

The Rich in the Depression

DOMESTIC SERVICE IN WOOLLAHRA DURING THE DEPRESSION YEARS, 1928-1934

DREW COTTLE

There has been a common response when interviewing elderly working people about their experiences during the Depression: the working people indeed suffered, but the rich continued, as before, to remain the rich. Or, as one ex-domestic remarked, "To the rich there was no depression" (D.Shaw, conversation, 12.5.1976). One could brush this remark aside as yet another myth about the Depression...On the other hand, the remark could be taken as a fact and investigated.

The following investigation is based on interviews with a number of people who had been domestic servants in the homes of the Woollahra wealthy during the Depression. Their testimony is a stimulating glimpse of how this elite fared at a time of "equal sacrifice". In addition, it provides for an account of the daily life and outlook of Sydney domestic servants, the social history of a strata of workers, mainly women, which had been all but neglected in other tracts on the Depression.

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Research into domestic service in Australia has been negligible. Indeed, it was not until the publication of B. Kingston's *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann*,¹ that a serious study of women in domestic service was undertaken. An examination of domestic service at the local level, therefore, will obviously be full of difficulties and errors. This exploration of domestic service, however, will not discuss every sociological nuance of domestic service.² Instead, the experience of domestic service in the homes of Woollahra's rich will be examined at a crucial period in Australian history.

In many ways, domestic servants, like the rich themselves, are the forgotten people of the Great Depression. Unlike the coalminers, the timber workers, the unemployed on the wallaby, the members of the New Guard, or of the Socialisation Units, the domestic servants were neither visible nor colourful. And because the Depression was a catastrophic period of our history, those who were not active at the heart of the drama have tended to be overlooked by historians.

This article examines the ways in which domestic servants experienced the Depression in the homes of their employers. It seeks to define the social world of the rich as experienced by domestic servants. While it concentrates on these genuine "voices from below", the main area of interest is on the tangible effects the Depression had on the lives of the rich and their relations with their servants.

The physical location of Woollahra was important for domestic service. The homes of this exclusive suburb, with their surroundings of gardens, isolated settings and segregation from working class districts, were not only intensely British, but also intensely private.³ This privacy made domestic service exceptionally confining. Their explicit lack of militancy and colour, along with their physical confinement, has led social historians to ignore domestic servants' "situation".⁴

To employ domestic servants in Woollahra did not automatically classify one as rich. But it did "define oneself as not being working class".⁵ Statistics on domestic service in Woollahra support this assertion. Figures from the 1921 Census show that almost one seventh of the women living in Woollahra were domestic servants, that is, 1,944 out of 14,479. Of the total female breadwinners, domestics made up

almost half (i.e. 1,944 out of 4,025). The 1933 Census figures show that women in domestic service made up one seventh of the total number of women in industry in the area, and three eighths of the total number of women breadwinners.⁶

Both censuses illustrate that Woollahra was the leading employer of both male and female domestic servants. The censuses only account however, for those "living-in", and more were employed on a daily basis. Working class Paddington, according to a woman who employed a "general" and four other servants, "was the hinterland of Woollahra...this is where the daily worker lived...who did the laundering, the garden and cleaned your house".⁷

The advent of the electric refrigerator, vacuum cleaner, hot water system and iron in the 1920s lessened the physical effort of domestic servants in the Woollahra homes which contained these appliances. The tasks of cooking, washing, dusting and ironing, nevertheless, remained. It is not the performance of these tasks which is important, it is the employers' attitudes and the domestic servants' experience of them which needs to be understood.

More important than these considerations is the essential function of domestic service. Domestic service not only defined the employer as "not being working class" but also created the leisure time of the middle and upper class women.⁸

Unlike factory labour, domestic service was an immediate and personal phenomenon. Paradoxically, because it was personal, a certain social distance had to be kept between the mistress/master and his/her maid, cook, chauffeur and gardener. This fact is emphasised repeatedly by a woman who went into "service" in Woollahra in 1932, at the age of sixteen. Asked if her three different employers, in Woollahra, ever confided in her, she replied

"No...I wasn't in their confidence...they didn't talk to me much...I was the maid...I was the maid... I was never anything else but...Oh...No...No... they would never speak to me...only at certain levels... It was only concerning my duties" and

"Their needs were the thing...they weren't interested

in you as a person...or having a personal life...No, you were just there to serve them...".⁹

Because the domestic servants' relationship with their employers was a personal one yet distanced, a vast range of attitudes - from resentment to admiration, from sullen indifference or esteem - were experienced by the domestics. A woman who worked as a "general" for Dr. Vicars of Beach Road, Darling Point, remembers fondly her employment during the Depression years. They were "some of the happiest days of my working life".¹⁰

Jean Mephane, who migrated from England in 1925, immediately entered domestic service upon her arrival in Sydney. Her second job in Rose Bay was "another cook-type-general, starting very early until very late" and "on (her) supposed day off had to turn out dinner room and prepare dinner before leaving which was 1 o'clock would have rather gone to bed only relief to get away needless to say I stayed 12 months no wonder Domestic Service was left if anything else turned up(sic)".¹¹ Another employer of Mrs Mephane's, "a kind understanding lady...left everything to me never made one feel one was a maid. I was there until the second world war...".¹²

A woman who found casual domestic service through Jessie Street's *Home Service*, spoke highly of Lady Street, for whom she worked: "I found Lady Street, or Mrs Street as she was then, a very just and fair woman...I...you wouldn't ask for anyone better...". Her other employers, who included the Games, the Horderms, the Theodores, the Fairfaxes and the Weekses, were described by her as: "Oh very friendly...Oh we never had any trouble...no, I can't remember any unpleasantness".

