthropic activity.

Philanthropy – ‘endow its charities’

Those who governed the world by endowing its charities did so because they had the financial capacity and the will to give to others. The strength of the religious ethos among emigrants to South Australia was a powerful motivating force and colonists believed it was their duty to help others. In the period before significant and consistent welfare provision by the state, such benevolence made a significant contribution to the well-being of the poorest members of the

⁹² Beth Duncan, “Thomas, Mary (1787 - 1875),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Supplementary Volume, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), p. 380.

⁹³ Kerr, ‘*A Exelent Coliney*’: *The Practical Idealists of 1836-1846*, p. 57.

⁹⁴ *The Adelaide Observer*, 13 June 1891, p. 1135a.

community and therefore to the overall prosperity of the colony. Some individuals acquired principles of philanthropy early in life. Before migrating to South Australia William Giles had been responsible for distributing the alms of a wealthy Englishman, and in that instance, as in managing his own charitable distributions, he aimed not to judge those who needed help but to respond to necessity.⁹⁵ As a child, preacher and writer Henry Hussey had the task of leading an elderly blind Jew, a visitor to his father's British Coffee House, around the streets of London for 'a consideration'.⁹⁶ Perhaps this early experience stimulated Hussey's interest in philanthropy, for as a preacher he regularly visited aged people in their homes, seeing some weekly over several years. These old men and women suffered numerous ills and many were bed-ridden. Hussey considered that his visits to one woman, who had a 'chronic liver complaint', had lost her nose and was deaf and almost blind, 'seemed to strengthen her to trust in the Lord to the end.'⁹⁷ The family of Henry Hussey remained actively involved in philanthropic activities in old age. Although she was 'comparatively retired from the world, and weaned from its vanities', his mother-in-law, Jean Neill, who 'took great pleasure in ministering to her numerous pensioners', kept accurate records of accounts relating to relief given and knew when an applicant appeared twice in one period, adjusting the amount given accordingly.⁹⁸ When Neill died in 1890 'at the ripe age of 88' she was 'respected by all who knew her', her death deemed 'a serious loss to the many poor and afflicted ones she had helped for years in the time of want and trouble.'⁹⁹ The relief she distributed may have come from her own funds or from the Church. When Hussey himself retired in 1895 from his work

⁹⁵ Jane Isabella Watts, *Family Life in South Australia Fifty-three Years Ago, Dating from October 1837* (Adelaide: W. K. Thomas & Co., 1890), p. 151.

⁹⁶ Hussey, *More than Half a Century of Colonial Life and Christian Experience*, p. 12.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

at the Bible Hall and Tract Depot, which he established eleven years earlier, he wrote that he was glad to have ‘sufficient to provide for [his] small family, and a little to give to deserving individuals and public institutions’.¹⁰⁰ The commitment to philanthropic activity, initiated in youth, clearly remained strong in old age.

The philanthropic and community activity of older colonists took place at various levels, some more conspicuous than others. Elderly people continued to contribute to their community through, for example, teaching Sunday School. Emily Padman’s Sunday School teacher, known as ‘Old Lady Longbottom’, had worked as a missionary with her husband in India and continued to support the missionary movement from South Australia by making and selling garments and donating the proceeds, despite becoming ‘old and bent, and unable to do much walking’.¹⁰¹ George Fife Angas contributed to religious, educational and benevolent institutions over many decades, continuing to do so in retirement, and gave away up to £10,000 a year in the last years of his life.¹⁰² At a simpler, more personal level, Angas assisted individuals, his actions noted by Henry Hussey, who was Angas’ secretary from 1865 until the latter’s death in 1879 at the age of 90. When, for example, Angas heard that ‘town missionary’ Mr. Harkness and his wife had lost a child, he paid the medical bill and the cost of the funeral and asked Hussey to purchase a house for the couple to live in, rent-free. Shortly afterwards he forwarded a cheque for £50 to Hussey, requesting that he direct Harkness to purchase coal or firewood for ‘widows and others’ in and around Bowden, this action demonstrating his

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 488.

¹⁰¹ SLSA, PRG 452, Emily Churchward, *Churchward family: Summary Record*, 1859-1955, p. 32.

¹⁰² Author not named, Douglas Pike, ed., “Angas, George Fife (1789 - 1879),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, I, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1966), pp. 15-18.

broader philanthropic impulse.¹⁰³ Philanthropic work of older people for old people directly assisted individuals, provided systematic assistance through such ventures as the Cottage Homes, and contributed to the overall understanding of the needs of the aged poor. Insights of those actively involved in turn provided background information to the Royal Commission as deliberations about the need for and nature of an aged pension unfolded.

*

By the late nineteenth century the settlement of South Australia had matured in terms of population and the economic, political and social structures that would inform development into the next century had taken shape. In this context older members of the South Australian society assumed a more significant place than in the early years of colonisation. In fiction and poetry and in other works of popular culture, in items of daily news and in the visual record of colonial life the ageing appeared in various guises. Whereas the balance tilted slightly towards negative portrayals of old age early in the colony's history, when the ageing had little presence and little voice, a more even balance of positive and negative representations of older people is evident in the later years of the nineteenth century. The shift reflects the increased presence of the old in society and the active roles they assumed. Old people were farmers, artisans, shepherds, businesspeople, grandparents, preachers, teachers and parliamentarians. Their ongoing contribution to the colony's development was clear. Recognition of work done by young colonists now grown old led to published accolades of individuals. Yet among enduring images that had appeared in other western societies over many centuries were those that cast old people as garrulous gossips, misers and lechers; these representations retained their place in popular culture along with philosophical musings on the nature of old age itself and the

¹⁰³ Hussey, *More than Half a Century of Colonial Life and Christian Experience*, p. 317.

sadness, discomfort and loneliness it can bring. Mirroring the multi-faceted nature of public perceptions and attitudes to the ageing, the everyday experience of the ageing was not entirely positive. The aged poor, often less visible than their wealthy and influential counterparts considered by Catherine Martin's fictional character to 'govern' the world, increasingly became the focus of social and political discussion as the nineteenth century progressed and as they struggled to meet daily needs. Consistent with the goals of colonisation, which included the possibility of a comfortable old age, and faced with the reality that many older people did not live in comfortable circumstances at all, the South Australian community could not help but focus on the 'problem' of old age in the later years of the nineteenth century. It is to the reality of life experienced by older people in South Australia that the next chapter turns.

7 'THE DOWNGRADE OF LIFE'

The majority of old people did not 'govern the world' but were governed by it. By necessity many continued to work to support themselves into old age. Some found work increasingly difficult to find as they aged. Those who anticipated the need for support became members of friendly societies or took advantage of retirement provisions if they could. Changing circumstances arising from, for example, physical decline or widowhood prompted different responses, some elderly remarrying and others choosing to live alone or to reside with family. Family support, ranging from regular visits to altered residential arrangements, played a significant role in assisting old people across varying levels of dependence. Independence though was a hallmark for many. Neighbours often helped elderly individuals retain some degree of independence and charitable organisations also provided assistance. Those who were unable to work, had made no provision for themselves through retirement funds or friendly societies and could not rely on family, social or charitable networks turned to the government for support in the form of out-door or in-door relief.¹ Glimpses of daily experiences of older people, obtained through the filters of fictional writing and contemporary accounts, both published and unpublished, through the more limited visual record and through official reports and documents, confirm the diversity of that experience. The visual and written record not only attests to the varied roles, the status and the condition of older people in private spheres but provides background to the stronger emergence of old age as 'problem' in South Australia in the late nineteenth century.

¹ For an explanation of these terms see pp. 91, 92.

On the ‘shady side of fifty’

In the latter decades of the nineteenth century older men and women continued to engage in a wide range of occupations, working as farmers and farm labourers, shepherds, miners, domestic servants, governesses, labourers, blacksmiths, paddle-steamer captains and clerks, to name a few. However, some employers objected ‘to employ[ing] a man who begins to show signs of being on the shady side of fifty’,² and economic circumstances had a profound impact on older workers. The poverty that some experienced in the 1880s occurred in a context of ‘trouble of the severest kind’ and ‘an unexampled period of depression’,³ marked by poor harvests and low wool and copper prices. The difficulties older men faced in securing work are documented in various sources, including anecdotal reports. An *Adelaide Observer* reporter, ‘Magpie’, writing in a regular column, referred to the familiar sight of an old man walking ‘on country roads with a weather-beaten swag and a very black billy looking for work’, finding it harder each autumn to secure work for the winter. Evoking artist S. T. Gill’s earlier but enduring rendition of a trudging figure in *Knocked Up* (Figure 17), ‘Magpie’ described how,

Each year he tramps over the dusty white roads, and through the parched country with less hope, each year the miles seem longer to the weary blistered feet. He has done good work in his time, now he is old, worn out. I have seen just that look of patient hopelessness in an old man’s face.⁴

² “Old Colonists,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 9 April 1892, p. 694bc.

³ “Our Immigration and Emigration,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 1 August 1885, p. 216cde, *The Adelaide Observer*, 1 May 1886, p. 845c.

⁴ *The Adelaide Observer*, 19 November 1898, p. 1023e.



Figure 17 546D1, Knocked Up, c.1846, brown watercolour wash, white gouache on brown paper, artist: S.T. Gill.

The visual record confirms observations made in letters, diaries and contemporary accounts; the physical, social and economic setting of the colony demanded that old people remained active when possible. Most visual representations of old people in the nineteenth century involved those who had the means to have a photographic portrait taken or to have a portrait painted. The poor appeared only when photographers or artists chose to depict them. Among those who did choose to include ordinary people in their portraiture were artist S. T. Gill and photographers Frederick Joyner and Ernest Gall, their works adding to information provided in written sources about the lives of ordinary people as they aged. Pictorial photographer Frederick Joyner's portraits, for example, give visual form to impressions created in writing of older men working as labourers, showing glimpses of everyday tasks engaged in and of leisure moments. Old Simon, a local worker in the Adelaide Hills, appears in a series of photographs showing a worker at apple-picking time (Figure 18 and Figure 19). Depicted lighting his pipe with *His Last Match*, Simon appears again in *Boiling the Billy*, both

photographs representing activities typical of many an itinerant older worker (Figure 20 and Figure 21).⁵

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 188
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 18 8113Ph45, Autumn, 1903-12, photograph, artist: Frederick Joyner.

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 188
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 19 8113Ph43, In the apple loft, 1903-12, photograph, artist: Frederick Joyner.

⁵ Jean Waterhouse, with Alison Carroll, ed., *Real Visions: The Life and Work of F. A. Joyner, South Australian Photographer 1863-1945* (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 1981), p. 5.

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 189
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 20 8113Ph40, His last match, 1903-12, photograph, artist: Frederick Joyner.

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 189
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 21 8113Ph41, Boiling the billy, 1908, bromide photograph, artist: Frederick Joyner.

Other photographers also gathered images of older workers. The composition of the photograph portraying men at Clarendon suggests they have been working on the land, although the group includes a one-legged man on crutches (Figure 22). Despite their elderly appearance, the youngest was 49 and the oldest 62, highlighting the difference between

physical and chronological age noted by emigration officials.⁶ An active working life clearly suited them, all living into their eighties or beyond, Jack Tester dying at 95. Another unnamed photographer took the portrait of three similarly rugged and older individuals who obtained their living on the river (Figure 23).



Figure 22 Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia. SLSA: B 35550, Clarendon, [Four elderly men, Ted Dix, [first name unknown, probably Charles] Hicks, Phineas White and Jack Tester], c.1880, photograph, artist: unknown.



Figure 23 Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia. SLSA: B 6424, Captains of River Steamers, c.1875, photograph, artist: unknown.

⁶ See discussion in Chapter 2, pp. 57, 58.

Composition of the workforce changed as a corollary of shifts in the colony's demographic structure, reflecting the ageing of young immigrants. Among increasing numbers of older workers some continued working because they felt no need or desire to stop, but many had to keep working to secure adequate income. Only physical or mental disability barred an adult from working until legislation forced the retirement of public servants.⁷ In the severely depressed economic circumstances of the early 1890s, 'elderly Civil servants ... [were]in fear and trepidation lest steps should be taken to dispense with their services.'⁸ In 1894 fear that the government would follow the Victorian example and 'get rid of all sexagenarians' led to a report on the subject in the *Observer* detailing the case of a worker in the Post and Telegraph Department who 'on account of his advanced years' was told to take leave and then retire, which he did not want to do.⁹ As he was able to function effectively and was on the 'Fixed List' he did not have to comply with the government request. Some years later the government delayed adjustment of the retirement age to allow the highly valued Charles Todd, aged in his late seventies, to choose when he would retire.¹⁰ Eleanor Giles, whose father would be affected by the legislation, observed, 'People can be so different at seventy years of age: some remain hale and hearty and others are on the downward path', leading some to consider 'seventy too old for heads of department'.¹¹ Retirement was possible for those who could provide for themselves in their later years, and some government officials did have access to retirement funds. The material wealth of some elderly colonists as revealed in the probate records considered in Chapter 5 indicates that a good proportion of those who

⁷ The Retirement of Public Officers Act, 1903, no. 827.

⁸ "Hustling out Elderly Civil Servants," *The Adelaide Observer*, 28 April 1894, p. 797d.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Todd retired in 1905, aged 78, and the Retirement of Public Officers Act was enacted on 30th June 1904. The Act provided that an officer aged over 70 who was deemed 'competent and willing' could remain in office, at the Governor's discretion, for a period of twelve months.

¹¹ SLSA, D 5879(L), Eleanor Giles, *Reminiscences of Eleanor Giles*, p. 23.

emigrated in the first decades of settlement in the hope of securing ‘a little property’ and the means to live comfortably in old age did attain that goal.¹² Knowledge that retirement was ‘looming’ led to family decisions, some moving to a smaller house or taking on an acreage where they could grow ‘some of the food’.¹³ Daniel Adcock, a member of the Young Men’s Christian Association in the 1860s, made trips to the South-East for his health as he grew older. Perhaps thinking of retirement himself, Adcock reported to his wife from Mount Gambier in the early 1890s that many older people had ‘acquired a satisfactory competency – though perhaps in some cases a very modest one – and to have settled to enjoy retired life most contentedly’.¹⁴

Activity and independence

Some social observers formed an optimistic view of the situation for the elderly in the colony. Contemporary commentator May Vivienne travelled widely in Australia and considered that the ‘longevity of South Australians is becoming really remarkable’; she noted that among 32 recent deaths seven individuals were between 70 and 80, and seven were over 80 when they died, the average age being 72 years.¹⁵ Supplementing these observations with descriptions of active old people, Vivienne referred to encounters with a ‘cheerful old lady of 99’ living in Fulham and a ‘wonderful old gentleman of 101, Mr. W[illiam] Vincent, of Norwood, who

¹² Capper, *Capper's South Australia*, pp. 165, 166.

¹³ SLSA, D 5879(L), Eleanor Giles, *Reminiscences of Eleanor Giles*, p. 23.

¹⁴ SLSA, D 3353(L), Letter from Adcock to his wife, 17 February 1892, D. J. Adcock, *Letters from D. J. Adcock, 1862-64, 1892*.