She did relate an experience of a "general" working for a grazier in Darling Point:

She was so overworked and incensed with it all...She was saving every penny till she had sufficient money to retire...so she could take a position and leave at a time when it was most inconvenient for the employer. She was a very capable girl...It was so wrong to see her taken advantage of...It wasn't a temporary annoyance...it was something she'd made up her mind to do...".¹³

Grace Selwood, a maid in three different Eastern Suburbs "situations",

summed up her experience of employers as:

Probably depended on the family by whom you were employed who treated you in the manner they thought your due, e.g. as their inferior and below their social standing. It was a social step up to employ a maid; treated as an equal to a certain degree, would talk and discuss subjects other than domestic; who made sure you knew your place and kept it.

She emphasised that there was a clearly understood behaviour code on the part of the domestic.

"Oh yes, I had to know my place. Speak when spoken to. Vaucluse and Darling Point, the mistress was to be called 'madame', and if spoken to outside, 'my mistress'.¹⁴

Apart from illustrating the solidity of relations within the homes of Woollahra's rich, the domestics' experience puts paid to the thesis that "class consciousness" is something which rises and falls in accordance with the booms and depressions of the economy.¹⁵ Nevertheless, consciousness of one's class whether servants or employer was very real in Woollahra. All of the domestics, written or spoken to, realised the consequences of the Great Depression for them. For example:

"No, we were pretty careful of our jobs too... there was a lot of unemployment...and if you got a job you hung on to it usually..."¹⁶

and

"It was still part of the Depression days. Work wasn't around and unless you had qualifications you didn't stand a chance..."¹⁷

Mrs A. Ryan remembered the great difficulties her husband encountered in seeking employment:

"Now and then the *Home Service* would give him a job for 13/- of which he would get 12/-...and that made him very dissatisfied, it annoyed him. It brought out the worst in him to know that he was of so much more value. It was better than being on the dole. It was a few shillings more. And he was employed. And he did grow some vegetables...then there'd be weeks and weeks and weeks when he couldn't get work at all".¹⁸

The domestics' number of tasks did not multiply, nor was there a feeling of militancy because of the Depression. As two ex-domestics commented, the Depression did not affect the social lives of their Woollahra employers:

"On the Depression didn't affect them. It was another world. No, I don't think they even knew it was going on".¹⁹

"Life went on just the same for them, they denied themselves nothing. They had no need to...They had the parties they wanted to".²⁰

A woman whose father and two brothers were surgeons living in Darling Point explained that "...the three servants were employed throughout the depression years".²¹ On the other hand, another life-long resident of Woollahra who was hurt by the Depression, recalled "the palmier days when we (her family) employed a cook, a lady's help, a parlour maid and a gardener, on a full-time basis".²² Her father, a Chief Mechanical Engineer in the N.S.W. Railways, "was forcibly retired by Lang in 1932". His retirement and "the general conditions of the depression" caused her family to sell their home and furniture. "One maid, Ellen, remained with the family when they moved from Jersey Road Woollahra to Wollaroy Road, Rose Bay".

A woman, whose circle of friends included the Reschs, the McCormicks, the Horderns and the Wentworths, remarked: "...The Depression didn't alter the domestic situation in our house - we were able to keep our domestics (4) fortunately".²³

Mr. Ken Graham, the son of a Rose Bay salesman, explained the Depression's effects on his family's employment of servants: "...I don't think either of them lasted too long, and then of course, as economic conditions worsened, there came an end to our employment of servants".²⁴

Mary Fairfax of "Ginagulla" Estate, where 11 servants were employed, dismissed her two yardmen "because of their inefficiency" in 1931.²⁵

The question of the domestic servant's wage illuminates certain

features of domestic service and its relation with the social life of the rich. The domestics' wages, as L. Davidoff states, were of "a pocket money character". Their wages, taking three examples from domestics who "lived-in", varied considerably. Miss *N. Lake's* father, the Chief Mechanical Engineer, "paid their maid 30/- a week".²⁶ Dorothy Shaw, a maid in three Woollahra households was paid respectively, 10/-, 12/- and 12/6 a week.²⁷ In the three homes G. Selwood worked in, she received 12/6 for the first four weeks and 17/6 thereafter.²⁸ To earn an income no matter how small, was most important in the Depression years. This does not explain the "pocket money character" of the domestic servants' wage. A comment by Miss *N. Lake* amplifies this point:

...most servants were Scots or Irish. Those servants who "lived-in" were most fortunate...sleeping quarters and food were provided free. Their wage was like pocket money. They never spent a cent on tax...²⁹

Because domestic service took place in the confining privacy of the homes of Woollahra's wealthy citizens, it manifested a peculiarly personal pre-industrial nature in terms of work. The wage of the domestic servant was seen as supplementary to the other rewards of food and sleeping quarters. The domestic servants' work routine, no matter how flexible, was always governed by the personal authority of the employer. These factors put their work "at the opposite end of a continuum to factory employment". An implicit yet unconscious pre-industrial attitude was displayed by employers as they assumed that "live-in" domestic servants "were only looking for a minimum subsistence income..." and that "once given, any amount of work could be required in return".

These points are emphasised in a remark by a woman whose mother employed servants in her Darling Point home during the 1930s. She explained: "Servants were kindly treated, people were very good to them. We liked and were fond of them. It used to be a privilege for these poor wretches to be in our home. On their days off they took us (the children) out, if we were at home. It was quite a privilege for them. We didn't give them much of a day off, but still..."³⁰

The daughter of a race horse owner living in Woollahra during the

30s stressed this pre-industrial nature of domestic service:

The wealthy had their servants, and they were very "inferior" to be ordered about and kept busy, and they expected to be. There was little communication. Domestics never entered conversation with the master or mistress, merely answered questions and followed orders and still tried to do anything extra that might please. Their wages were very low but if they lived-in, the privilege of being surrounded by luxury was supposed to compensate. Comfortable quarters and anything resembling luxury was not for staff. There was no such thing as being paid for overtime for all the extra hours and days, and many of the domestics knew the children of the family better than the parents...³¹

The "pocket money character" of the domestics' wage is vividly expressed by D. Shaw:

"...Then I'd get the bus from Bellevue Hill to Sydney... a Bondi bus...I'd go to town...have lunch and go to the pictures and go home broke. My ten shillings would be just about gone by the time I got home..."³²

The low wage of the domestic servant meant that it was most difficult for domestics to break from the confining privacy of the Woollahra homes. Marriage for most domestics was a way out of their "situations".³³

The intense confinement of domestic service in Woollahra effectively isolated domestics from wider society. The "live-in" domestics received low wages and had to work long hours, there was a lack of other "situations" available. This isolation enhanced the personal authority of the employer, which governed most aspects of the domestic's life. It ranged not only over wages and conditions, but also the personal freedom of the domestics. D. Shaw explained:

"I remember I never had a holiday...never...never... it was something that didn't happen...no holiday pay...no compo...I don't know what would've happened if I'd have fallen over. Nothing to cover you at all...no protection whatever. And, as I said, I never got home (she came from Kurri Kurri)...I stayed about 18 months. I never got a trip home...I remember my brother visited me once, not to stay or anything. I just met him on the street. No, No, you weren't supposed to have friends or anything, I mean..."³⁴

Grace Selwood relates how she had to please the personal whims of her employer, even to the extent of blending in with the interiors:

"...Darling Point orange uniform with white cap always and white apron for P.M. The reason for the orange colour was the mistress had red hair and she always wore green shades and there were green curtains, etc., and the orange was to blend in with the decor, including carpets, could you imagine anyone going to such trouble and thought. I was not allowed to wear green at all in the house..."³⁵

The personal authority of Mary Fairfax was stamped into the social relations, the buildings and even the grounds of "Ginagulla" Estate. It portrayed the high bourgeois style perfectly, as P. McLeod explains:

"...It was very much as H.G. Wells describes the establishment of the small upper and lower classes in his description of Bladesover House in "Tongo-Bungay" or in another shorter novel...Parlour maids, 'cook', lady's maid, companion, (but I can't recall a butler as such), yardmen, and others in a hierarchy whose very rigid statuses I can't immediately remember. Tradesmen's entrances were *that* and no other. And once a year, near my birthday, I was "brought to see the mistress" and given a present, usually a (British) Boys Annual, The chauffeur wore a uniform; and all except the companions and guests went by surname only...And next door were the Knoxes and the Warwick Fairfaxes and the Marcus Clarkes...All with *their* similar fiefs".³⁶

While these descriptions of the personal authority of Mary Fairfax allow us to understand generally what it meant to be a servant at "Ginagulla", they do not bring out the pervasiveness of the mistress's personal authority. The daily routine of the servants was orchestrated to suit the mistress's whims. If guests were to be entertained in the "big house" or the grounds, the outdoor workers were "to remain invisible".³⁷

P. McLeod, the gardener's son, was forbidden to play with any of the children of the guests who might be in the "big house", even when the mistress was spending the humid summer months at her Bowral country home or was overseas.³⁸ The chauffeur diligently tended the potted plants on the passenger's window of the mistress's Bentley. (P. McLeod

has the lasting memory of the chauffeur continually polishing the three cars). Of all the servants at "Ginagulla", only the gardener was married. The rest of the domestics were expected to remain single if they wished to remain employed by Mistress Fairfax.³⁹ This practice, however, was commonplace among the servants who "lived-in". It was, according to D. Shaw, "an unspoken understanding"⁴⁰ between the employer and the domestic. The personal authority of the employer was the most important element in the relationship between the employer and the domestic. The low wage of the domestic and, of course, the fear of being unemployed during the Depression, under-pinned this personal authority.

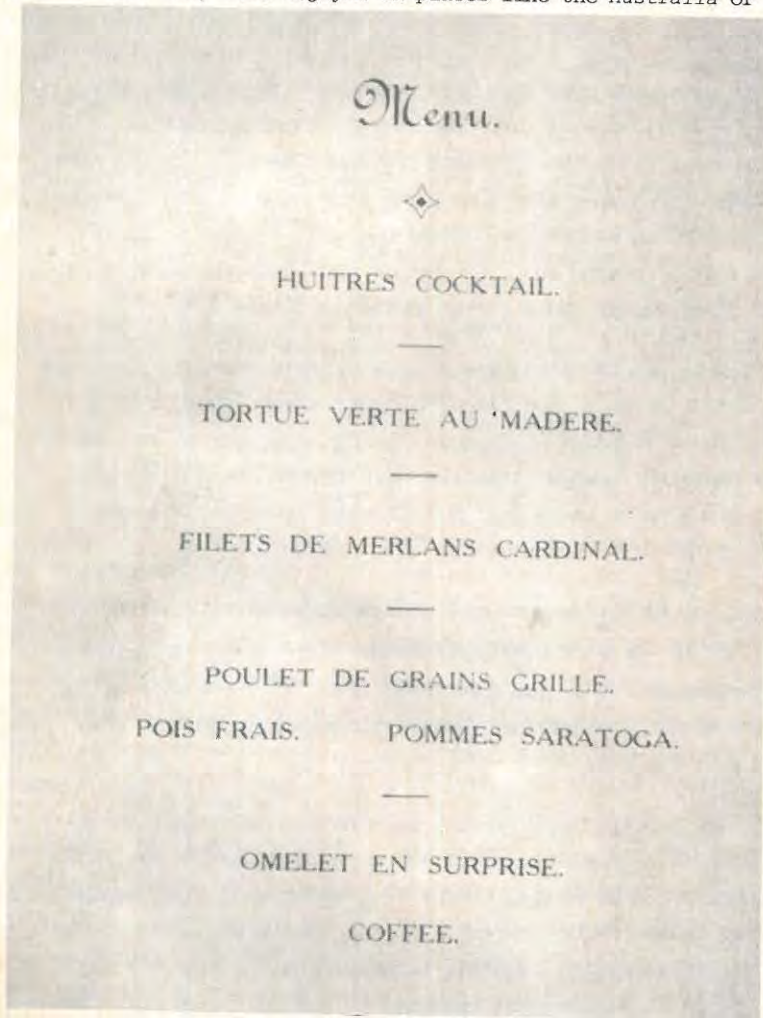
Despite "unspoken understandings", however, the servants were rarely in the confidence of their employers. Numerous remarks emphasise the social distance between the two classes: "Oh no, they were pleasant enough, but they knew their place and we knew ours too..." (A. Ryan) "...the yardworkers at 'Ginagulla' never spoke to Lady Fairfax, unless of course they were spoken to. Come to think of it, the indoor staff rarely spoke to the gardeners either".⁴¹

Mrs *Minmore*, whose father was a senior public servant, remembers the three domestics well, "but I can't remember confiding in them".⁴² Another Woollahra resident, K. Graham, fondly recalled the servants his family employed. "Jean", "Lottie" and "Gladys" were all mother figures to him when he was a boy; but although excellent "playmates" they "never entered the conversation of his parents".⁴³

Many of the domestics employed in Woollahra may have agreed with D. Shaw's view of the rich during the depression, "Oh, the depression didn't affect them...", or the view of A. Ryan, "...Life went on just the same for them...". Certainly, there was reason enough for this view.

Food, like clothing and shelter, is a basic need of all social classes. In a time of economic depression as in Sydney in the 1930s where a majority of the working people were unemployed, food became a most precious item. It is obvious the Great Depression affected the various social classes differently. Occupation and levels of income defined the type of food usually consumed by the various social classes.

The picture on the cover of *The Depression of the 1930's*, by L.J. Louis and Ian Turner, gives us a vivid impression of how many of the unemployed and homeless found food by foraging through garbage tins. Even if this is an emotive and inaccurate impression of the way in which the majority of the unemployed found food in the inner city, it nevertheless stands in stark contrast to the menus of the places where the rich or the socially prominent might dine. (See illustration). The occasion, the venue and of course the menus, point to the fact that only Sydney's most notable citizens would attend these functions. The importance of the menus is that they were enjoyed in places like the *Australia* or the



Menu of Dinner for touring English Cricket Team.

Ambassador, which were "brightly lit so that you could see people dancing and entertaining", and were far different from the food provided by the dole coupons. Judy Mackinoly shows the effects the economic policies of "balancing budgets" and "sane finance" had on the dietary habits of Sydney's working people. For example, the *retail price index number* for total household expenditures in Sydney declined steadily from 1929 to 1933.⁴⁴ The home vegetable garden, although not a Depression phenomenon, became more widely used after 1930. This was partly because the dole rations did not allow for vegetables or fruit.⁴⁵



THE EQUAL SACRIFICE.

Cheaper and more filling diets, bread and dripping, Irish stews, and golden syrup were resorted to by Sydney's working people. The sharing of whatever food was available became commonplace in the inner-city working class suburbs. Despite these factors, it is reasonable to assume that the inadequacy of the dole provisions meant that many unemployed workers went hungry during the Depression.⁴⁶ And while there are no statistics listing starvation or malnutrition as causes of death, an indicator of the quality of food and health care is the incidence of infant mortality on a suburb-by-suburb basis. As Peter Separritt says:

Just as money could buy a good education...so could it also buy good, bad or indifferent food and health care...

He goes on,

...In Sydney suburbs for the four years 1930-31 and 1933-34, infant mortality (calculated on deaths of infants in their first year, per thousand live births) varied from 87.25 in the inner industrial suburb of St Peters to 30.5 in Mosman...

He cites Vaucluse, a middle class suburb adjoining Woollahra, as having a low mortality rate, "...in the 30-40 per 1000 level...".⁴⁷

Of course, certain of Woollahra's citizens may have attended the *Citizens Dance for Bavin*, held at the Hotel Australia. And in contrast, few may have had to eat Irish stew, bread and dripping or "specked fruit". This tells us nothing of the food actually consumed in the homes of Woollahra's well-to-do. Above all, it does not reveal very much about the perceptions or attitudes of the servants to their employers' diets. To explore these perceptions and attitudes, perhaps one should begin with the high points in the social lives of the rich of Woollahra - the cocktail parties, the tennis parties, the informal dinner parties, to demonstrate the different material level of living the rich were accustomed to and expected, in spite of the Depression.

A. Ryan, a casual domestic, was hired through Jessie Street's Home Service agency by many "leading citizens" (the Games, the Streets, the Fairfaxes, the Vicars) to help in the preparation for cocktail and informal house parties. One house party in Darling Point she distinctly

remembers:

... and what a beautiful party it was, of course, they had all the most beautiful food. Of course that was in the middle of the Depression...and there wasn't anything you could desire that wasn't there... and do you know what I saw...at the dinner party for 30...the centrepiece on the table was made of... every fruit in season and out of season. And inside the pineapple, it'd been scraped out, whether they used it or not. I don't know, I don't think they worried very much about it and inside each pineapple was a globe and a dessert when all the dessert came on there was other fruits as well passed around... and finger bowls...they had everything...and they turned all the lights out and lit up the centrepiece and the table. Oh it was the most beautiful thing! All those fruits that could be...like pawpaws that you could shine through. There was everything... they must have got them from Queensland...But that was in the middle of the Depression...1932...⁴⁸

In another Darling Point home in which Mrs Ryan worked an after-the-races cocktail party was given. There was insufficient food as Mrs Ryan points out:

...Did I tell you before about that cocktail party after the races...I knew there wasn't enough food... I kept telling her...(the mistress of the house)... there wasn't enough food. And you see, such a lot of people at the party knew me...I went inside with some food. Instead of getting some loaves and making sandwiches. Anyway, Lady Street was there and she said to me, '...Mrs Ryan could you get me a savoury or even a little sandwich...I can't drink on an empty stomach and I had no lunch at the races today...'. That was the senior Lady Street. I was ashamed to go back. Could you imagine people giving a party and not providing enough food...