¹⁵ May Vivienne, *Sunny South Australia: Its City-towns, Seaports, Beauty-spots, Fruit, Vineyards, and Flowers; its Wheat, Wool, Wine, Sheep, Dairying, Copper, Iron, Phosphates, and other Progressive Industries from 1837 to 1908 with Map, 4000 Miles of Travel* (Adelaide: Hussey and Gillingham, 1908), p. 47.

chops wood for the stove, and carries to his dear old wife, who is bedridden, all her meals.’¹⁶ The old man’s ‘chief care’ was to tend to his wife’s needs, which he did with ‘strikingly pathetic ... tenderness’, rewarded by ‘her loving smile of gratitude’, while remaining active himself by going on daily walks. William died at 102, his wife Mary, who was almost twenty years younger, dying days later.¹⁷ Elizabeth Stead of Medindie, aged 102, ‘retained her faculties to a remarkable degree, and conversed on many subjects connected with her early life.’¹⁸ Vivienne concluded that ‘all these old folks so hale and hearty’ demonstrated that South Australians would not require any of the ‘new cures’ coming into fashion, including ‘New-life drops for the aged.’¹⁹ Whether or not the longevity and the physical capacity and independence of the ageing of South Australians was unusual, Vivienne’s account confirms that people supported themselves independently for as long as possible, the disturbing possibility of dependence on the government providing one motivation to do so. Again the visual record correlates with written observation, showing that as long as they remained physically able old people chose to remain in their homes, tending to their own needs. The photograph of 98 year-old W. Helbig by an unknown artist is similar in composition to Frederick Joyner’s depictions of an old man engaged in everyday activities and shows the German woman, practically dressed, bringing in her firewood supply, presumably a regular task and one requiring some physical stamina (Figure 24).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915.*

¹⁸ Vivienne, *Sunny South Australia*, p. 47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*



Figure 24 Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia. SLSA: B 39282, Elderly woman, Barossa [Mrs. W. Helbig, aged 98, pushing her firewood in the wheelbarrow], c.1890, photograph, artist: unknown.

Apart from involvement in paid work, public duties and philanthropic activities, the active and independent elderly fulfilled other influential roles in private life. The importance of the extended family in early South Australia has been noted at various points in this thesis. Grandparents provided financial support, helped with daily responsibilities and care and acted as temporary protector. In her late fifties Mary Ann Casely's mother assisted at her grandchildren's births, the young mother recording that, 'Dear mother was doctor and nurse!'²⁰ Years later when Mary Ann's husband, a minister, went to England for nine months in 1881-82, her 78 year-old father, apparently then a widower, came to stay with her and the young children, presumably offering some protection. As in earlier decades evidence of strong affection in relationships between the generations appears in personal and public writing of the 1880s and 1890s. A poem describing a boy hunting for his grandmother's spectacles and

²⁰ SLSA, D 5789(L), Mary Ann Casely, *Reminiscences of Mary Ann Casely*, 1839-1912, pp. 7, 14.

threading needles for her, and the grandmother caring for the boy, ended with the appreciative phrase, ‘there’s nothing like a grandmother to have about the house!’²¹ Photographs also give evidence of the strength of family bonds and the place of older members. T. H. Stoward’s photographic portrait of an old woman and young child attests to the role and function of grandparents. The grandmother pauses in her knitting to supervise the girl’s calculations on the abacus, the photograph conveying intimacy (Figure 25). In John Kauffman’s more formal portrait the central placement of the matriarch and patriarch in the photograph of the family of Emma Wolffe preparing to leave South Australia conveys a sense of the role and status of the older family members (Figure 26).



Figure 25 917Ph30, Old woman with child, c.1905, photograph, artist: T. H. Stoward.

²¹ “The Boy’s Grandmother,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 29 August 1891, p. 428a.

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 196
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 26 884Ph24, The Departure of Emma Wolffe and her Family, c.1907, photograph, artist: John Kauffmann.

In addition to family responsibilities, those who remained independent and active pursued their own interests in old age. Ernest Gall's photographic portraits capture some of the diverse activity of older South Australians. *Scientific Studies* depicts an elderly woman preparing slides, the man using the microscope to examine the specimen (Figure 27).



Figure 27 Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia. SLSA: B 47660, Scientific Studies, c. 1880, photograph, artist: Ernest Gall.

Difficult financial circumstances or physical or mental decline compromised independence and tested the strength of family bonds. Physical conditions like rheumatism

affected daily life, limiting ordinary activity and curtailing working life. Sufferers turned to advertised remedies and continued independently for as long as possible. In a letter to Priscilla Barker in 1884 a relative described Christmas presents she had sent, including a piece ‘embroidered by *herself*, although her fingers and hands are very much drawn and contracted with rheumatism.’²² When ailments associated with old age affected the capacity of family members to live independently, some relatives acted to manage the individual’s affairs. Priscilla Barker recorded in her diary in early 1892 that she had met with her Aunt Mary and other relatives ‘about Aunt Emily’, who was ‘in debt and incapable’, and that they would meet again to ‘see what can be done’.²³ In addition to observations made in letters and diaries, some writers of fiction described the role of family in assisting aged relatives and strategies used to seek financial support and companionship in old age. The notion that single women should dedicate themselves to the care of an ageing parent at the expense of pursuing their own lives, for example, is evident in works of contemporary fiction.²⁴ In John M. Waterhouse’s novel *The Medhursts of Mindala*, it becomes clear that after Dr. Medhurst suffered a seizure his daughter Eleanor, ‘will marry no one in her father’s lifetime’.²⁵ Her suitor watched Eleanor ‘lay down her book, lift her father from his chair, put the crutch under his arm, and stroll up and down beside his hobbling steps’, and stated, “‘It is only women who can endure such trials’ ... and his eyes were full of tears.’²⁶ Although fictional and melodramatic, such accounts show that family members actively assisted ageing relatives in a variety of ways. Prescriptive

²² SLSA, D 6418(L), Priscilla Barker, *Diaries of Priscilla Barker*, [1876 – 1900].

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ See, for example, Miss Ford’s dedication to her father in Eiffe, *The Three L’s: Lawyers, Land-jobbers, and Lovers*.

²⁵ John M. Waterhouse, *The Medhursts of Mindala: The Story of the Development of a Soul* (London: Stock, 1897), p. 231.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

literature, legislative requirements and limited assistance from the state combined to encourage and require such family involvement, but compulsion did not necessarily drive the choices of young family members. When, in Catherine Martin's three-volume account of family lives and fortunes, *The Silent Sea*, 25 year-old Helen's great-grandfather died 'at the ripe age of ninety-seven' and left her £3000 a year, she asked her father to give up his job and she became the mistress of the house, leading her to spend her time 'chiefly with elderly friends'.²⁷

Difficulties women faced in securing adequate resources in old age provided subject matter in fiction too. For another of Martin's characters, financial preoccupations dominated, and her life since widowhood 'had been one long panic as to the safety of gold mines, modified by high dividends from risky ones'.²⁸ Conversely, the financial security of some older people occasionally prompted younger women to consider marriage and some elderly men to consider themselves likely marriage partners; three sisters in Martin's novel, concerned about their financial future, married prosperous elderly men, thereby securing their place in the world.²⁹ The need for women to find financial security as they grew older inspired Sibella Edgcome's story about a middle-aged woman in need of money and a home who responded to an advertisement for a position as companion to 'an elderly gentleman, troubled with rheumatism'.³⁰ She found he was also 'stone deaf' and singularly unpleasant, a caricature of an eccentric and erratic old man. He required her to read to him for hours at a time. Eventually she called his bluff, reading for so long that he became agitated and threw a book at her head.

²⁷ Catherine Martin, *The Silent Sea*, vol. I, p. 26.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ "Wanted, A Middle-Aged Lady Companion," *The Adelaide Observer*, 27 August 1887, p. 1708a.

The story ends with the revelation that he had posed as deaf and difficult to meet a woman of character to marry. Considering the match sound, she married him.³¹ The real need for companionship in old age and security for women as they aged inform this story, penned as light entertainment.

‘Troubles and vicissitudes’ ; ‘no fault of theirs’

The colony’s newspapers provided a forum for stories of individual suffering and need and for discussion about responses to poverty among the aged. Often letters and reports raised the issue of whether or not the individual concerned was deserving of assistance. In a letter to the editor in April 1882, James Allen praised the ‘great signs of progress’ he observed in the colony but declared that it ‘grieved and pained’ him to see how many old colonists, once ‘well-to-do’, were ‘now greatly reduced in circumstances from no fault of their own’, and that no provision was made for them. Allen pointed out that Melbourne’s Old Colonists’ Association, founded by former South Australian George Coppin, provided well for such individuals and could provide a model for South Australia.³² Early the following year Thomas Bastard, manager of the City Baths, initiated the South Australian Old Colonists’ Association, emulating the Victorian example. Discussing its purpose and merits some declared that they ‘could not support the movement because the old colonists had had opportunities of getting on but had failed to grasp them.’³³ Bastard, however, held the widely supported view that many ‘had not had such opportunities’, and others ‘had been brought low through no fault of theirs’, being reduced to ‘such indigent circumstances that they had had to go into the Destitute

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *The Adelaide Observer*, 1 April 1882, p. 543b.

³³ *The Adelaide Observer*, 13 January 1883, p. 78a.

Asylum'.³⁴ Corroborating these comments, John Bull outlined his own experience as an old colonist and that of the Hack brothers, all of whom had endeavoured to bring stock into the colony and had suffered through change in government policy. Stephen Hack had worked hard but was 'now at home a cripple', and Bull had lost the means to retire comfortably.³⁵ The motion establishing the Association explained that its purpose was 'to mark the esteem and respect which the perseverance and industry of the early colonists have gained'. At the inaugural meeting, held on 20 February 1883, the declared aims included 'to establish homes for, and to assist necessitous "pioneers" and "old colonists" and their descendants'.³⁶ Editorial comment suggested that the Association deserved 'the cordial sympathy of the community' as its purpose was to 'save honest but unfortunate early settlers from the humiliating necessity of depending upon public charity'.³⁷ The same editorial pointed out that time would 'soon thin the ranks' of the old colonists; reports of deaths appearing on the same page confirmed this, referring to deaths of several colonists who had arrived in the 1830s and ranged in age from the early sixties to the late eighties.³⁸

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Edwin Hodder, *The History of South Australia: From its Foundation to the Year of its Jubilee with a Chronological Summary of all the Principle Events of Interest up to date*, vol. II (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1893), p. 98. After some discussion, 'pioneers' were deemed to be those who arrived before 28 December 1846, while the term 'old colonists' described those arriving in the next ten years, 'colonists' being those who arrived after 1856. Initially, those who arrived in the colony before 1840 and then 1841 would qualify as 'old colonists'. Reference to the Melbourne Association's rules led to shifts in definition. *The Adelaide Observer*, 13 January 1883, p. 78a, 20 January 1883, p. 120c.

³⁷ *The Adelaide Observer*, 20 January 1883, p. 120c.

³⁸ It is worth noting that most of these individuals died at home and were residing with children. *The Adelaide Observer*, 20 January 1883, p. 120b.

Letters from old colonists to the Association representing them related tales of ‘troubles and vicissitudes’ experienced ‘on the downgrade of life’.³⁹ Donations from individuals, like the £300 bequeathed by John Dunn, enabled the Association to assist those who had ‘helped build up the colony’ but had ‘suffered reverses’ and were ‘in their old age, unable to recover themselves.’⁴⁰ *The Adelaide Observer* provided a forum for those wishing to help old people in need. William Hitchcox, aged 80 himself, wrote a letter to the editor entitled “A Poor Old Man”, in which he highlighted the plight of Peter Lamont, aged 102, who had emigrated in 1839, had not saved any money for his old age, was dependent on charity and refused to go to the Destitute Asylum, having ‘a home of his own’ for so many years.⁴¹ Hitchcox expressed the hope that ‘some kindhearted person in his neighbourhood would get a woman to look after him, and see that he is supplied with the necessaries of life’, whether or not he deserved such help. Whether help was forthcoming is unknown, but both Lamont and his advocate died the following year.⁴²

Immigration policy and fear of the dependent aged

Fear and hope, emotions that motivated emigration and shaped private decisions and public policy relating to immigration in the early decades of colonisation, were recurring themes in discourse relating to older people in South Australia. In later decades, as the proportion of those aged over 60 in the population increased due to natural ageing of the population and low

³⁹ *The Adelaide Observer*, 28 December 1895, p. 1247d.

⁴⁰ John Dunn of Mount Barker died at age 92 in October 1894 and is likely to be the donor mentioned here, *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915*; *The Adelaide Observer*, 28 December 1895, p. 1247d.

⁴¹ “A Poor Old Man,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 2 February 1901, p. 214a.

⁴² *Ibid.*; *South Australian Deaths, Index of Registrations 1842-1915*.

birth rates,⁴³ a lingering dread of older emigrants who may become dependent on government assistance, compromising the prosperity of the colony, continued to characterise public and private debate. In the course of discussion about older migrants over several decades participants raised issues of dependence, self-reliance, the role of the elderly and the need to honour the ageing in ways echoed in later discussion leading towards the introduction of the pension. Concern that older emigrants might become dependent surfaced repeatedly in parliamentary and official consideration of immigration policy and practice. In the late 1850s Commissioner Francis Dutton reported to the Land and Emigration Commissioners in England that numerous emigrants lied about their age to secure passage to South Australia. He described ‘the deception practised [as] being of the most palpable character’, five individuals in particular having ‘evidently understated [their ages] by many years’.⁴⁴ Although those who slipped through the system and secured a passage joined friends and relatives in the colony, Dutton reasoned that gave ‘no guarantee that the aged may not, sooner or later, become a charge on the funds of the Destitute Board.’⁴⁵ From the 1850s to the 1880s discussion about immigration policy prompted parliamentarians and members of the public to caution that free immigration encouraged pauperism, to comment that subsidised migrants ‘flew’ to the government for support at the slightest difficulty and to emphasise the importance of self-

⁴³ Whereas in the mid-1870s families averaged six children, the average was four by 1905. The declining birthrate was attributed to rising age at marriage, fewer marriages and voluntary limiting of family size. Arthur A. Calwell, *How many Australians tomorrow?* (Melbourne: Reed & Harris, 1945), p. 19.

⁴⁴ “Correspondence Relating to Immigration, Extract of immigration agent’s report for quarter ended 30 September 1857,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 26, 1858 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1858), p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

reliance, suggesting that in cases of ‘real distress, voluntary benevolence should grapple with it.’⁴⁶

Discussion regarding the nomination system of immigration, which inevitably led to greater numbers of older people among resulting migrants, included consideration of the merits of a more flexible approach. Stephen Walcott, Secretary to the Land and Emigration Commissioners, observed in 1858 that the Commissioners had resolved ‘to treat remittance and nominee cases in a liberal spirit’, recognizing that this would lead to inclusion of ‘more aged persons than the ordinary selected emigration’, and that where applicants stated their age correctly they were reluctant to intervene.⁴⁷ An additional difficulty, stated Walcott, was that ‘it is often extremely difficult, in the case of Irish of the laboring class, to ascertain their exact ages’, as their appearance could be misleading, and records were often missing.⁴⁸ One reason given for a tolerant approach was that individuals who decided to emigrate and obtained initial approval to do so had to give up employment, ‘separate themselves from their connexions’ and incur expenses, so to reject them at the last would involve ‘great injustice and cruelty’, would ‘justly create an outcry ... and would be fatal to the future operations of all connected with it.’⁴⁹

⁴⁶ “Cessation of Immigration,” *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 29 September 1858 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1858), p. 249; “Free or Assisted Immigration,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 25 November 1882, p. 1034e. “The Unemployed,” *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 11 January 1870 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1870), pp. 1249-1251.