The insufficiency of food was uncommon for these cocktail parties. Mrs Ryan's embarrassment stresses the point. Further of her remarks compound it:

...It was appalling. Then you'd do other parties and there'd be an abundance over...you wouldn't know where to put it...⁴⁹

Even those people in Woollahra who could not afford to dine in the manner of Mrs Ryan's employers strove to keep up appearances.

Mrs D. Shaw's employers were such people:

...if they had a dinner party, it was oysters and prawns and everything...My word! I remember shelling prawns for the prawn cocktails...

And while these people never hired "help" for their parties, the style in which the rich dined was emulated:

...they had a little bell, even though they didn't have a dining room. They were putting on the dog, and I didn't wear a uniform, but they would ring the bell and I would scurry in and take away the soup...Then she'd ring the bell and I'd take in the next course.⁵⁰

That the rich ate well, particularly when hosting parties, is emphasised further in J. Mephane's statement:

...when guests came for meals, then the expensive and the best wasn't good enough for that inevitable impression which was so vital it seemed.⁵¹

These comments by the ex-domestics suggest that a certain style and material level was expected when the parties were given. That the residents of Woollahra never went hungry is shown not so much in what the domestics said about the ordinary meals, but in that there was always ample food. Answers to the question, "What did they eat during the Depression?", ranged from "...Mostly very plain food..."⁵² to "...Oh things like bacon and eggs for breakfast and...Oh yes, they ate very well..."⁵³

A travelling gardener who tended the large grounds in the Rose Bay home of J. Mephane's employer was given a breakfast of "...two fried eggs, several slices of bacon, fried vegetables if any, and about six slices of bread and butter and a pot of tea..."⁵⁴ He ate this meal in the garden shed away from the sight of Mrs Mephane's mistress. The Sydney dinner Mrs Ryan prepared in one Woollahra home indicates that hunger was never a problem there:

...they'd have a first course...it was a dinner for 6...either with a fruit dish or something of that nature. It might be prawns or prawn salad or something like that. Then there'd be the dinner and a sweet...They loved roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.

Oh! that Yorkshire pudding, it was the bugbear, because at the last minute I had to make the Yorkshire pudding and rush it well, I had to have the dinner ready by 6.30 p.m...

Mrs Ryan also remembered the well-stocked pantry of a Darling Point surgeon:

...yes I have never in my life, excepting in a store, seen such a well-stocked pantry and...in the middle of the Depression...tinned whitebait and caviar and salmon...everything you wanted for a party...caviar was a very expensive item in those days. And pate de foie gras there was...it was a luxury too. He had a beautiful home. They had their own beach...⁵⁵

"Elegant" was the term used by Mrs Leek to describe the dress of Mr and Mrs Vickery of Victoria Road, Darling Point. Mrs Leek, as a girl of 15, laundered the clothes of the Vickers twice weekly during the Depression.⁵⁶ On the subject of clothes,⁵⁷ one can only speculate on two cheque butt receipts made out by E.F. Vickery (solicitor) on 16.10.33. "Anthony Horderms and Sons Ltd" received a cheque for £69.11.9. The other cheque was made out to "Farmer and Co. Ltd" for the sum of £95.7.4. Whether the cheques were for *clothes*, furniture or other commodities it is impossible to discover,⁵⁸ but the spending of these amounts indicates a solid material level of life. Most of the ex-domestics' comments on the clothes of their employers are extremely terse. D. Shaw remembers the clothes of one employer very well:

...He dressed very well. He was a very tall man... His clothes to me were just beautiful...I think my father (a coalminer) had a couple of Peape's Shirts. Yes, I sent off some of their castoffs. Yes, that's right.⁵⁹

One retail store was chosen by her employers, "D.J.'s for all their clothes...". J. Mephane's Vaucluse and Darling Point employers had their own seamstresses and tailors.⁶⁰

When describing the dress of Woollahra's women, two ex-domestics emphasised the long gloves and hats of:

...these ladies, it was in the days they all wore long kid gloves and everything...⁶¹

Gloves, gloves only when they went out...the women...and hats and stockings...Oh, I envied them.⁶²

Despite the brevity of the ~~ex-domestics~~' descriptions, the many photographs of the rich in *The Home* illustrate why there was little need to elaborate on the clothes of the rich. The long descriptions of the weddings found in the "Women's Column" of the *S.M.H.* suggest that the rich never suffered the ignominy of wearing the dyed blue army greatcoats of the unemployed.

The home entertainments of Woollahra's rich are the only forms of entertainment the domestic servants could comment upon accurately. The information the servants convey is summed up in their sparing words. Mrs Ryan was constantly employed by Woollahra's matrons for parties and wedding receptions. The masked balls held at the Willsallens she remembers humorously, "Of course, they all knew one another. All the wealthy and socially established went to those balls".⁶³

"Whenever tennis was played on the courts at 'Ginagulla', there was always parties...my mother said they were for charity...".⁶⁴ The colour and laughter of Mistress Fairfax's gatherings was in complete contrast to the game of tennis played by McLeod and his son. This occurred when the mistress was away. The gardener and his son stole onto the courts to play tennis. They did not play on the courts but on the grass beside it. McLeod's father brought the game to an end within minutes as he feared being seen on the courts.⁶⁵ Mrs D. Shaw's employers were constantly hosting bridge parties.⁶⁶ The Governor and his wife were most popular among the rich of Woollahra. A. Ryan remembers the excitement and colour of the Vice-Regal parties "...All the dances were to a programme and often went until three in the morning".⁶⁷

In *Dismissal of a Premier*, B. Foott commented upon the Games' charity to the homeless men of the Domain.⁶⁸ She failed to comment, however, upon the entertainment Government House provided when the Games had distinguished guests. Mrs. Ryan, a hired "help" remembers well:

...If they had visitors staying there (Government House) which they sometimes did...Sir Isaac Isaacs and Lady Isaacs used to come and stay sometimes. A big breakfast would be set up and on the side table there were 7 or 8

dishes for them to choose from...Yes, it seems terrible, everything they would possibly want. There was pheasant or anything like that. Anything they wanted.⁶⁹

In the same week of these rather grand breakfasts, the Isaacs attended the Spring Carnival at Randwick and went motoring in the Blue Mountains with the Games.⁷⁰ Touring by motor car was much favoured by the upper classes, and the Blue Mountains was a favourite spot. Many of the well-to-do travelled by car to their country retreats at Sutton Forrest and Bowral during January and February to attend the Bong Bong Picnic Races.⁷¹ The cooler air of the southern tablelands and the garden parties were the added attractions which prompted the rich of Woollahra to motor down. A car trip to Avalon Beach was popular among the not-so-rich of Woollahra, as D. Shaw explains:

And then they had this Austin with a rumble seat. And they would go to Avalon on a Sunday perhaps. And I'd sit in the rumble seat with the toddler on my lap and you'd be out there in the wind and the weather and everything...⁷²

The charity of the wealthy is interesting not so much for the descriptions the domestics give of "the marquees on the tennis courts" or of "the ladies in their beautiful clothes",⁷³ but for the domestics' attitude to it. D. Shaw was blunt and forthright: "...Charities, yes, yes. And you got your picture in the paper...and someone was raking it all off...taking the cream off every collection they had...".⁷⁴

Perhaps her memories of her home town, Kurri Kurri, in the Depression of her father and brothers unemployed, made her cynical towards the charities of the upper classes. Perhaps it was the memory of her mistress who held parties for charities but who also "...tied the telephone down with numerous knots, round and round and round, so that I couldn't use the phone...".⁷⁵

The memory of the dog gymkhana in 1930, held in the grounds of "Kenworth Bank", the Vickery's home, irked O. Leek. Proceeds from the gymkhana went to the R.S.P.C.A., "and there was all that unemployment about".⁷⁶

A. Ryan's comments were equally blunt "...they had their charity balls but they gave their charity to whatever charity they wanted to,

not the unemployed...Oh no...".⁷⁷

Each of these ex-domestics unconsciously assumed the middle and upper classes of Woollahra should have felt a sense of guilt for the plight of the unemployed. And further, that the charity of the upper classes was misdirected - or that it was a part of the social whirl. Does this explain the vapidness of the charity of the rich to the poor? Even if it does, the charity of the rich is still not understood. For while the rich displayed a genuine concern for the poor and the unemployed, they never felt guilt. Those with capital in Woollahra saw the Depression as an economic problem. To them it was never a moral dilemma or a question of personal guilt. As an economic problem it had to be solved by the efforts of government and business leaders. The views of the upper class of Woollahra concerning the unemployed echoed the sentiments of the General Manager of Baltana Pastoral Company, "Sorry to see men turned out who gave their best service, but needs must...".⁷⁸

Certainly, charity for the social elite of Woollahra was part of their social whirl. This, itself, was part of the social life the rich had grown accustomed to and expected. Charity balls or parties were a pattern in their social life - an area of conspicuous consumption.⁷⁹

Charities, whether they were in aid of the Red Cross or The Home for the Incurables, were something which defined the rich socially.⁸⁰ Perhaps a major reason that the various charities organised by the women of Woollahra overlooked the unemployed was that unemployment was seen as a moral problem - not a problem of personal guilt for the rich. It was that the unemployed posed a moral threat to society.⁸¹ Perhaps in the social circles of Woollahra, unemployment was seen as a sign of moral weakness on the part of the "victim" - akin to the moral problem of alcoholism. These social attitudes might explain why "at no stage (in the 1930s) when unemployment was so acute, was there an official inquiry into the standard of living of the unemployed..."⁸²

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relief in Melbourne in the early 1930s. The meagreness of the dole is explained as a form of social control, as is private charity. As a cultural phenomenon, charity is barely considered by Watts, but he does note Stanley Argyle's view of charity: "...it was one of those institutions of the British race that was desirable to continue..." (*Victorian Parliamentary Debates*, 12.9.1922, Vol.161, p.1341. Argyle was Victorian Premier). See R. Watts "The Unemployed Men and the Footscray Council, 1930-December, 1932", *La Trobe University Studies in History*, No.3, March 1972; "New Directions in Australian History", *Arena*, No.34, 1974; and correspondence between Watts and the author, 16.8.1976. The "Britishness" of charity work was no doubt one of the reasons why the well-to-do women of Woollahra found it culturally and socially important.

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- 57 See, *Stock and Land*, 23 June, 1977 and *Department of Overseas Trade*, Media Release, 7 December, 1976.
- 58 For Sinclair's reactions see the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December, 1976. For Howard's response see *Department of Overseas Trade*, Media Release, 7 December, 1976.
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The Sydney Rich in the Great Depression

DREW COTTLE

"I wouldn't be seen dead talking about the depression. We didn't really suffer".

— Dame Elizabeth Murdoch (wife of Sir Keith Murdoch) in *Woman's Day* 13 June 1977, p.9.

"The depression didn't affect us in any way whatever, so it was no hardship as far as we were concerned".

— Son of a senior executive on the Melbourne Herald during the 1920s and 1930s, interviewed on 7 September 1975.

Social histories of the great depression in Australia are few, and social histories of the depression years in New South Wales are fewer. Writings on this period have tended to concentrate on politics and economics, while they have largely ignored its social aspects. Certainly they provide us with the familiar images of Lang, the dole queues, the "happy valleys", the plight of the small farmers, Niemeyer's visit, the Premiers' Conference, the defeat of the Scullin government and the triumph of the conservative parties. But one is left with the impression that the depression, in metropolitan Sydney especially, was a period of universal suffering.