⁴⁷ “Correspondence Relating to Immigration, Extract of immigration agent’s report for quarter ended 30 September 1857,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. I, no. 26, 1858 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1858), p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

As immigration policy and practice varied according to perceived needs within the colony, age featured consistently and unsurprisingly as an issue. In the early 1870s those considered eligible for assisted passages included artisans, labourers, miners and gardeners under 50 years of age, single female domestic servants and widows without children under twelve, up to the age of 35, and wives and children of married immigrants.⁵⁰ Age restrictions for males continued to reflect the desire to encourage migration of the able-bodied and independent, while for women restrictions continued to encourage migration of those of child-bearing age. Applicants for assisted passage had to provide certification of their age, occupation and health status, the relevant forms to be signed by a physician or a magistrate or clergyman.⁵¹ Difficulties in ensuring that ‘false representations’ regarding such key qualifying factors as age, health and character did not result in the migration of ‘unsuitable persons’ continued in the late 1870s, a Select Committee urging that emigration agents take greater care in screening applicants.⁵² As Walcott had observed earlier though, many agricultural labourers looked ‘eight to ten years older than they were’ as a result of poor nutrition, and numerous migrants had physical ailments that remained undetected until after embarkation.⁵³ Among cases of chest disease and paralysis were older people who were ‘certainly ... not the sort of colonists we want here’, including one woman, ‘quite grey’, aged between 60 and 70 years.⁵⁴ Another immigrated as a domestic servant but was ‘quite unfit’ for such work, was around 60

⁵⁰ “Immigration Regulations, 1872,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. II, no. 21, 1873 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1873).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵² “Report of the Select Committee of the House of Assembly on Immigration; together with Minutes of Evidence and Appendix,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. III, no. 102, 1877 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1878), p. 31.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

years of age and since arriving ‘really has done nothing’; she applied to the Destitute Board for relief but was refused.⁵⁵

Despite the desire to exclude those whose age and other attributes made them unsuitable emigrants, the Committee suggested that relaxation of the regulations would encourage emigration of family groups and avoid excluding those wanting ‘to accompany their children and grandchildren to their new homes.’⁵⁶ Considering how to attract suitable migrants in the 1870s, the Select Committee asked how other settlements dealt with the issue. Responding, witness David Sutherland described the Canadian Government’s family approach used to attract desirable emigrants from the north of Scotland; strongly opposed to a ‘hard and fast line as to certain ages’, the Canadian Commissioner of Emigration argued that the country would save money by bringing out whole families, as ‘old people have more control over the younger ones than any one else.’⁵⁷ Asked to confirm whether the benefits of bringing out large, complete families would outweigh the ‘expense of introducing one or two old people’, Sutherland replied, ‘Yes; never mind the ages of the parents, the younger ones will grow up and be useful.’ The Canadians, said Sutherland, had been ‘very satisfied’, and felt the system gave them ‘value for money’.⁵⁸ Testimony of local farmers, the likely employers of such families, countered this positive view of whole-family migration. Asked if he would object to employing a family that included ‘the old father and mother, son and daughter in the prime of life, and half a dozen children’, Charles Heard, who farmed 2000 acres and employed permanent and seasonal workers, declared that ‘farmers, as a rule, would have nothing to do

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

with them.⁵⁹ He pointed out that ‘difficulties in making children maintain their parents’ could mean that such families ‘might turn their old relatives adrift for the State to look after’.⁶⁰ Heard’s testimony, expressed by a private individual in a public forum, is representative of broadly held views about the risks and responsibilities associated with the dependent aged.

*

Practical concerns and altruistic values regarding the ageing articulated in the course of determining and administering immigration policy found form in other aspects of colonial life too. Attitudes to and treatment of the impoverished elderly directly reflected contemporary mores and drew upon often uncompromising moral messages that stressed the importance of thrift and self-reliance. These themes emerge clearly in prescriptive literature, which both emphasised the need to respect and care for the ageing and suggested how to conduct oneself throughout life. Sermons added to advice that appeared in articles in regular publications, local ministers variously emphasising the wisdom of older people and their potential to contribute to society and identifying diligence, ‘self-denial and self-discipline’ as critical to success in life, as no-one can ‘make twenty seasons do the work of seventy’.⁶¹ The extent to which engagement with religion shaped colonists’ views of old age is difficult to ascertain, but ministers’ words undoubtedly carried widespread and profound influence. The dual emphasis on the need for society to value the elderly and for the ageing to earn respect through self-reliance and hard work is once again evident in public discourse. These values, so strongly expressed in the colony’s culture and considered in its policies, underpinned debate about the

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Gilmore, *Sermons by the Late Hugh Gilmore*, p. 128; Henry Howard, *The Summits of the Soul* (London: R. Culley, 1910), pp. 22, 166, 167.

pension. Increasing poverty and visibility of poverty among the aged in the closing years of the century impelled community and government response. Associated investigations and discussion unfolded in the context of the changing social and demographic profile of the colony and of responses to these issues in other colonies and overseas. Ambivalence of attitude to the ageing, evident in tension between notions of veneration and thrift and responsibility for oneself, characterised the discourse. Themes such as fear of pauperism caused by the dependent aged, the need for qualities of independence and acknowledgement of the positive influence of the elderly also emerged in debate related to immigration of older people to the colony in the second half of the century, setting the scene for discussion preceding the introduction of the pension.

8 RESPONSES TO THE PLIGHT OF THE AGED: TOWARDS THE PENSION

The previous chapter outlined experiences of the active and independent ageing and the difficulties faced by those who lacked financial independence or who experienced loss of independence through physical or mental decline, along with some of the strategies adopted in response. The purpose of this chapter is to consider more closely circumstances of the aged poor, the increasing extent of their plight in the late nineteenth century and the consequent responses at individual, community and government level. Consistent with other colonies in Australia, the colony of New Zealand and with countries including Great Britain and Canada,¹ the most comprehensive response entailed movement towards a non-contributory aged pension. Not surprisingly, ambivalence shown in societal attitudes to the ageing characterised the debate and discussion that culminated in the introduction of the Commonwealth Old Age Pension in 1909. Those involved placed emphasis both on the need to look after and honour the deserving aged, who contributed to the founding of colony and nation, and on the importance of encouraging thrift and self-reliance to minimise dependence on government assistance. So consideration of solutions to the ‘problem’ of old age reflected and crystallized themes already present throughout the century; these included, most notably, veneration for the aged and fear of the dependent aged. Both found expression in exaggerated form in the context of a colonial society that had initially sought to exclude the old, hoped that its colonists would be able to avoid poverty and create a comfortable old age and feared

¹ New Zealand introduced an old-age pension scheme in 1898; NSW introduced legislation for a non-contributory old age pension in 1900, enacted in July 1901; Victoria introduced an old-age pension scheme in January 1901. A means-tested non-contributory pension scheme for those aged 70 years and over began in Great Britain in 1908 and in Canada in 1927.

replicating conditions, including the dreaded workhouses, that were the lot of many aged poor in England.

Nevertheless, in the latter stages of the nineteenth century poverty and destitution did exist at significant levels and affected the aged in particular. The gradual increase in the proportion of the ageing in the population, resulting in part from the ‘increasing unpopularity of marriage’, ‘less fruitful’ marriages and a consequent decline in the birth rate,² posed particular challenges in providing for those who were neither in a position to ‘govern the world’ in their old age nor even to secure a small part of it for themselves. Evidence appearing in sources including personal papers, newspapers, government records and parliamentary papers and debates attests to the difficulties encountered. The colony’s origins and aspirations, and prevailing attitudes to the ageing all influenced responses at individual, family, local community, official and government levels in the late nineteenth century and widespread concern generated increasingly coordinated consideration of issues relating to charity and the destitute. A range of investigations into the nature of poor relief, with particular focus on provision for the aged poor, occurred in South Australia and in other colonies in the 1880s and ’90s and leading social reformers contributed to discussion. Similarly, historians Margaret Pelling and Richard Smith identify the 1880s as the time when ‘political debate concerning the material circumstances of the elderly began to grow.’³ At the inaugural Australasian Conference on Charity in Melbourne in November 1890, participants compared approaches

² “From Cradle to Tomb,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 5 August 1899, p. 281a. Births in 1898 - 1899 were the lowest since 1877.

³ Pelling and Smith, eds., *Life, Death and the Elderly*, p. 1.

taken by different colonies.⁴ Brief consideration of the South Australian perspective as presented by social reformer Catherine Helen Spence, who delivered a paper entitled ‘Charity in South Australia’, establishes a clear context for understanding the conditions of and responses to the aged poor in the colony in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Spence took care to identify points of difference in South Australia’s approach to treatment of the destitute, stressing that provision for the poor, funded from general revenue, had always been made in the colony even during times of ‘direst’ difficulty.⁵ Like others engaged in social reform, Spence considered the moral dimensions of poverty and the public response to it. She remarked that many, not just ‘socialists and sentimentalists’, considered ‘treatment of the aged poor in England as a scandal to civilisation and to Christianity’, and that the ‘thoughtful and humane’ condemned the 1834 Poor Law as ‘inadequate, cruel, and demoralising’.⁶ According to Spence, the insistence on ‘absolute destitution as the sole condition of affording relief to the aged and infirm respectable poor’ directly discouraged thrift.⁷ Although she condemned treatment of England’s aged poor and emphasised the successful role of outdoor relief in South Australia in enabling many to retain relative independence rather than becoming completely reliant on the state, Spence, like others, recognised that existing systems were under strain. Significant problems in providing ongoing support to the impoverished aged demanded different approaches.

⁴ Showing, for example, a centralized approach in South Australia and a mixed approach in Victoria. In Tasmania philanthropists had resisted the government’s attempts to take a centralized approach and New Zealand localised government action. Catherine Helen Spence, “Charity in South Australia,” *Proceedings of the First Australasian Conference on Charity, Held in Melbourne, from 11th to 17th November, 1890* (Melbourne: Robert S. Brain, Government Printer, 1890), p. 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*

The condition of the aged poor

Consideration of the everyday living conditions of the ageing and community responses is necessary to understand the nature of these difficulties. As described in the previous chapter a good proportion of South Australians worked well into old age, living independently or obtaining support through financial assistance, shared residence or regular visits from close relatives or friends and neighbours. Alongside such immediate and informal networks of support, assistance came from benevolent associations and from outdoor relief, administered by the government through the Destitute Board. Those who could no longer live independently or had no one to care for them turned to indoor relief in the Destitute Asylum, which initially provided care for a cross-section of the needy, including ‘widows, unmarried mothers, deserted wives, orphans, chronically sick, and the aged’ but shifted its main focus to the aged destitute.⁸ The Asylum offered permanent residence to ‘the aged, the infirm, the blind, the maimed, and the paralyzed who are destitute’, criteria for admission including total ‘incapacity for self-sustaining work ... and the absence of sons and relatives able to keep them.’⁹ Consistent with legislation in England family members in South Australia had a legal obligation to contribute to the maintenance of parents and grandparents, although legislation current in the 1890s held sons and grandsons liable but made no demands of daughters, sisters and granddaughters.¹⁰ In both instances ‘children, parents, or grandparents of a destitute person’ could be imprisoned if they did not provide for that person.¹¹ When authorities collected only £196 from relatives in 1896 in South Australia, the *Observer*’s reporter deduced

⁸ Brian Dickey, *No Charity There: A Short History of Social Welfare in Australia* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1980), p. 53.

⁹ Spence, “Charity in South Australia,” p. 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹¹ *The Adelaide Observer*, 3 October 1896, p. 12ab.

that, ‘almost every householder who was in a position to pay anything keeps his aged relatives at home if he can possibly do so.’¹² Another interpretation is that, by choice or not, some relatives simply could not be found.

Some family members shirked responsibility, but generally old and young collaborated, often with the help of outdoor relief, to help elderly relatives remain in their homes and avoid admission to the Asylum. Notes made by the Destitute Board’s Visiting Officer record their efforts.¹³ Adult children and grandchildren assisted the aged by paying the rent or sharing their residence. Joseph Wright’s two daughters, for example, paid his rent, and 81 year-old John Brown’s grandson assumed responsibility for payment of his grandparents’ rent.¹⁴ Mary Maddigan and Mary Walsh, ‘very feeble’ 76 and 79 year-olds, lived with their sons, each of whom had a large family of his own.¹⁵ Sometimes widows of two generations resided together, the mother supporting her daughter and the daughter later tending to her aged mother.¹⁶ Siblings too pooled their resources; 60 year-old Sarah Stanley, described as ‘partly imbecile’, lived with her brother, while Ellen Kelly, who was also 60 years of age and suffered from consumption, rendering her unable to work, lived with her sister.¹⁷ Family members were sometimes reluctant to share a residence with elderly relatives because they could be difficult, and in 1889 the Destitute Board offered this incentive: ‘Keep your father or your mother in your own house and we will give you one ration’, a proposition that if not ‘for the quarrelling

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ See, for example, SRSA, GRG 28/16, Reports of the Visiting Officer on Applicants for Relief, 1882 – 1885.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22 February 1882.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 February and 7 June 1882.

¹⁶ See, for example, *Ibid.*, 9 June 1882.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21 February and 27 February 1882.

... would make the maintenance of an old parent a mere featherweight.’¹⁸ Some elderly people who preferred to remain in their own home and managed with the support of children had great difficulty in managing their daily lives safely and effectively. Occasionally local newspapers reported fatalities reflecting these challenges. In an effort to keep warm in their small cottage in Hindmarsh one old couple, John and Mary Power, placed a galvanised iron tub containing an oilcan of burning charcoal between their beds. Their daughter, who tended to them regularly and had visited the previous night, arrived with a hot breakfast the next morning and found them dead, both having been overcome by the fumes.¹⁹

In the absence of family some received assistance from other sources, including neighbours and friends. Private arrangements made for the care of the elderly sometimes failed. Emily Churchward moved into the same boarding house and fed, washed and cared for a friend’s aunt, who, although younger than 70, ‘was childish and confined to her bed’, but found she could not maintain the heavy lifting required and had to leave after two weeks.²⁰ Eighty-three year-old widow Judith Francis, a ‘very feeble woman’, received help from ‘a few old neighbours’ to pay her two shilling per week rent, and friends paid rent for 77 year-old Ellen O’Sullivan and her 84 year-old husband and for crippled Catherine Leonard, aged 65.²¹ Charitable organisations played an important role in maintaining or extending the independence of the aged. Keen to inform the public about the nature of their work in the mid-1880s, the Charity Organisation Society invited a reporter to observe how it responded to

¹⁸ Spence, “Charity in South Australia,” p. 23.

¹⁹ “Extraordinary Death of an Old Couple,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 7 July 1888, p. 29b.

²⁰ SLSA, PRG 452, Emily Churchward, *Churchward family: Summary Record*, 1859-1955, p. 135.

²¹ SRSA, GRG 28/16, Reports of the Visiting Officer on Applicants for Relief, 1882 – 1885, 21 February, 22 February and 1 June 1882.

applicants for relief. Assistance mostly involved supplying ‘immediate necessities’ or helping people to secure work by, for example, supplying a mangle so that a woman could undertake washing.²² Among the applicants for relief though was a ‘poor, proud old fellow’ who had no ‘kith or kin’, had only worked occasionally for years due to illness and wanted help to pay his rent. Like many others he resisted the suggestion that he enter the Destitute Asylum or the Home for Incurables, unable to ‘bear to think that he must end his days in a charity house’.²³ Without such assistance some aged individuals had little choice but to enter the dreaded Destitute Asylum, losing all vestiges of independence.

Even with assistance many aged struggled to contend with illness and poor living conditions. Case notes of the Destitute Board’s Medical Officer in 1882 – 1883 record problems such as rheumatism, bronchitis, ulcers, asthma and anaemia.²⁴ Death came relatively swiftly for some; 64 year-old widow Isabella Craig died after suffering from paralysis for three weeks with no treatment being considered suitable.²⁵ Some, like 78 year-old labourer James Read, who was ‘too old for [an] operation’ on his cancerous jaw, endured illness over a longer period.²⁶ A common cause of death cited in the Medical Officer’s records is ‘senile decay’, and the ailments most commonly listed include senility and debility, afflicting some from their early to mid-sixties.²⁷ The difficulties associated with senility make Spence’s observation that ‘good temper, patience, and pleasantness oil the wheels of life ... and are

²² *The Adelaide Observer*, 15 August 1885, p. 296abc.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ See, for example, SRSA, GRG 28/23, Outdoor Relief, Medical Officer’s Case Book, 1882 -1883, 7 May 1882, 23 April, 23 May, 21 June and 4 August 1883.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, August 1882.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27 February 1883.

²⁷ See, for example, John Kenny, aged 64, 5 September 1882, and Eliza Murray, aged 62, 4 May 1882, SRSA, GRG 28/23, Outdoor Relief, Medical Officer’s Case Book, 1882 -1883.

especially valuable in the relations between the old and the young',²⁸ the more compelling. For some, illness meant the end of independence; 74 year-old labourer Donald Macnamara's senile decay instigated his move to the Destitute Asylum.²⁹ Emphasising that in most cases the poor were 'a self-respecting class' who endeavoured to keep their houses clean and neat, the *Observer's* 'Special Reporter' suggested that abodes dating from settlement and housing the poor should be replaced, describing leaking roofs, damp floors and general dilapidation in Beck's cottages in Grenfell Street.³⁰ One old woman who had lived there since the cottages were built in the 1840s paid reduced rent due to the poor conditions.³¹ Another 'aged woman' washed clothes to support her 'paralytic, helpless, aged husband and a crippled daughter',³² and in the same street 'an aged man and a young woman, both paralysed' lived in a dirty, damp place with a 'tumbledown fireplace', being supported by a 'woman of advanced years'.³³ For some aged poor daily life was a struggle.

Rations, relief and responsibility

Although the Destitute Board asked that relatives assume responsibility for the aged, the time taken to locate them sometimes left the elderly without the essentials provided by outdoor relief. When allocated, relief took the form of rations, consisting of basics like flour, meat, sugar, rice, soap, tea and salt,³⁴ but excluded items such as fuel, clothing, bedding and money,

²⁸ Spence, "Charity in South Australia," p. 23.

²⁹ SRSA, GRG 28/23, Outdoor Relief, Medical Officer's Case Book, 1882 -1883, 7 May 1882.

³⁰ "The Back Slums of Adelaide," *The Adelaide Observer*, 22 June 1889, p. 1182cd.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1182c.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ "Destitution on Yorke's Peninsula," *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. IV, no. 186, 1877 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1878), p. 9.

private charities providing these where possible and necessary. Meeting weekly to consider applications, the Board provided one month's rations in advance for cases of a chronic or semi-permanent nature, the old and feeble being 'spared the trouble of appearing quarterly' but being under 'close observation' of the Visiting Officer.³⁵ Before William Wiggell could receive rations through outdoor relief in Moonta, the Destitute Board intended to track his grandsons down in Adelaide and to compel them to provide for their grandfather under the 'Destitute Persons Relief Act, no. 26 of 1872', rations only forthcoming if this could not be achieved.³⁶ Also in Moonta 68 year-old widow Mary Richards had no children at home but a son in Burra hospital with a broken leg. She had received one ration in six months, and the official responsible 'thought the son ought to be made to support his mother.'³⁷ Sometimes the Board provided rations and later recovered money from relatives liable for maintenance under the Act. William Pike of Gumeracha, for example, had an ulcerated leg and received rations for many years before the Board recovered twenty pounds from his son George, expecting to retrieve the remaining £51 due for 'past maintenance' from two other sons.³⁸

In rural areas, administration of outdoor relief was especially difficult to manage, highlighting the need for equitable and systematic provision of assistance for the aged. Those who lived beyond the capital relied on outdoor relief but could not rely on the quality of rations or the consistency of decision-making. A system of tenders operating in the 1860s, for example, resulted in limited supervision and compromised quality of goods supplied as those

³⁵ T. H. Atkinson, "Destitute Poor Department of South Australia," *Proceedings of the First Australasian Conference on Charity, Held in Melbourne, from 11th to 17th November, 1890* (Melbourne: Robert S. Brain, Government Printer, 1890), p. 86.

³⁶ "Destitution on Yorke's Peninsula," *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. IV, no. 186, 1877 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1878), p. 8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 9.

³⁸ SRSA, GRG 28/1, Destitute Board, Minutes, 1885-1887, vol. VIII, 25 October 1886.

who won tenders to supply rations sought to maximise profit. Reporting to Parliament on the matter in July 1867, Mr. Carr relayed the impact of such practices on elderly recipients of relief. He described one couple as being ‘the best class of ... destitute poor’ and as having the ‘good old English horror of the workhouse’, which meant they ‘would suffer almost any privation rather than go into the Destitute Asylum.’³⁹ The woman, who suffered from a chronic illness, had been ‘unable to wait on herself many years’, while the ‘man was old, infirm, and unable to work.’⁴⁰ Instead of receiving small, manageable amounts of meat of reasonable quality as they had previously, under the system of tender the old couple had to salt ‘or do as best they could [with]’, twelve pounds of ‘forequarter of sheep – which, according to all appearance, never felt the butcher’s knife’ and was ‘poor meat fit only for dogs’.⁴¹ The inferior quality of rations in rural areas prompted requests for a review of the administration of outdoor relief. Criticism also targeted management of applications. Judah Solomon, Chairman of the Destitute Board, heard applications for relief at the Moonta Court House and in Wallaroo in July 1877, but local officials criticised his approach because he had advertised the sessions in the local paper, assuming ‘all those poor people take the said newspaper’; no one attended the Wallaroo session.⁴² Among cases refused with no apparent explanation were those of Mrs. Editert, a widow of nearly 70 from East Moonta who was ‘very delicate with old age’, and 70 year-old James Sculley, who was ‘very infirm, nearly blind’. Both had previously

³⁹ “Destitute Board Returns,” *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 24 July 1867 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1867), p. 169.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁴² “Destitution on Yorke’s Peninsula,” *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. IV, no. 186, 1877 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1878), p. 11.

received rations.⁴³ Officials in Moonta requested that a Local Destitute Board, better able to deal with local cases, be established.⁴⁴

A Visiting Officer regularly heard applications for relief in Adelaide.⁴⁵ The resulting notes provide insight into the lives of the elderly poor, who otherwise left little trace of how they eked out their existence. To determine whether or not to distribute rations, this Officer recorded the age and marital status of each individual, noted their earning capacity and residential circumstances and commented on whether they had to support or were supported by others. Ailments, a constant in the lives of some old men and women, limited their efforts to make a little money. Sixty year-old John Grant was ‘nearly blind’ and earned ‘very little’, his wife supplementing their meagre income by selling fruit and vegetables ‘when possible’.⁴⁶ George Hooper, aged 75, was also nearly blind, and his wife earned a little ‘by washing’,⁴⁷ while the Doolans managed to ‘sell a few eggs’ to pay their four shilling a week rent.⁴⁸ Ann Holland, a widow of 72, earned ‘just ... enough to pay Rent for 1 Room’, while Patrick Meehan, still endeavouring to work at 84, earned ‘very little’, and ‘often not enough to pay his small rent’ of one shilling and sixpence per week.⁴⁹ Such individuals clearly required assistance to pay rent and obtain food and so qualified for rations. The Visiting Officer’s notes from six days of assessment visits in February 1882 show that the majority of aged applicants

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.

⁴⁵ On 15 February 1882, for example, five of the fifteen cases considered concerned those aged 60 and over. SRSA, GRG 28/16, Reports of the Visiting Officer on Applicants for Relief, 1882 – 1885, 15 February 1882.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2 June 1882.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 8 June 1882.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 23 February 1882.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 February and 2 June 1882.

for relief were women, and that most of those were widows.⁵⁰ Twenty-nine of the 39 applicants for relief were women, including sixteen widows. The female applicants also included eight married women, five single women and one deserted wife. Of the ten male applicants eight were married, one was a widower and one was of unknown marital status.

Government assistance through outdoor relief played an essential role in providing for the aged poor, but other initiatives assisted the elderly to retain their independence. One of the most significant and successful of these was the Cottage Home scheme, which began in 1873 with four homes built in North Adelaide. One aim was to accommodate poor aged couples without separating them.⁵¹ Outlining advantages of the scheme, the Cottage Homes' Chairman explained that, 'old people felt they could accept such a form of relief without losing their independence', and 'aged couples could ... spend their last years together', rather than being separated in the 'barracks' of the Destitute Asylum.⁵² Residents of the Cottage Homes also received rations.⁵³ Not all were sympathetic to the notion of Cottage Homes providing a 'refuge to stave off poverty', W. S. Bickford of Glenelg remarking that, 'Labour representatives are chosen to trace between cause and effect ... to open natural opportunities to labour, and not to coddle and encourage alms-giving or dependence in any form whatever.'⁵⁴ Significantly, the most active contributors to erection and maintenance of the Homes were elderly benefactors, who themselves had succeeded in the colony, understood the needs of the aged poor and wished to support them. By 1891 43 homes accommodated 56 people with an

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, February 1882.

⁵¹ *The Adelaide Observer*, 16 May 1896, p. 1056e.

⁵² "Adelaide Cottage Homes," *The Adelaide Observer*, 27 May 1899, p. 998de.

⁵³ See SRSA, GRG 28/16, Reports of the Visiting Officer on Applicants for Relief, 1882 – 1885.

⁵⁴ *The Adelaide Observer*, 6 June 1896, p. 1203a.

average age of over 70, several residents being in their eighties.⁵⁵ In 1896 William Finlayson, whose health was failing and who died the following year at 84, donated land in Mitcham for the erection of a large number of cottage homes in blocks of four, each to have a reading room attached. Finlayson's deceased wife had long had 'a great desire to do something in this way, especially for old men who had few friends to look to.'⁵⁶ Numerous others made smaller donations,⁵⁷ but Committee members lauded Finlayson as 'noble and venerable', having lived 'a life full of good work, and ... of love and thought for others.'⁵⁸ By 1897 a total of 60 homes housing 73 old people across several suburbs had been built using voluntary contributions, and by the turn of the century philanthropy had resulted in the establishment of over 100 Cottage Homes, providing rent-free accommodation for 'poor widows and aged couples'.⁵⁹

Through individual action and collaboration philanthropists and benevolent organisations provided resources for the aged poor. Like the Cottage Homes Scheme, the Adelaide Benevolent and Strangers' Friend Society also operated homes for widows with families and for the aged.⁶⁰ Edward Spicer, at 80 'one of the oldest and most respected of Adelaide's merchants', built three houses in East Adelaide for aged Wesleyan Methodist ministers or their widows; he recognized that while an 'ordinarily successful business man was able to provide for his declining years', ministers of religion faced 'very different'

⁵⁵ *The Adelaide Observer*, 4 July 1891, p. 31a.

⁵⁶ *The Adelaide Observer*, 16 May 1896, p. 1057b.

⁵⁷ For example, six cottages built in Walkerville and donated by Charles Drew, who died at age 60 in 1896 leaving land for the Homes, offered rent-free accommodation for aged inmates, 'irrespective of their creed or nationality', at Drew's request. "The Somerset Homes," *The Adelaide Observer*, 2 December 1899, p. 1141e.

⁵⁸ *The Adelaide Observer*, 16 May 1896, p. 1057a.

⁵⁹ William Hitchcox, *South Australia: Its Early History, its Climate and a Few Particulars of its Products and Capabilities* (Adelaide: E. S. Wigg and Son, 1900), p. 15.

⁶⁰ *The Adelaide Observer*, 22 May 1897, p. 987e.

circumstances.⁶¹ Spicer and his wife wished ‘aged widows’ to be given first consideration, the only charges to be those necessary to cover rates, taxes and insurance.⁶² Business owners donated goods to the poor, the Stevenson Brothers of Rundle Street, for example, donating 100 pairs of boots to the ‘deserving poor’ in autumn 1886, a time of great economic difficulty in South Australia.⁶³ Among the many applicants were ‘aged men and women ... [who] left with fervent protestations of gratitude’ after being fitted with ‘a good substantial pair of new boots’.⁶⁴ The General Relief Committee, active in the early 1880s, distributed soup, firewood and clothing to the poor until disbanding in mid-1883 due to increased employment and prosperity. At the final distribution of relief around 300 people sought assistance, including numerous ‘old women who always will be poor and wretched’.⁶⁵

Indoor relief: The Destitute Asylum

As already outlined, family assistance, outdoor relief and other support did not meet everybody’s needs. Those who resorted to indoor relief in the Destitute Asylum experienced conditions that attracted public concern over several decades. In parliamentary debate in 1860 Mr. Mildred described the overcrowded institution as ‘a scene of wretchedness and depravity’.⁶⁶ In 1870 one speaker anticipated that the number of ‘chronic or convalescent

⁶¹ “Homes for Aged Ministers, A Munificent Gift,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 7 August 1897, p. 256de.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ “The Depression,” *The Adelaide Observer* 1 May 1886, p. 845c.

⁶⁴ *The Adelaide Observer*, 24 April 1886, p. 798d.

⁶⁵ *The Adelaide Observer*, 26 July 1883, p. 174c, 16 August 1883, p. 321ab.

⁶⁶ *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 22 August 1860 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1860), p. 649.

cases, constantly drafted off to the Destitute Asylum' from the hospital, would increase because

This community has now arrived ... at the age which has brought large numbers of its early colonists, in the course of nature, to the disease and infirmities of old age; and, in the absence of any provision for this contingency, and also without relatives able to support, they have no other resource but to throw themselves upon the public charity. Our asylum is entirely composed of this class of persons - diseased, aged, and infirm.⁶⁷

The annual report of the Destitute Poor Department for 1897 to 1898 showed that 280 people had been admitted over the year, and 360 were residents in the Destitute Asylum in June 1898.⁶⁸ Over two-thirds of those inmates were over 61 years of age, 152 were aged over 71 and 34 were over 81.⁶⁹ Overall there was indeed an increase in the number receiving relief and an increase in the cost of providing relief. Earlier, the large numbers of old people in the Asylum made a strong impression on Florence and Rosamund Hill, sisters involved in campaigning for prison reform in England who visited Adelaide in the early 1870s while on a world tour investigating social welfare issues. The aged poor, 162 men and 69 women, comprised the largest group in residence when they visited.⁷⁰ They observed that,

A large proportion of both sexes being infirm or bed-ridden, there is not much employment attempted beyond the housework and washing, and making some of the clothes. A few men, however, were making rough canvas bags ... and shelling almonds for outside employers; and in this way they earned something for the institution and obtained a trifle for themselves.⁷¹

Despite overcrowding noted by Mildred and others, the Hills described 'large and lofty [rooms] opening on verandahs commanding a pretty view, and affording a pleasant lounge for

⁶⁷*The South Australian Government Gazette*, 25 August 1870, p. 1110.

⁶⁸ "The Destitute Poor, A Year's Record," *The Adelaide Observer*, 17 September 1898, p. 567e.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Dickey, *No Charity There*, p. 54.

⁷¹ Rosamond and Florence Hill, *What We Saw in Australia: By Rosamond and Florence Hill* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1875), pp. 143-144.

the old people who were basking in the winter sunshine.⁷² Men and women lived in separate accommodation, a door connecting the two areas. While the men had access to a quadrangle ‘beautifully laid out as a garden’, the women’s outdoor area was a ‘drying ground ... left rough and ill-paved and so dangerous for the lame to walk upon that it was painful to watch a poor old creature on crutches make her way across it.’⁷³ Apparently the surface was untended because men would have had to enter the women’s grounds to cultivate it. Catherine Helen Spence noted that although the ‘food is good and sufficient, the clothing decent, and the management not unkindly’, the Asylum was ‘not a very cheerful place’.⁷⁴ Despite its being deliberately ‘not made too attractive’, one old man travelled from Melbourne to Adelaide to gain admission, having heard that ‘it was a good place for old men’, only to be returned to Melbourne.⁷⁵ Certainly some old people who had been living in ‘abject misery and wretchedness’ considered that they had never ‘been so well provided for’ as in the Asylum.⁷⁶ Conversely, some inmates found life in the Asylum intolerable. One such man, 70 year-old Ferdinand Schmidt, a ‘well-behaved inoffensive man’ who had lived in Clare before his admission and had no relatives in the colony, hung himself from the Asylum’s gates.⁷⁷ The Asylum’s central position enabled relatives, friends and philanthropists to visit but also facilitated access to city hotels with ‘sad results’.⁷⁸ Apart from those inmates who suffered depression or sought alcohol at every opportunity, old men seemed to adapt to life in the Asylum better than old women, the men’s yard being a ‘more cheerful’ place, and the old men

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Spence, “Charity in South Australia,” p. 18.