The handful of history theses which have examined the social effects of the depression have been histories "from the bottom up".¹ They have given the people a place in Australian history and made "the person in the street" more than a statistic. Judith Mackinolty's work shows the effects of the depression of Sydney's working people, and it describes the forms of popular culture from talking movies to community singing; the way people helped each other with housing, food and clothing — in short, the great fortitude of the Australian people. Nadia Wheatley studied the effects of the depression on the working class suburb of Balmain. The chronic un- and underemployment, the forms of charitable relief, the political organisations of the unemployed are crystallised in her remarkable study. Her other writings show that many of the unemployed did not merely accept their lot, but "kicked".²

Most of the historical writings which explore the depression period, however, concentrate on the political organisations, the living standards and the culture of Sydney's workers, and the way they were affected by different government policies. But they concentrate unduly on the working people and, with certain reservations, they reinforce the view that the depression was a time of general hardship, when sacrifices were made equally. The 'certain reservations' are rare but penetrating comments which show that not everybody shared unemployment, eviction and the fear of it, meagre diets, gold fossicking, rabbit catching, rattler-jumping, or the dole coupons. Mackinolty's thesis contains many suggestive, but unexplored, comments on the socially *diverse* effects of the depression:

The depression was not uniform in its impact on people.... For some people it appears that the social round continues, perhaps somewhat diminished in its gaiety ... but nevertheless a continuation...³

and

The people least affected by ... [prolonged unemployment] were those people who had sufficient private means or income to tide them through the lean years or were even able to profit from the reduced prices of goods, ranging from houses and cars to everyday food and clothing items.⁴

Indeed, a common response when interviewing elderly working people about their experiences during the depression has been that the working people certainly suffered, but the rich continued as

the rich there was no depression".⁵

The history of the very wealthy, of the social elite, has rarely been critically examined in Australian history. Much has been written about the rich, but most of this has been to sing their praises.⁶ The social or material life of the rich is either taken for granted or ignored.

Every day Miss Mary goes her rounds,
Through the splendid house and through the grounds.
Looking if the kitchen table's white,
Seeking if the great log fire's alight.
Finding specks on shining pans and pots,
Never praising much, but scolding lots.

— from Miss Mary Fairfax by Lesbia Harford. (This poem was written when Lesbia Harford worked for a time as a domestic servant in Sydney's eastern suburbs.)

Situating the High Bourgeoisie or Woollahra

The great families of Woollahra established their fortunes in the leading pastoral, industrial, mining, banking and commercial enterprises in Australia.⁷ Each of these sectors of the economy was affected differently by the depression. In the last instance, the material circumstances of Woollahra's established families depended on the fortunes of each sector.

The observations of social commentators suggest that Woollahra was the *premier* suburb of Sydney. A satire of life "at the top" by G.C. Bleeck in its creation of atmospheric background gives some idea of the solid homes of Woollahra's rich. The author writes,

"... 'The Pines' is one of these rare survivals of the days when the majority of the well-to-do preferred to live in houses... It was sober, well-weathered grey stone with steeply sloping slate roofs ... The grounds were spacious, dropping down at the rear of the building to an ancient yellow-walled artificial fountain... Even the garage is of ancient and solid construction, and designed with that spaciousness of outlook so characteristic of architects of an earlier generation. Originally, a coach-house, it too is of stone and slate..."⁸

That this home is situated in Woollahra is unmistakable.

"Below stretch the fairways of the golf-links... then the harbour, glittering at the moment with a myriad mirrors of the early afternoon sunshine; further, across the water, the cheerfully coloured rooftops of the northern suburbs show through the dark grey green of the treetops. A generally pleasing prospect of the kind to inspire estate agents to lyrical heights..."⁹

A source which highlights the point that Woollahra was a high bourgeois suburb is the *1931 Electoral Roll* (Commonwealth and State Joint Electoral Roll N.S.W. *Wentworth - 1931.*)

Using occupation as a social indicator, the electoral roll is unusually revealing. Taking a sample of *one* voter in *fifty* and examining the electoral subdivisions of Bellevue Hill, Woollahra and Rose Bay (*total number of voters = 21,169, total sample = 423*) the occupation of labourer appears *twice*. Other occupations which could be considered working-class (shop assistant, fitter, motor mechanic, barman, carpenter, warehouseman and storeman), appear *nine* times. Those employed in personal and domestic service (children's nurse, lady's companions, chauffeur, butler, gardener, maid, "useful", steward, cook, letter-carrier, valet), have a total of *twenty-four*. And while the white collar wage and salary earners (clerks, saleswomen, travellers, bank clerks, teachers, typists and secretaries) are numerous, those most conspicuous are the leading professions (woolbuyers, manufacturers, company directors, brokers, importers, barristers, merchants, engineers, graziers, bank managers, station-managers, and newspaper proprietors). Their occupations are over-represented. They have a total of *seventy-nine*. Seventeen people described themselves as of "no occupation", of "independent means" and (like Gwyneth Dow's father, Eric Terry), as a "gentleman".¹⁰

While these figures hardly provide a composite picture of Woollahra in terms of occupational status, they nevertheless underline the fact that many of those in the leading professions lived there. The high number of those of "independent means" and people employed in domestic service indicates Woollahra as a place where lives of comfort and service might conjoin.

Woollahra was a high status area. Figures on grades of occupation

taken from the Commonwealth Census of 1933 confirm this. More employers lived in Woollahra than in any other suburb.¹¹ Levels of income found in the Census also confirm that Woollahra was the suburb of the rich. In both the male and female categories, Woollahra had the highest proportion of residents earning over £260 per annum.¹² Historically, this had always been the case. The Fairfaxes and the Knoxes, owners respectively of newspaper and sugar refining empires, were pioneer settlers in the area.¹³ The Horderns, Lloyd-Jones, Dangars, Vicars, Windeyers and Willsallens built their fine homes on the ridge of Bellevue Hill.