⁷⁵ Atkinson, “Destitute Poor Department of South Australia,” p. 81.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *The Adelaide Observer*, 3 February 1883, p. 224d.

⁷⁸ Spence, “Charity in South Australia,” p. 18.

taking ‘infinitely more interest in books and newspapers than the women’, who did not show similar interest in sewing and knitting.⁷⁹ Among the philanthropic visitors, Audrey Tennyson, the Governor’s wife, judged the aged residents to be well treated and found that most ‘had pretty respectful manners’; she ‘received a good many “God Bless You’s”’ as she moved among them.⁸⁰

The notion of the deserving poor influenced visitors’ impressions and related discussion. The visiting Hill sisters concluded that while ‘inevitable misfortune’ caused some to seek refuge in the asylum, ‘by far the larger number ... had been brought ... by faults of their own – drinking being the most common.’⁸¹ Alcohol did lead many individuals to the Destitute Asylum in their old age, and the Hills commented that several inmates could have ‘maintain[ed] themselves outside by their labour could they have kept sober’.⁸² The Hills noted a high representation of ‘bushmen’ among the inmates, the warder explaining that ‘when a bushman loses his wife he is “floored”’ and turns to drink.⁸³ As women comprised the minority of inmates the Hills surmised that, by contrast, the wife ‘could get on pretty well alone’.⁸⁴ When she first visited in May 1899, Audrey Tennyson declared herself ‘amazed to see the number of old people - 105 old women & three times that number of old men’, especially given the context of high wages and the scarcity of labour in the colony.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁸⁰ Alexandra Hasluck, ed., *Audrey Tennyson's Vice-Regal Days: The Australian Letters of Audrey Lady Tennyson 1899-1903* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1978), p. 106.

⁸¹ Rosamond and Florence Hill, *What We Saw in Australia*, p. 143.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Hasluck, ed., *Audrey Tennyson's Vice-Regal Days*, p. 35.

Suggesting reasons for the consistently higher numbers of old men than old women in the Asylum, Spence remarked that in all the colonies there were ‘more friendless old men and more men disabled by accident’, and that relatives may well have been ‘more disposed to keep a grandmother than a grandfather’.⁸⁶ Reference to causes of destitution had long appeared in official reports, and while Board members made judgments regarding culpability of older colonists due to ‘former extravagance or vice’, they also took a compassionate view, as many were reduced to ‘such a state of wretchedness’ that they felt obliged to provide relief.⁸⁷

The public gained information about the extent and nature of poverty among the ageing in the colony and contributed to related discussion through newspapers such as *The Adelaide Observer*. Over many years series of articles imparted factual information, commented on the effectiveness of management of problems associated with poverty, considered new ways of dealing with poverty and discussed issues such as differential treatment for the deserving poor. One series, written in early 1880 by the reporter ‘Vid.’, presented the public with a vivid evocation of life in the Destitute Asylum and of the diversity of its occupants. Vid. described the functioning of the system administering relief to the destitute and the condition and background of inmates.⁸⁸ In the women’s quarters the reporter encountered ‘old and feeble women, ... present[ing] a pitiable picture of decay and decline’, including a ‘withered old dame feebly munching her dinner’, an old woman propped on pillows, ‘the wasted remains of what was once a remarkably pretty woman’, and ‘seven more old women fast ripening for

⁸⁶ Spence, “Charity in South Australia,” p. 19.

⁸⁷ SRSA, GRG 28/1, Destitute Board, Minutes, 1849-1856, vol. I, p. 97.

⁸⁸ “Our System of Destitute Poor Relief,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 31 January 1880, p. 202b,c,d,e.

another world.⁸⁹ One ‘painful spectacle’ was a woman aged between 70 and 80 who had been active until seven years earlier, when she was stricken by paralysis that left her ‘helpless as a log’.⁹⁰ Other wards also had their share of ‘enfeebled old women with thin faces and great staring eyes’, including one ‘querulous old lady’ who, ‘crabbed and soured by suffering’, had been offered a Cottage Home but preferred the security of the Destitute Asylum.⁹¹ While most elderly female inmates appeared to be ‘hobbling and tottering feebly or seated dejectedly’, a few occupied themselves by hanging out the washing.⁹² Vid. considered that little effort had been made to enliven the environment in the Asylum and ‘Aesthetic culture is evidently not an item in the programme’, despite the fact that ‘some of those feeble old men loitering about the yard or ... sucking at ... clay pipes are men of education’ and that many inmates could read and availed themselves of the books and magazines in the small library.⁹³ Those whose ‘shattered constitutions and broken fortunes’ brought them to the Asylum included ‘lawyers, doctors, squatters, and broken-down tradesmen’.⁹⁴ One former doctor from a large country practice had become ‘a paralytic old hobbler ... trudging painfully backwards and forwards ... before dinner’.⁹⁵ Another inmate, a ship’s captain suffering from dropsy, belonged to two Lodges, but his wife died while he was in the Asylum and the money from the Lodges went to support his children, reinforcing the point that some older people experiencing their own health problems still had children who required financial support.⁹⁶ Like the women, some men could

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202d.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 7 February 1880, p. 242b,d.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31 January 1880, p. 202d.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7 February 1880, p. 242b.

undertake some activity, while others suffered from ‘blindness, paralysis ... imbecility or partial madness’.⁹⁷

The *Observer*’s ‘Special Reporter’ brought the varied lives of inmates of the Destitute Asylum to life by interviewing them in the early 1890s. He pointed out that the ‘tottering old man who passes along the street in the ... ugly garb of the State charitable asylum’ might have been a scholar or a soldier.⁹⁸ Two men interviewed were blind ex-convicts; one had been a smuggler, a whaler, a master painter and a miner, the other having worked on the roads and as a sawyer.⁹⁹ Another fellow had had success at the diggings but lost money through speculation and litigation and found himself ‘at seventy, paralysed and in the Destitute’.¹⁰⁰ As the reporter noted, ‘there is not a deal of ... romance in the life of a poor hard-working man who has been fighting stubbornly for forty years or more to keep the wolf from the door, and who has barely made a living.’¹⁰¹ Aiming to improve the lives of inmates, some members of the public made small contributions to the Destitute Asylum. One donation of three pounds in December 1900 came with the request that it be used ‘towards providing Christmas cheer for the Destitute.’¹⁰² Most inmates of the Asylum relied solely upon government support, but some also qualified for a pension following service in the army or navy.

One dilemma associated with the poverty of the aged concerned treatment of couples. Spence echoed others’ concerns when she stated, ‘To separate old people who have lived

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31 January 1880, p. 202e.

⁹⁸ “Culled from the Destitute Asylum,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 23 January 1892, p. 186b.

⁹⁹ “Culled from the Destitute Asylum,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 12 March 1892, p. 522a.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² SRSA, D3866/19/16, in GRG 28/25, Destitute Asylum, Personal Papers of Deceased Inmates, c. 1890-1920.

together all their lives, simply because they are poor, is a cruel thing.’¹⁰³ Keen to avoid such cruelty and to save money by minimising the extent of indoor relief and its associated costs,¹⁰⁴ the Destitute Board distributed rations to couples who were still able to ‘keep a roof over their heads’ by continuing to work, relying on savings, or through the ‘help of relatives’.¹⁰⁵ Spence presented the pathetic situation that resulted when ‘the small savings are spent, ... the children or grandchildren cease to pay the rent, ... the home is broken up, the few poor sticks of furniture sold, ... the money appropriated by the board, and the old couple are placed for the remainder of their lives in separate wards.’¹⁰⁶ In discussion of Spence’s paper the Launceston Benevolent Society expressed strong opposition to the practice of separating elderly couples, remarking that it would be ‘far cheaper’ for the Government to provide rental assistance.¹⁰⁷ Conflict and quarrelling complicated the provision of support and accommodation for some of the aged poor. According to Arthur Lindsay, superintendent of the Destitute Asylum, one of the obstacles to housing old couples together, apart from availability of suitable accommodation, was their propensity to quarrel, an observation that prompted Spence to remark that it was ‘a thousand pities that the want of social qualities’ should prevent reform.¹⁰⁸

‘Against the risk of want’: Poverty and the pension

Discussion regarding responses to poverty among the aged that began in the early years of settlement intensified in the last decades of the nineteenth century, participants including old

¹⁰³ Spence, “Charity in South Australia,” p. 21.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* Whereas the cost of a ration and a half, suitable for an elderly couple, was three shillings and ninepence in 1890, accommodation in the Asylum would cost over eleven shillings.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

colonists themselves, parliamentarians, government officials and social reformers. Just as *The Adelaide Observer* and other newspapers disseminated information, so they provided a forum for public debate, and editorial comment often stimulated response. Issues raised included the increase in the proportion of aged poor in the community, the effectiveness of provision of outdoor and indoor relief, the moral basis for provision of relief and the form relief should take. Discussion regarding introduction of a non-contributory pension involved all of these and prompted colonists to express and test their views regarding independence, thrift and the responsibility of family, individual and society. In the early 1880s, when ‘the pressure of hard times was making itself felt with unprecedented vigour’, increasing demands on the centralized system of relief, the Chairman of the Destitute Board, Thomas Reed, called for ‘an entirely new system of affording relief to the poor’.¹⁰⁹ Editorial comment agreed but did not support Reed’s suggestion that relief be provided through the taxation system, arguing that to emulate Britain in introducing a poor rate, thereby ‘giving people a vested right to charity’, would be a ‘grave mistake’.¹¹⁰ Instead, a system based on compulsory insurance, like that proposed in New Zealand, ‘would be far preferable’,¹¹¹ as it would require young people to pay an amount of approximately fifteen pounds, to be paid out later as sick leave and in old age. The writer concluded that such an approach would make people ‘more thrifty’ and would therefore ‘be a vast gain to the community’.¹¹² Over the following years analysis of the state of the poor and the effectiveness of the management of destitution continued,¹¹³ and contributors continued to raise the idea of a national insurance scheme. In a letter typifying others’

¹⁰⁹ Over 4700 people received relief in 1881. “Decentralization of the Destitute Organization,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 19 August 1882, p. 360cd.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 360e.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ See, for example, “The Destitute Poor,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 5 September 1891, p. 457e.

concerns '1845' expressed sadness that old colonists who 'spent the best years of their lives in making the colony what it is' struggled to support themselves, and agreed with English politician Joseph Chamberlain's proposal enabling 'every man to draw an annuity after reaching the age of sixty, of course supposing that he had previously contributed to a retiring fund.'¹¹⁴ Other suggestions proffered were that the wealthy 'do something to assist their less fortunate brethren', following the example set by Dr. Wyatt, who established the Old Colonists' Relief Fund, and that 'distressed old colonists' meet to discuss what could be done.¹¹⁵

The individual face of suffering among those in difficult circumstances at a time when pensions were to the forefront of discussion is evident in a letter to the Editor, 'Old-Age Pensions and Aged Sufferers', by one of the last pioneers living at the close of the century. This letter illustrates the pride of old colonists, which prevented some from seeking help, an issue recognised by those favouring the introduction of a pension. As '1839' wrote,

The pioneers have never been aided except when, as a necessity, the Destitute Asylum has opened its doors to them. There are a number of us left who arrived previous to 1840 The pioneers fought through all obstacles and made the cultivation of cereals a success. But now, alas! Many of them are left in affliction and poverty, and, through no fault of theirs, in absolute want. They would feel it a reproach to apply for Government rations. About four months ago I wrote to a gentleman who was very prominent in the Jubilee celebrations, and detailed to him my colonial career and my present condition. I told him that I was afflicted with failure of the heart, and in my eighty-sixth year, but he did not deign a reply. My doctor has certified that I am suffering from senile decay and incapable of earning my livelihood. Yet with all my privations I am consoled by knowing I never sought relief in the Insolvency Court. Other old colonists are so comforted, but we are all unnoticed.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ "Old Colonists," *The Adelaide Observer*, 9 April 1892, p. 694bc.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ "Old-Age Pensions and Aged Sufferers," *The Adelaide Observer*, 18 September 1897, p. 543b.

Although the writer considered his concerns overlooked, there were those in positions of public responsibility who were keen to acknowledge the kinds of difficulties outlined by ‘1839’ and to act to meet the needs of the aged and vulnerable.

In 1897 William Carpenter, House of Assembly member for Encounter Bay and representing the United Labor Party, called for a Select Committee into provision for the aged poor. As the issue had been examined closely in other colonies and other countries throughout the previous ten years, and because South Australia ‘usually tried to be ahead of the rest of the world’, Carpenter considered the colony’s lack of coherent policy in this area surprising.¹¹⁷ Outlining the situation relating to provision for the aged poor in South Australia, he noted efforts made by private charity organisations to build homes for the aged poor and the sound management of indoor relief run by the Destitute Asylum, which ‘could not be much bettered’ despite the need for improved physical facilities.¹¹⁸ Records of the provision of outdoor relief exposed increasing challenges faced by the old, the poor and their relatives, approximately half of the 1,393 families receiving outdoor relief through the Destitute Board being ‘aged, infirm or otherwise incapacitated.’¹¹⁹ The average value of relief or rations received was 11 3/4d. a week, which Carpenter did not consider to amount to ‘adequate provision’.¹²⁰ Drawing the Parliament’s attention to the ‘large amount of poverty in their midst of which they were

¹¹⁷ “Select Committee – The Aged Poor,” *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 28 July 1897 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1897), p. 287.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

practically ignorant', Carpenter suggested that a Select Committee could try to establish 'how far old age by itself was a cause of poverty and the best means of relieving it.'¹²¹

Investigating the issue, Carpenter scoured debates relating to the Destitute Persons' Relief Act of 1866 and subsequent amendments (1872, 1881, 1886) in search of principles informing the legislation but declared the search fruitless, concluding that, 'As far as he could see, those responsible for the Act did not have a very clear idea of any principle at all.'¹²² The sole informing principle that he located was the declaration in the preamble to the 1866 Act that, 'it is the natural duty of those persons who are of sufficient ability to maintain and support such of their relatives who from age or sickness are unable to support themselves.'¹²³ While not questioning this principle, Carpenter observed that many adult children faced a 'severe struggle' to meet their own families' needs, some going 'without life's necessities' as they endeavoured to support aged parents too.¹²⁴ In response to this dilemma, Carpenter asked parliamentarians to consider the 'principle ... recognised in every civilised country' that people who had contributed actively to society and who were unable to provide for themselves in old age had 'some claim upon the community.'¹²⁵ Validating his point, Carpenter presented the preamble to a Bill before New Zealand's Parliament, which stated: 'Whereas it is equitable that all persons who during the prime of life have helped to bear the public burdens of the colony by the payment of taxes and to open up its resources by their labour and skill, should in

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 287.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

old age be protected by the colony against the risk of want.’¹²⁶ He also referred to the recent affirmation of the principle of old-age pensions by the New South Wales’ parliament’s Select Committee and even cited Emperor Joseph II of Austria’s declaration that ‘the poor in his dominion should receive a pension as a matter of right and not as a charity when they came to a certain age.’¹²⁷ Provision for the ageing in Austria included the establishment of ‘Old-age Homes’, which Carpenter proffered as a useful model for Australia. He had clearly investigated the issue thoroughly and outlined to the Parliament measures considered and implemented in other countries including Germany and Denmark. Of particular interest was the British scheme proposed by Charles Booth, based on the notion that ‘every man who had paid taxes and contributed his share of the work of building up the State should have the right to receive a pension of not less than 5s. per week’ from the age of 65 years, sourced from national revenue.¹²⁸ The Bill before New Zealand’s parliament reflected the same principles but included prerequisites relating to, for example, duration of residence in the colony. Variations examined in New South Wales included the premise that pensions should be funded by activities that led to reduced capacity for independence in later years, such as use of alcohol and tobacco.¹²⁹ A scheme put to the House of Commons Select Committee in 1885-87 included the proposal that young workers be compelled to contribute to a fund that would provide both sick-pay and a pension of four shillings a week from the age of 70 for men and 65 for women.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

The responses to Carpenter's investigations in debate preceding the Select Committee's appointment warrant close consideration, as attitudes and concerns expressed by parliamentarians reflect views that prevailed in the broader community. The points Carpenter raised generated spirited discussion, one issue of contention being whether provision of a pension for all would pose 'great danger', discouraging thrift among ordinary working people.¹³¹ The Victorian Select Committee encountered strong division of opinion regarding the benefits of an old age pension, philanthropists in particular holding the view that the pension would 'discourage thrift and industry',¹³² and South Australian parliamentarians expressed similar qualms. Referring to the 1893 House of Commons Select Committee into the aged poor, which found no need for 'fundamental alterations' in the prevailing system of relief in England, Alexander McDonald pointed out that South Australians 'were not so poverty-stricken as they were in the old country' and expressed concern that people increasingly tended to 'look to the Government for everything.'¹³³ Caldwell also believed conditions had improved in the last 50 years and suggested that people had been prepared to endure more difficult conditions early in the colony's life.¹³⁴ Contesting this view, Carpenter argued that people would be more inclined to save towards old age if they knew assistance would be forthcoming.¹³⁵ McDonald recommended that South Australia await the findings of other colonies before conducting further investigation, but others supported Carpenter's observations and motion. Richard Wood considered that poverty had worsened in recent times,

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 289, and "The Aged Poor," *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 25 August 1897 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1897), p. 505.

¹³² "Select Committee – The Aged Poor," *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 28 July 1897 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1897), p. 289.

¹³³ "The Aged Poor," *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 25 August 1897 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1897), pp. 505, 506.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 509, 510.

¹³⁵ "Select Committee – The Aged Poor," *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 28 July 1897 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1897), p. 288.

warned that some ‘would rather commit suicide’ than go to the Destitute Asylum and urged that the ‘aged poor of South Australia deserved ... immediate attention’.¹³⁶

Those supporting the introduction of a pension followed several lines of argument. Wood focussed on the principle that the pension should be regarded ‘not as a charity but as a reward for past services’ in the same way that soldiers received recompense in old age.¹³⁷ He also emphasised that the working classes were at the mercy of conditions of industry and the economy with little prospect of controlling their circumstances. Describing problems of unemployment among older people as a ‘growing evil’, he reported that there were ‘people now who could not after the age of forty-five or up to fifty get a day’s work’, and that some resorted to dyeing their hair ‘because they could not obtain employment when that had turned grey’.¹³⁸ The Treasurer, Frederick Holder, considered dignity an issue, declaring, ‘A man should not live to the age of sixty without being able to not only make a living for himself, but also to make provision for his old age.’¹³⁹ He hoped that any scheme developed would enable individuals to ‘keep the wolf from the door when their hands could no longer work and their brains were weary.’¹⁴⁰ Thomas Brooker spoke of his ‘great regret ... that in a young country like South Australia they had been unable to inaugurate some plan to do away with the poverty and hardships of the old country.’¹⁴¹ Charles Napier, decades earlier, had expressed confidence that this goal was attainable; Brooker’s comment confirms that he was mistaken. Having been

¹³⁶ “The Aged Poor,” *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 25 August 1897 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1897), p. 506.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 507.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 508, 509.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 510.

responsible for initiating the shift from ‘pauper garb’ to ordinary clothing for inmates of the Destitute Asylum, Brooker hoped to ‘give ... old people an opportunity of earning their own living’ and suggested that residents be offered the chance to look after ‘cows and plant fruit trees’ or to be involved in the Barossa irrigation scheme.¹⁴² In fact, asylum inmates received no fruit or butter except through charitable donations, and some members of the community were anything but charitable, saying, ‘those people had lived too long’.¹⁴³ Like Holder, Brooker wanted old people to retain some dignity and hoped changes would involve going ‘deeper than the giving of pensions, and deeper even than the practising of thrift.’¹⁴⁴

Several parliamentarians made statements supporting a Select Committee but looked to acknowledge and maintain existing systems or expressed wariness of possible outcomes of an investigation. Declaring that there was no more ‘humanitarian work than in providing for old age’,¹⁴⁵ John Castine praised the benevolent work of friendly societies and their efforts in encouraging people to save. Apparently South Australians had achieved more in this respect than inhabitants of other colonies, 93,669 depositors saving an average of £32 2s. 11d., demonstrating that ‘people in South Australia had made fair provision for old age’.¹⁴⁶ The proliferation of friendly societies in South Australia provided security for members and their families in times of sickness, and, as in other colonies, large numbers of colonists sought their support; there were 36,000 members of friendly societies in the colony in 1897.¹⁴⁷ Although none made specific provision for old age, some provided for aged members through extended

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 524.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

sick-pay but found the financial difficulties challenging, ‘the strain on their funds ... so great that they had been advised to discontinue the practice.’¹⁴⁸ Yet when one friendly society urged young members to make annual contributions that would fund a pension in old age, only two men in three years showed interest.¹⁴⁹ Recognising the importance of friendly societies, Carpenter cautioned that any scheme of relief in old age should not compete with the provisions of these organisations.¹⁵⁰ Conservative John Downer cautioned against ‘pauperiz[ing] people’ and emphasized that ‘men in their youth ought to be compelled to recognise that they had a duty to themselves in old age.’¹⁵¹ Expressing his opinion that benevolence rather than state intervention should assist those unable to help themselves, Downer argued that those who lived ‘to a great age without needing pensions’ should not have to ‘provide ... for their less virtuous, less industrious, and more unfortunate neighbours’.¹⁵² Others shared the view that measures taken should differentiate between the ‘deserving poor and those who were largely at fault themselves’.¹⁵³ Overall, although members disagreed regarding the need for and the form of an old age pension, the Parliament did support Carpenter’s motion, sanctioning the implementation of an enquiry into the status of and provision for the aged poor.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas H. Kewley, *Social Security in Australia 1900-1972* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1973), p. 13; “Select Committee – The Aged Poor,” *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 28 July 1897 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1897), p. 288.

¹⁴⁹ “The Aged Poor,” *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 25 August 1897 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1897), p. 505.

¹⁵⁰ “Select Committee – The Aged Poor,” *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 28 July 1897 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1897), p. 288.

¹⁵¹ “The Aged Poor,” *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 25 August 1897 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1897), p. 508.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 512.

The subsequent Select Committee heard from recipients of relief and from those administering assistance to the aged. The resulting report reiterated Richard Wood's concerns regarding employment prospects of older people, remarking that 'old age itself, under stress of modern competition, has become one of the chief immediate causes of poverty'.¹⁵⁴ Certainly surplus labour in a growing population meant that 'older and less active workers are pressed out by younger men'.¹⁵⁵ In his evidence to the Select Committee missionary Emanuel Hounslow told of a 55 year-old man with seven children who relied for months on the eight shillings per week earned by one son, because the father 'could obtain nothing to do, as he was getting old, and younger men were preferred', leading him to remark that 'it seemed to be a crime for a man to get old.'¹⁵⁶ Identifying infirmity and old age as 'chief causes' of poverty, Hounslow also confirmed that, 'Intemperance has much to do with poverty' too, whether contributing directly or indirectly.¹⁵⁷

An *Observer* editorial, asserting that there had been 'a humanitarian revolution in the methods of helping the aged indigent' since the days of Dr. Johnson's statement, 'A proper provision for the poor is the truest test of a nation's civilisation', rejected the call for the Select Committee to be merged with a Royal Commission, arguing that all that 'can be known on the question of old-age pensions has already been elicited', so no more money should be spent on the matter.¹⁵⁸ The Victorian Royal Commission had recommended distinction be made between the 'deserving' and the 'less deserving' poor, the former to receive a pension and the

¹⁵⁴ "Minutes of Evidence before the Select Committee on Relief of Aged Poor," *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. II, no. 21, 1898-99 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1899), p. v.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ "How can the Aged Poor be Helped?" *The Adelaide Observer*, 11 December 1897, p. 1122a.

latter to be cared for in institutions.¹⁵⁹ After exploring possible arrangements relating to pensions and funds required to support them, the article concluded with the sentiment that while an old-age pension scheme may be worthwhile, nothing should be done that might ‘discourage self-respect, independence, and resourcefulness on the part of any individuals or class of individuals.’¹⁶⁰

As consideration of the ‘problem’ of the pension intensified at the close of the nineteenth century, an editorial in the *Observer* proffered its own contribution, asking, ‘Must philanthropists and statesmen confess that they are beaten – that there is no solution of the problem of adequately and fairly providing for the aged poor?’¹⁶¹ The writer observed that ‘few practical results’ had come from the ‘Numerous Committees and Royal Commissions in Great Britain, in all the Australian colonies, and in other parts of the world’ and stated that ‘sympathy alone will not house, clothe and feed the aged destitute’.¹⁶² Given that both ‘statesmen and financiers’ in other colonies and in Great Britain struggled to find ways to give practical form to ‘altruistic principles’ and to ‘differentiate between the deserving and the undeserving poor’, the editorial questioned whether a South Australian Royal Commission would be any better equipped to do so.¹⁶³ The article went on to summarise recommendations made by the Victorian Royal Commission and to point out that most methods suggested carried a risk that they would ‘sap the principles of independence and self-help and dry up

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1122b.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1122c.

¹⁶¹ “Old-Age Pensions,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 3 September 1898, p. 491e.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

existing channels of private benevolence.’¹⁶⁴ In Japan, by comparison, where the state assumed no responsibility for the destitute, ‘parental and filial love is manifested in a charming manner.’¹⁶⁵ The writer applauded steps taken by friendly societies and insurance companies to encourage thrift and saving, hoped that steps that would not erode the self-reliance of the people could be taken to assist the destitute and suggested that the best approach to the problem may involve working with existing charitable institutions. Despite reservations expressed in parliament and through editorial comment in the colony’s newspapers, the Aged Poor Royal Commission took over from the Select Committee in late 1897, charged with investigating and reporting upon ‘the causes and extent of poverty, the present methods of relief as embodied in the work of the Destitute Asylum, benevolent societies and friendly societies, old age annuities and pensions.’¹⁶⁶

In the wake of the Select Committee and Royal Commission the introduction of an old-age pension seemed both inevitable and the most practical option, the challenge becoming how best to implement it. Just as previous investigation and discussion reflected and tested contemporary values regarding the aged, so consideration of the practicalities of implementation incorporated and reflected the duality of attitudes to the ageing: the concepts that society owed them support and that only the deserving should receive assistance. The issue of differentiation between the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’ characterised debate about pension schemes in other colonies and in Great Britain. The English Trades Union Congress argued that pensions should be made available to all workers aged 60 and over,

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 492a.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Elmar Zalums, *A bibliography of South Australian Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament and Boards of Inquiry, 1857-1970* (Bedford Park, S. A: E. Zalums, 1975), p. 80.

whether they ‘had been thrifty or not.’¹⁶⁷ The House of Commons Select Committee on the aged poor took a different view, recommending pensions for British subjects aged 65 and over, contingent upon conditions. One plan stipulated that recipients should have had no criminal conviction for twenty years, not have received poor relief and have an income of no more than ten shillings per week. An alternative plan added the condition that recipients had to have belonged to a friendly society for twenty years or have ‘secured ... income by ... saving or by thrift.’¹⁶⁸ In South Australia one preoccupation of those considering how best to assist the aged poor concerned the level of obligation to recent or short-term residents in a particular colony. Concerned about the tendency for the destitute to travel between the colonies seeking relief, Thomas Atkinson called for consistency across the colonies, urging that ‘only those who have spent the majority of their lives in a colony should be maintained in the asylums belonging to it.’¹⁶⁹ Such concerns mirrored those manifest over many centuries regarding responsibility of parishes for destitute residents in England.

The report of the findings of the Aged Poor Royal Commission, released in November of 1898, recommended that cottage homes be built for suitable inmates of the Destitute Asylum, married couples in particular. Land attached to the homes would give occupants who were physically able some productive occupation.¹⁷⁰ A further recommendation, based on the success of the boarding-out system for state children, involved the boarding-out of inmates on an experimental basis, payment being made to those offering a place in their homes.¹⁷¹ The

¹⁶⁷ “Old-Age Pensions,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 16 September 1899, p. 585b.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Atkinson, “Destitute Poor Department of South Australia,” p. 81.

¹⁷⁰ “Aged Poor Commission, Recommendations,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 26 November 1898, p. 1048d.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1048de.

Commission also recommended provision of pensions for those who contributed to a pension fund. Four of the seven Commissioners disagreed, Glynn and Gilbert arguing that the number of ‘old and destitute persons unprovided for by existing methods of State help and private benevolence is not so great as to justify the risk of the heroic remedy suggested’.¹⁷² The two other dissenting Commissioners, Carpenter and Adams, thought that ‘indirect compulsion through ordinary taxation’ would be necessary in order to set up an effective pension system.¹⁷³ They considered that the pension should be provided for those aged 65 and over who had lived in the colony for fifteen years and whose income, including the pension, did not exceed one pound per week.¹⁷⁴ Carpenter and Adams’ suggestions, considered similar to Booth’s rejected plan for England, attracted criticism on the basis of the ‘moral and economic effect’.¹⁷⁵ They estimated that the scheme would cost £27,000 per annum, an amount the *Observer*’s editor thought could be used for other purposes, including payment of debt.¹⁷⁶ The Commission’s Report prompted reference to be made to systems adopted in other countries. The Danish pension, for example, was available to those who could show that they were not responsible for their lack of means, an approach which the writer judged would ‘exclude a large proportion of the old men now in our Destitute Asylum.’¹⁷⁷ The question of how to distinguish between the deserving and the ‘undeserving’ poor continued to characterise the often heated debate over the most appropriate and viable way to implement assistance to the aged poor. The *Observer*’s editorial was not unusual in arguing that ‘we must be just before

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 1048e.

¹⁷³ “The Aged-Poor Commission,” *The Adelaide Observer*, 26 November 1898, p. 1057b.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

we are generous', and in reflecting that the problem involved consideration of 'high moral questions'.¹⁷⁸

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By century's end, the colonists of South Australia had long recognised that the early vision of a community free of poverty was impossible and impracticable and that although many enjoyed a comfortable old age in the colony those who struggled with financial, physical or mental difficulty and decline required assistance. Determining how best to provide that assistance had involved listening to the aged themselves, examining existing measures, looking to the practice in other communities and aligning practice with belief about such issues as social obligation and individual responsibility. Resulting discussions derived from and challenged prevailing cultural mores. Influenced by social constructions about the place of the elderly in society, commonly held images of the elderly and anecdotal and factual evidence, individuals variously argued that policy determining assistance should differentiate between the deserving and the undeserving, encourage thrift and self-reliance, acknowledge contributions of the aged to the colony's development or be informed by humanitarianism and compassion. The concerns and themes that imbued debate about the ageing at the close of the nineteenth century and beyond bore similarity to those that influenced official and informal attitudes towards old people prior to colonisation and in the early years of settlement. South Australia, recognised for innovation in social reform in other areas including the introduction of the vote for women in 1894, did not lead the way in relation to the introduction of a non-contributory pension for the aged. Instead, South Australians participated in debate, arrived at

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

in-principle agreement about the need for and the preferred form of a pension, but waited for the implementation of a pension through the newly formed Commonwealth.

9 CONCLUSION

The study of the experience of older people and of public and private perceptions of old age and the ageing remains relatively new to the historian. However, interest in the field has burgeoned in recent decades, especially among those conducting research in America, Europe and Great Britain. Several Australian historians have undertaken research into specific aspects of the ageing experience or have begun to investigate the lives of older people in particular settings. This study, to my knowledge the first of its kind in South Australia, is significant in that it considers the role and status of the ageing in the colony of South Australia, observes shifts in the perception of and by the ageing about their experience and place in society and considers factors influencing change in these areas at private and individual and at public and official levels. Drawing on a wide range of sources and using an eclectic approach, it has been possible to make observations about each of the above. Findings range from the empirical, tracing the shift in the colony's age composition and demographic profile over the course of the century from 'young' to 'mature', to the qualitative, observing the early preoccupation with the young in fiction and verse and the later diversity of literature and works of popular culture, including more frequent reference to and focus on older people. Others may take a different approach in investigating this subject, resulting in additional and different findings. A recent work by Lisa Dillon, exploring the experience of the ageing in Canada and the United States in the late nineteenth century, for example, shows how detailed analysis of census material can yield insight into the economic and social status of older people and reveal the extent of diversity in their experience, particularly when complemented by consideration of

qualitative sources.¹ With this in mind, some alternative approaches and areas for investigation relevant to the study of old age in early South Australia will be discussed in this concluding chapter after reviewing the findings made in this study, which result from the use and interpretation of diverse sources and provide a base for further research.

No uniform experience of old age prevailed for those aged 60 years and over in colonial South Australia. Rather, individual circumstances varied, the experience of ageing shaped by health, family structure and support, community attitude and official and government policy, each of these determined in part by broader social, economic and cultural influences. Nevertheless some commonality is evident across time and place both in image relating to old age and in the experience of the old. European historian Fernand Braudel's understanding that the history of humans in relation to their surroundings 'is a history which unfolds slowly and is slow to alter, often repeating itself and working itself out in cycles which are endlessly renewed', is pertinent when considering continuity and change among the images and realities associated with ageing in different communities over time.² One commonality is that ambivalence and contradiction characterise the South Australian experience in ways consistent with findings for Britain, Europe and America made by historians such as Peter Stearns, David Troyansky, Georges Minois, Herbert Covey and Andrew Achenbaum. Among the consistencies, however, are variations. Cultural, demographic and social shifts that accompanied settlement in South Australia disrupted some of the cycles associated with the experience of the ageing in Britain. Some such shifts were deliberate, as outlined in Chapter 2. Planners and migrants alike formed and acted upon a desire to disrupt grim cycles of

¹ Lisa Dillon, *The Shady Side of Fifty: Age and Old Age in Late Victorian Canada and the United States* (Ithaca, N. Y: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

² Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 3.

experience for the working class, and those involved in the planning of the settlement of South Australia articulated the goal of improvement in the circumstances of ordinary working people in old age. To establish the extent to which the experience of older people in South Australia contrasted with that of their English counterparts would require further comparative study or studies. At an anecdotal level evidence shows that significant numbers of older colonists retained their independence, and that those who did not had relatively consistent access to outdoor and, if necessary, to indoor relief. In this respect at least conscious effort to break long-standing cycles of inadequate provision for the elderly yielded some result. Whether or not older people living in South Australia in the late nineteenth century were better off than those living in England, they did benefit from interventions by social reformers who showed awareness of the notion that the treatment of South Australia's ageing would reflect the values of the colony's community. Such awareness is particularly evident in the widespread discussion of the late nineteenth century about the need to institute an old-age pension. Andrew Achenbaum cautions against making generalisations about the experience of the ageing over time, observing that it is inevitable that 'older people's circumstances improved in some aspects and deteriorated in others'.³ The study of image and experience relating to old age in the planned colonial environment of South Australia reveals reasons for such improvement and deterioration and shows how particular factors effected both subtle and significant change and affected the continuity in human experience remarked upon by Braudel.

Among issues informing the research undertaken here is the extent to which rhetoric and attitude, expressed both in official forums and through popular culture, influenced the choices

³ Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience since 1790*, p. 167.

and experiences of the ageing. Observation of the interaction between image and experience shows that each had the capacity to shape the other. For example, evidence concerning the process of settlement showed active discouragement of involvement of older people in the colonisation of South Australia, and their consequent scarcity in the early years in turn reinforced the popular perception that the colony was a place for the young. In demographic terms the colony remained young for several decades, the ageing of colonists gradually altering the age structure of the population and in turn influencing the place of older people in society. The complexity of this dynamic between image and reality is apparent throughout the decades. The background to settlement and the everyday circumstances of life in the early years of colonisation seemed to tilt expression of attitude about older people towards the negative. Later, the range of representations of and views expressed about the ageing broadened, commensurate with increase in their numbers and diversification of their roles. Ambivalence of attitude evident in early material is even more widespread in later sources that depicted old people variously as miserly, wise, decrepit, influential, dependent, independent or ridiculous. Varied and ambivalent representations continued to characterise popular culture in the late nineteenth century, but references in everyday texts to the contribution elderly colonists had made and continued to make in the developing colony increased, tilting the overall view towards the positive. Alongside recognition of the achievements of older people, though, was dismay at the poverty many endured. By the close of the nineteenth century, when the colony had become mature in demographic terms with more than five percent of the population aged 60 years and over, the presence of the aged demanded a more systematic and considered response at community and government level. Just as rhetoric influenced experience and *vice versa* in the first years of settlement, so connections between the two are evident as the colonial period and the nineteenth century drew to a close.

Investigation of attitudes held about and by the ageing and of the experience and roles of old people in the colony involves consideration of a broad range of sources including official correspondence, census data, parliamentary papers and debates, published materials such as newspapers, journals and novels, and private papers such as migrants' letters, diaries and memoirs, along with the visual record, both public and private. The evidence shows that some cultural expectations and practices relating to old age travelled with the colonists and changed as the settlement matured demographically, socially, culturally and politically over the course of the nineteenth century. Some of the images associated with old age and expressed in popular culture perpetuated long-held images that characterised the culture of Europe and England. Cultural influences within the colonial society of South Australia played a part in creating and shaping perceptions of the elderly in everyday life, supporting Achenbaum's comment that, 'our perceptions of "reality" are products of the perennial paradoxes of growing old and the elderly's eternal experiences, as well as the cultural tendencies, value systems, and structural forces pervading society at any given moment.'⁴ So, while there is considerable continuity in images of the elderly across time and place, shifts in image and perception can be observed also. The unique characteristics of the planned colonial setting of South Australia exerted influence over the role and experience of the ageing in the colony from its inception. It was, for example, the clear intention of those establishing the colony to populate it with young couples and single people of marriageable age and to limit the involvement of older individuals in the process of settlement. Although this strategy was not completely successful, and some older people did migrate with assisted passage, slipping through emigration processes intended to be rigorous, the proportion of people in the colony aged over 60 was

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

initially very low and only increased gradually over several decades. The range of sources consulted reflects this cultural and demographic reality of the early period of colonisation; that the colony was indeed a place for the young and was regarded by both migrants and government representatives as such is evident in private correspondence, in government papers and in the artistic record, both visual and written. As the nineteenth century progressed attitudes that prevailed towards the old in South Australia both reflected cultural, social, and economic dynamics occurring in society and shifted in response to changes in these dynamics.

While unique features characterised the colonisation of South Australia and shaped the experience of its older residents, in some respects the study of the ageing in colonial South Australia yields few surprises as common factors influencing individuals' experience in old age are identifiable in western societies across time. As today, some of the elderly remained healthy and continued working well into old age, maintained their involvement in the community, remained in their own homes and lived relatively comfortably, often with the support of family, friends and neighbours. Others, by contrast, lost financial, physical and or mental independence as they aged and required varying levels of support. Some, having secured their own financial well-being, even offered financial support to family and community members. This is evident in the public record through accounts of philanthropic actions of elderly individuals, which ranged from the financial support of particular families or individuals to the purchase of property to be used to provide cottage housing for the aged, as discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. In the private sphere too evidence abounds of the downward flow of wealth through generations, older people of means taking care to provide for family members and for others who had assisted them. The consideration of probated estates in Chapter 5 shows clearly that older relatives generally abided by accepted norms governing the

distribution of wealth after death, directing their estates first laterally to a spouse, then downward to children and then to other relatives or figures of significance. Examination of probated estates by sample enabled discussion of pathways of wealth transfer, the most common patterns involving lateral and downward transfer, a spouse endowing the surviving spouse, children and grandchildren. The wills also revealed how some people repaid neighbours and friends who cared for them in their frail old age, and that husbands often placed conditions upon their wives' inheritance, redirecting their bequest in the event of remarriage, or seeking to protect the endowment from any future spouse. The numerous factors influencing individual, community and official responses to the needs of the elderly in South Australia included the strength of familial bonds, community perceptions of the ageing and judgments based on moral issues, along with practice observed in other communities. Inevitably, there are commonalities both in imagery relating to the elderly and in their experience in nineteenth-century western societies. Equally inevitably, the very particular and planned nature of the settlement and development of the colony and concomitant demographic features and cultural peculiarities influenced the place of the old in society. Those who planned the settlement of South Australia according to Wakefieldian principles intended to establish a colony where ordinary working-class people could grow old well, leaving the workhouses of England behind. Consequently, idealism featured prominently in the rhetoric of discussion preceding establishment and in the early years of the colony and throughout the century hope for a prosperous society and fear of the problems that could accompany dependence in old age continued to drive decisions relating to immigration policy. These emotions also shaped cultural responses to ageing through literature and are evident in expressions of everyday culture in private papers, periodicals, daily newspapers and to a lesser extent in the images of art and photography.

Factors that influenced the place and experience of old people in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were evident in South Australia to varying degrees throughout the nineteenth century. As anticipated by those involved in the initial phases of settlement, the colony reflected many of the characteristics of Britain, contemporary commentator Edwin Hodder judging that by 1889 Adelaide had managed to reproduce ‘all the best institutions of the mother country, literary, scientific, social, and philanthropic.’⁵ In relation to the ageing, shared features include ambivalence of attitude and the practice of philanthropy, the latter being particularly well developed among the wealthy in South Australia. Positive and negative stereotypes of the old as misers, gossips, worthy souls and holders of wisdom that had long circulated in popular culture throughout Western Europe easily survived the journey across the ocean to appear in the newspapers, journals, poetry and novels of the colony. As practical and financial constraints limited the extent of writing generated and published in South Australia in the early decades, direct reproduction of pieces written in Europe or Britain was common and contributed to continuity in the cultural link between colony and mother country. In later decades independent publishers emerged, albeit briefly in some cases, and local content increased, enabling development of more distinctively Australian depiction of characters old and young. Image aside, factors such as physical health and stamina, the associated capacity to work and the type of work,⁶ along with the extent and reliability of financial resources and of social networks directly influenced the experiences of

⁵ Hodder, *The History of South Australia*, vol. II, p. 125.

⁶ Martin Shanahan observes that while individual characteristics and behaviours including thrift and family circumstances including class and inheritance, along with broader social and economic influences, influenced the distribution of wealth in South Australia, the single most influential determinant was occupation. Shanahan, *The Distribution of Personal Wealth in South Australia, 1905 to 1915*, pp. xxxi – xxxv, li.

old people in both South Australia and Britain. In particular, the notion that family members should bear responsibility for the care of aged relatives held strong in South Australia as it did in Britain, rooted in legal obligation. Mobility of younger relatives affected the capacity of officials to ensure that they did so.

Against a background of commonalities that included moral and legal obligation toward older relatives the colonists made considerable effort to differentiate their experience from that of the old country. The absence of inter-generational pressure arising from limited availability of land and the different strategies employed at community and government level to respond to the needy aged were among points of contrast. Ready availability of land in the colony meant that young family members did not have to wait for their elders to retire or die before establishing themselves in their own right. Indeed, in the early years of settlement and beyond immigration legislation and regulation worked to exclude the dependent aged from South Australia, resulting in very low numbers of old people in the colony. As the demographic profile of the colony changed, reflecting the ageing of young colonists and the lowering of the fertility rate, the increased presence and visibility of dependent aged attracted response from government, community groups and philanthropic individuals. The idealism that led Charles Napier to predict in the 1830s that South Australia would remain free of poverty for many years quickly gave way to a more realistic view, the gulf between the two attracting comment among parliamentarians in the late 1890s.⁷ Government strategies differed from the British, a key point of contrast being the extent of outdoor as opposed to indoor relief offered in the colony. As the needs of the poor and in particular of the aged poor came to the fore in public

⁷ See discussion in Chapter 8, and particularly the comments of Thomas Brooker, "The Aged Poor," *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 25 August 1897 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1897), p. 510.

and political discussion towards the end of the century commentators took care to point out South Australia's consistent emphasis on provision of outdoor rather than indoor relief, noting the contrast with approaches taken elsewhere, and particularly in Britain. The significance of the distinction was philosophical, reflecting the strong desire of the colonists to establish a culture of self-reliance and thrift; outdoor relief assisted individuals to continue to live relatively independently in the community rather than obliging them to shift into an institution. The Destitute Asylum, situated centrally in Adelaide, catered for those who were unable to live independently. Even there inmates undertook physical tasks and engaged in activities such as reading where possible.

Various commentators have remarked that the place of the ageing in a society gives insight into the values of that society. Georges Minois, for example, observes that, 'Every society has the old people it deserves Every type of socio-economic and cultural organisation is responsible for the role and image of its old people.'⁸ This view is consistent with the life course approach, which draws connection between the status of the young and that of the old in any society. Taking the example of agricultural labourers of central Europe in the early twentieth century, who experienced 'lack of schooling, minimal health education, and often submissiveness to all forms of authority' in childhood, Leopold Rosenmayr remarks that the conditions affecting and shaping childhood and youth also affect old age.⁹ Those who came to South Australia came with an expectation that both young and old could break away from patterns prevailing in Britain. Expectation and hope did, to an extent, create change and the opportunity for new experiences in the last stage of life. As discussed throughout this

⁸ Minois, *History of Old Age*, p. 7.

⁹ Leopold Rosenmayr, "Biography and Identity," in Hareven and Adams, eds., *Ageing and Life Course Transitions*, pp. 31-32.

thesis, a multiplicity of factors determine the experience of older people in society, including individual and physiological circumstances, family and social circumstances and structures, economic circumstances and broader community and government strategies and policies. In the case of South Australia, a colony established in a climate of pragmatic idealism, people had the opportunity to diverge from the often difficult circumstances that characterised the experience of old age in Britain. Not all were able to control their experience of later life; those who did not have immediate family members, for example, could be even more isolated than their counterparts in Britain where extended family could offer assistance, and economic conditions fluctuated in the colony as in the mother country, causing many older people to lose employment and therefore financial security.

The introductory chapter of this dissertation included discussion of the perceived influence of industrialisation and modernisation on attitudes to and treatment of the ageing. The experience of South Australia confounds some of the tenets of modernisation theory and conforms to others. According to modernisation theory the ‘status of the aged is highest when they constitute a low proportion of the population and tends to decline as their numbers and proportions increase.’¹⁰ Although negative images of the ageing are readily identifiable in the latter half of the nineteenth century in South Australia, positive representations are evident too. The aged did not have high status in the early years of the colony, but towards the end of the century much was made of early colonists’ contribution to the economic and social development of the community, those who had grown old in the colony attracting considerable positive attention in everyday and serialised publications like newspapers and journals. Holmes and Cowgill state that the ‘proportion of the aged who are able to maintain leadership

¹⁰ Cowgill and Holmes, “Ageing and Modernization,” p. 64.

roles declines with modernization'.¹¹ Yet the influence of older individuals became more pronounced in late nineteenth-century South Australia. On the other hand, the modernisation model outlines that 'responsibility for the provision of economic security for dependent aged tends to be shifted from the family to the state'.¹² Such movement is evident in South Australia at the close of the nineteenth century. However, as Catherine Helen Spence outlined in her paper, 'Charity in South Australia', given to the inaugural Australasian Conference on Charity in Melbourne in November 1890, the dependent poor in South Australia had long had recourse to government assistance, and, as Quadagno points out, 'throughout English history vast numbers of older people turned to the state for economic support.'¹³ In South Australia, consideration of the responsibility for the dependent aged became the focus for widespread and ongoing debate among the general public and in the more formal forum of the colony's parliament, issues such as thrift and personal responsibility eliciting varying opinions among politicians and private individuals. The intensity of such discussion did arise in the context of the process of modernisation.

Towards the end of the century, then, the extent to which individuals should make provision for their own old age was the subject of considerable discussion among parliamentarians, social reformers and members of the public. While many of those who could did save for the future, the high level of commitment to friendly societies among South Australians demonstrating awareness of the need to have some insurance against misfortune, many others did not. As demographic historian Peter Laslett points out, people who, at the start of their working life, have such a low expectation 'of ever growing old ... that the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Spence, "Charity in South Australia," p. 197.

prospect can be sensibly disregarded', are likely to have a different attitude 'toward ... late and very late life ... from that of a person who can confidently expect to be old.'¹⁴ That working-class English people did not save for old age well into the twentieth century, despite saving 'penny by penny' for their funerals,¹⁵ supports this observation. Some South Australians, like the English subjects of Laslett's discussion, may have been surprised to find themselves still alive, old and without sufficient resources. As already noted, one significant factor determining the well-being of old people was the support of family members. Some had nobody to turn to, and it was their plight in particular, along with the increased proportion of aged people in the colony, that provoked intense discussion in parliament and in the broader community as the century drew to a close.

Images of the old appear consistently across varied sources in the period studied. Those images served to introduce, reinforce and perpetuate several stereotypes regarding old age and the aged. Countering such images are representations of the ageing as active and productive participants and leaders in society. Stories of independent older people living an active life and acknowledgement of the contribution of influential elderly people through political involvement, religious leadership, philanthropy and business activity countered negative imagery. Such duality in representations of old age is consistent with Bernice Neugarten's findings for American society. Neugarten notes that stereotypes associated with old age draw disproportionately upon the condition of the 'old-old' as 'sick, poor, enfeebled, isolated and

¹⁴ Laslett, "Necessary Knowledge: Age and Aging in the Societies of the Past," p. 62.

¹⁵ Paul Johnson, *Saving and Spending: The Working Class Economy in Britain 1870 – 1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), cited by Laslett, "Necessary Knowledge: Age and Aging in the Societies of the Past," p. 62.

desolated' and tend to be 'uncritically attached' to all those aged over 65 years.¹⁶ In fact, many colonists remained active in work, community and family life well into old age. In work, older people continued to run businesses, farm, shepherd, engage in manual labour, teach and work in ministry. Far from becoming passive and withdrawn, many older men were active in parliament, and men and women engaged in philanthropic activity. The numerous accounts and tributes that appeared in newspapers of the late nineteenth century attest to the often extensive and profound contributions older people made to their community. The ageing were both recipients of and participants in philanthropic activity. Their strong participation led some to form the impression that the elderly governed the world. Their need to receive indicated that South Australia, perceived in early days as the 'Land of Promise', a place where hard work and opportunity could secure a comfortable old age for all, would have its share of poverty and destitution. Consequently, provision for the more vulnerable members of the community had to be made. Responses to that realisation reflected both long-standing attitudes to the old and attitudes formed in the colonial environment. Underlying discussion in a range of forums was the idea that the aged, who had worked to build the colony's prosperity, should be respected and looked after as a result. Equally, though, emphasis on the need for self-reliance and thrift imbued debate.

Reflecting on perceptions of ageing throughout history, commentator Margery Fry observed that, 'if anyone would take the trouble to make an anthology of the portraits of ancient men and women in literature these would fall into far fewer types than those in a

¹⁶ Neugarten, "Age Groups in American Society and the Rise of the Young-Old," p. 191.

similar anthology of, let us say, young lovers.¹⁷ The types that occupied the South Australian literary landscape did vary, ranging from positive characterisations of wise and worthy old men and women to the negative portrayal of old women as meddlers and gossips. Herbert Covey notes that, 'older people were venerated and sought out for their wisdom, survival skills, and experience' in western society during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁸ In the early stages of settlement in South Australia the young assumed the leading role. Evidence of veneration of older people emerges in the later years of the nineteenth century, framed by the desire to acknowledge the contributions of the old in their youth. Tension between positive and negative images of the ageing can be observed in opinionative writing and in fiction. On the one hand, old people were described as having been responsible for the prosperity of the colony and as deserving respect, consideration and even veneration as a result. On the other hand, many old people had not provided for themselves and became reliant on charity, posing problems for the broader society and inviting pity or ridicule. A similar dichotomy is evident in poetry about and by old people, some verse extolling virtues such as wisdom, grace and maturity evident in the old, other pieces bemoaning their lot. Such ambivalence echoes and is characteristic of views of old age in European society. The theme of veneration for the work of the early colonists, now ageing, is readily identifiable in contemporary literature and newspapers. As the century progressed, the ageing attracted greater attention in the media. Such attention celebrated the achievements of the elderly when they were young, acknowledged the philanthropic activities of the successful elderly and focussed both on the problems of those who struggled to survive in their old age and on concomitant problems posed to the government and community.

¹⁷ Margery Fry, "Public Oration," in *Old Age in the Modern World: Report of the Third Congress of the International Association of Gerontology, 1954* (Edinburgh: E. and S. Livingstone, 1955), p. 6.

¹⁸ Covey, *Images of Older People in Western Art and Society*, p. 161.

As fertility rates declined and ageing of large cohorts occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century, the ageing became more visible. Their visibility contributed to the perception that old people were a problem. Clearly, the circumstances of a significant proportion of the aged poor were such that they required assistance. Some had made every effort to remain independent but faced circumstances that thwarted them, including difficult economic conditions, financial mistakes and physical or mental decline. In responding, individuals, groups and government expressed and tested the values of the community. Ultimately, acceptance of the need for a non-contributory means-tested pension reflected a shift in the values of some. The views of conservative members of parliament, including John Downer, did not prevail; addressing the needs of the dependent aged would not be left to benevolent organisations, and family members could not take sole responsibility. Instead, approaches to the needs of the aged poor in the early twentieth century would acknowledge the importance of individual responsibility and self-reliance, of community-based and organisational support and of the role of government. People continued to save for their old age and to remain working to support themselves where possible. They continued to look to family, friends and neighbours for support, and to benefit from the assistance of benevolent organisations. The introduction of the pension would provide a safety net for those who could not provide effectively for themselves in old age.

The study of attitudes towards the ageing and of the nature of the experience of old people in any society is complex and can be approached in various ways. The main focus here has been to use available sources to gain insight into the experience of and attitudes towards old people in the particular demographic and cultural context of a young colony, and to

observe changes in both over the course of the nineteenth century. Inevitably, the broad scope of the inquiry and the availability of sources have resulted in less detailed treatment of some topics than of others. Issues related to retirement, for example, could form the basis of a discrete study, which would in turn enrich understanding of the movement towards introduction of the non-contributory pension. Introduction of legislation that stipulated retirement ages in the latter part of the nineteenth century directly affected the lives of older people, causing individuals to make decisions relating to residence and influencing their interactions and status in society. The extensive influence of older people through business activity, philanthropic activity and religious ministry also warrants closer study. The medicalisation of old age, which contributed to the increasing problematisation of ageing in the late nineteenth century, is another area awaiting further investigation. Marriage and remarriage among older people has not been the subject of close investigation here and remains a topic inviting closer scrutiny, using quantitative sources such as census materials together with qualitative materials including letters, diaries and newspaper and journal articles. Investigation of contrasts in the ways different ethnic groups within South Australia treated their ageing members could be productive. The concentration of German settlers in the Barossa Valley from the 1830s, for example, warrants consideration of related sources and of the place of the ageing within that setting.

One of the challenges in developing a clear understanding of the experience of the ageing lies in obtaining access to their views. Old people had some voice of their own, but published discussion and advice tended to be *about* the old rather than given *by* them. Newspapers and journals devoted regular sections, for example, to dissemination of advice on how old people should dress, eat and generally conduct themselves and how family members

should care for the elderly, along with admonitions to venerate and value the old. Old people themselves spoke through their wills, through letters and diaries, and sometimes through involvement in public life. Among the practical limitations of sources and one of the barriers to extracting information from the diaries and other personal papers of old people is that the quality of handwriting often deteriorates with age. Thomas Frost, for example, kept a detailed journal up until four weeks before his death in June 1910 at the age of 84, but his later entries are almost illegible.¹⁹ As Margaret Pelling and Richard Smith observe, disabilities of old age, such as blindness or rheumatism, can restrict the ‘recording of the experience of old age in letters and diaries’.²⁰ For the literate limited resources sometimes impelled the writer to write first in one direction and then across the page, creating a challenge for the reader.

Jill Quadagno points to the influence of the mode of production on the position of the aged in the household. In particular she reports that at a time when the main aim of working families in England was ‘to earn enough to maintain a minimum level of subsistence’ the ‘position of the aged in the household’ in the nineteenth century differed according to the mode of production.²¹ She observes that Michael Anderson’s findings in a comparative study of rural and urban regions of Lancashire show that more aged people lived with married children in urban than in rural areas, contradicting the hypothesis that the economic basis of the extended family suffered through the process of industrialisation.²² European historian Herbert Covey comments that historians increasingly agree that ‘extended family has never been the predominant form of the family in Western society’ and that the processes of

¹⁹ SLSA, PRG 1158/1-3, Thomas Frost, *Autobiography of Thomas Frost, Diaries of Thomas Frost 1825 -1910*.

²⁰ Pelling and Smith, eds., *Life, Death and the Elderly*, p. 2.

²¹ Quadagno, *Aging in Early Industrial Society*, pp. 62, 63.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

modernisation and industrialisation have not caused the alienation of older relatives from their families. On the contrary, Covey asserts, ‘if they could afford to and were able to, they *preferred* to live independently of their offspring and grandchildren.’²³ Older people in South Australia lived in a range of settings, some sharing their residence with family members or coming to live with relatives after the death of a spouse and some living alone. Others chose to lodge in shared accommodation or to take in lodgers themselves, a common strategy adopted by older women who were single or widowed. Economic need no doubt influenced these decisions, but social and family connections played a part too. One way of finding out more about the status of old people within the household in late nineteenth-century South Australia would be to conduct an analysis of census material in conjunction with such sources as land deeds, cross-referencing detail about land ownership, residence and occupation. Historian Andrew Achenbaum considers the role of the Depression in increasing pressure for the introduction of a pension in America.²⁴ The 1890s depression in South Australia may well have contributed to the movement towards a pension; the difficult economic conditions certainly increased the visibility of the aged poor and generated extensive discussion about their plight. The extent to which the circumstances associated with economic depression influenced the views of parliamentarians and social reformers on the appropriate response to the needs of the aged poor remains to be determined.

Demographic historian Peter Laslett cautions that general histories of ageing, drawing on qualitative material, may ‘impede the progress of the study’ of ageing.²⁵ Social historians

²³ Covey, *Images of Older People in Western Art and Society*, p. 167.

²⁴ Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience since 1790*, pp. 127-131.

²⁵ Kertzer and Laslett, eds., *Ageing in the Past: Demography, Society, and Old Age*, p. 8.

use primary sources available to them to gain understanding about past communities. Demographic evidence, systematically examined and analysed, provides vital information, but qualitative and anecdotal evidence cannot be dismissed. Laslett identifies the statistical era as the period ‘during which states have carried out exact recording of vital events, analyzed and preserved those records, and made them accessible’, a process that for most developed countries began in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁶ The settlement of South Australia coincided with greater awareness of the usefulness of statistics, evidenced by the establishment in 1835 of the South Australian Statistical Society, which was, however, short-lived and resulted in unreliable and inconsistent records.²⁷ Census data began to be collected from the 1840s in South Australia and enable observation of, for example, the changing proportion of older people in the community. Further close analysis of the statistical material available could yield significant information regarding patterns of residence and occupation among the ageing. In their study of family structure of older people in America in the late nineteenth century, Daniel Scott Smith, Michel Dahlin and Mark Friedberger were able to extract information about residential arrangements from census data and concluded that, ‘co-residence of adult generations was related to family economic activity and to the provision of welfare to needy kin’.²⁸ Approximately 50% of old black people and about 70% of old white people in the American study lived with children.²⁹ The anecdotal evidence suggests that in South Australia decisions made by older individuals about residence were at times driven by economic factors,

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Vamplew *et al.*, *South Australian Historical Statistics*, pp. 9, 10.

²⁸ Daniel Scott Smith, Michel Dahlin and Mark Friedberger, “The Family Structure of the Older Black Population in the American South in 1880 and 1900,” *Sociology and Social Research* LXIII (1979), p. 547.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 544.

particularly when elderly women took in lodgers to subsist, to boost income or for company and assistance.

This study has set out to contribute to the base of understanding about the experience of the ageing in South Australia in the nineteenth century. In so doing it has been possible to make observations about universals governing attitudes to old age and the experience of old age, and ways that variables can ‘tweak’ both attitudes and experience. In the spirit of Cicero’s observation about the importance of understanding the past, Laslett and Kertzer remark, ‘we cannot expect to understand ourselves as we now are in the industrialized countries - and what we shall become - unless we also understand what we have been.’³⁰ Given that western populations are, in demographic terms, ‘the oldest human populations that have ever existed and that they will never be young again’,³¹ it is pertinent to consider the experience of the ageing in earlier communities and to strive to recognise factors that influence perceptions of the ageing. In seeking to understand what life was like for older people in the colonial environment of South Australia in the nineteenth century, the role of pragmatism and the emotions of hope and fear cannot be overlooked. Hope for a more prosperous future for the working class shaped the form and process of colonisation, concomitantly excluding the old. Fear drove the emphasis on thrift, the ongoing care taken to limit the inflow of older and potentially dependent migrants and the intensity of public and political discussion about ways to provide for the aged poor. Compassion and a strong culture of philanthropy contributed to the strong network of provision of outdoor and indoor relief and informed the responses to increasingly visible issues relating to care of the aged at the close of the century and of the

³⁰ Kertzer and Laslett, eds., *Aging in the Past: Demography, Society, and Old Age*, p. ix.

³¹ *Ibid.*

colonial period. South Australia led the way in several areas of social reform and did endeavour to attend to the needs of the elderly in a humane manner, placing particular emphasis on outdoor relief. In relation to legislation for an old age pension, the colony took active part in debate through such forums as local newspapers and journals and through parliament but delayed action until after federation, when the Commonwealth instituted the relevant legislation. Although predictions of a society free from poverty amounted to little, colonists could save for their old age, and ordinary working people could live comfortably in their old age in nineteenth-century South Australia. Those who could not remain independent were at least able to turn to government and charitable assistance in a colony where ambivalence of attitude towards the ageing and initial resistance to their very presence developed into pragmatic acceptance of the need to balance emphasis on thrift, independence and compassion in responding to the needs of old people.

10 APPENDIX

Explanation regarding sampling method of probated estates

By 1855, when 79 estates went to probate, the numbers were sufficient to warrant sampling, although the high ratio of males to females precluded sampling of female estates. The process of selection of probated estates for close examination involved identifying years from which to sample probated estates, counting the number in each year, grouping the estates in terms of value to ensure that the resulting sample would include equal numbers of estates of low, medium and higher value, determining an appropriate sample interval, identifying a random number, collecting the resulting sample and examining the estates identified as a result of this process. In dividing the estates into groups based on their value some overlap was inevitable, as the estimation of an estate's value was approximate and often rounded off.

The divisions applied are as follows: Group 1 estates ranged in value from £1 to £200; Group 2 estates ranged from £200 to £500; and Group 3 estates had a value of £500 or greater. By selecting years from early in the colony's settlement, from the middle period when the colony had grown in both numbers and prosperity and from the early 1890s, a time of depression, it is possible to note responses to demographic, economic and social shifts. Choosing the census years 1855, 1861, 1871 and 1891 provided a useful frame of reference, and browsing through the wills not included in the sampled groups in the identified years yielded additional anecdotal evidence. Recording the value of all estates in the sample years and the gender of the deceased enabled basic observations to be made regarding the range in

value of estates and the proportion of male and female testators. The time-consuming nature of the cross-referencing required and inconsistencies in data precluded establishment of age at death for all testators and estate-holders. Where a testator's age is not declared but clearly falls within close range of 60 years the related information has been included in discussion. Where the will of a young person affected the circumstances of an old person that information has been included.

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