Unlike working-class Balmain, Woollahra had always been free from industrial plants. In the thirties it was without timber yards, railway workshops, abattoirs, ship yards, soap factories or wheat silos, which dominated the Balmain scene. Business enterprises in Woollahra were all of the service variety — greengrocers, bakeries, tobacconists, confectioners, a picture theatre and laundries. These shops were found only on the main roads or on the boundaries of the suburb.¹⁴ Not one shop or small business was situated in the most exclusive parts of Point Piper, Darling Point or Bellevue Hill. The exclusiveness of the area is shown in its property values. Few of the properties in the Point Piper ward were below an unimproved capital level of £3,500, and many ranged from £10,000 to £40,000.¹⁵

The Woollahra City Council's attitude to charities also shows up the suburb's social character. The council sponsored the charity appeals of the Eastern Suburbs Day Nursery, the Royal Hospital for Women, the Red Cross and the Benevolent Society. It permitted the Red Cross and the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia to conduct street collections for its various appeals. But on the five occasions when the Paddington Relief Committee sought permission to carry out street collections for the unemployed, the council refused.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, Woollahra had one of the lowest unemployment rates of any suburb during the depression.¹⁷

Even recreation embodied Woollahra's social character. During the inter-war period golf was the most popular game. So popular was it in Woollahra that many rate-payers had miniature golf courses built on their properties.¹⁸

The Royal Sydney Golf Club was a tangible symbol of wealth and exclusiveness. Its members, many of whom resided in the district, represented Sydney's most select social circles. Their occupations ranged from grazier to civil engineer. Many of the names appearing in F. John's 1927 edition of *Who's Who* have Woollahra addresses, membership of Sydney's exclusive Union and Australia clubs and membership of the Royal Sydney Golf Club. The 1931 Executive Committee of Royal Sydney consisted of two knights, three judges, four leading businessmen and two retired military officers.¹⁹ In 1922, the Club had a membership of 2,000. In 1960 its membership had risen to only 3,875.²⁰ The Club was, according to the present Secretary, "In those days (the 1930's) very much a private affair...Only those at the very top of the social ladder even thought of joining the Royal Sydney."²¹

Certain of Woollahra's schools also manifested the area's high bourgeois character. The Presbyterian Scots Collège on a hill overlooking Rose Bay and Double Bay was not only a place of learning, but a place where boys' class character and outlook were moulded.²² Its spacious playing fields and well-constructed buildings were equal to any of the other Great Public Schools in Sydney. Most of the "day boys" lived in Woollahra, while the boarders came from places as distant as Papua and Fiji.²³

Further down the hill lay the more recently established Cranbrook. In a particular way, Cranbrook was the private boys' school most representative of the area. The ground on which it stood had once belonged to the Tooth family, long time residents of the area. Before being converted into a school, three governors of N.S.W. had chosen Cranbrook as their residence. Samuel Hordern, Rodney Dangar, Sir Kelso King and other prominent people in Woollahra had provided the capital to buy the property for the purpose of converting it into a school. It was the *High Anglican* school of the area.²⁴

A biography of Iven G. Mackay reveals much about the upper class character of Cranbrook and the district of Woollahra. Mackay, a distinguished soldier, was appointed headmaster of Cranbrook in 1933. His biographer, Ivan Chapman, remarks that:

"Mackay was astonished at the number of boys who came to school in chauffeur driven cars. He (Mackay) could not stop this; but he could prevent

the cars depositing their small passengers near the headmaster's residence...He never let up in his war on pretentiousness, humbug and display of wealth. Some of the boys were sent home to remove from their attache cases a show of hotel-stickers - Raffles, Shepherds, Galle Face, Savoy, Waldorf-Astoria, Imperial, etc...."²⁵

Mackay may have been successful in his unrelenting campaign against humbug and display of wealth. The wealth of Woollahra, however, still remained. Perhaps Mackay wanted to foster at Cranbrook the discretion and tact of the older upper class schools of Shore and Grammar. There, wealth was assumed, not pretentiously displayed.

Pervading these symbols of exclusiveness was a feeling of "being British". The homes, the golf course, the parks, the yachts — everything down to the clothes worn by the citizens of Woollahra effused this sense of British-ness, of being part of The Empire. Such cultural anglophilia had repercussions in the politics of the depression years, for in British Australia, if one stood for God, King and Country, one resolutely opposed Langism and repudiation.

Life at the Top: The Social World of Woollahra's High Bourgeoisie

The social world of Woollahra's richest families could generally be described as Anglo-Australian. The Depression did not alter the nature of this social world, even though American influences, particularly Hollywood's talking movies, were affecting the tastes and fashions of Sydney's well-to-do.²⁶ The rich of Woollahra were not immune to such American influences as luxury flats, the cocktail party, the Charleston or Clara Bow's bob, but these complemented rather than radically changed their social world, which remained stridently Anglo-Australian in outlook.

These sentiments had a firm basis in material reality. Australia was an important part of the British empire. British investment had dominated the Australian economy. The business interests of Woollahra's propertied classes were largely dependent on the maintenance of a prosperous British empire. Their family origins were to be found in Britain, and "the crimson thread of kinship"²⁷ was an attitude and a fact within the Woollahra establishment.

had important political consequences. It was expressed in many ways. De Groot's decision to open the Sydney Harbour Bridge, for example, "in the name of the decent and respectable citizens of New South Wales"²⁸ was the voice of British investment. De Groot stood for the Empire, "sound finance" and the payment of one's debts. To him and other wealthy Anglo-Australians, Lang represented national dishonour and repudiation. On the other hand, popular reaction to this sense of being British was seen in Test Cricket — in the infamous bodyline series of 1932-33. The jeers of derision which the Australian crowds levelled at the new bodyline bowling tactics of the touring English cricketers were borne of political grievances. Jardine's men, like the British financiers, were hitting Australians when they were down.²⁹

The rich of Woollahra defined themselves socially as an elite, quite apart from the rest of Sydney's population. Their social exclusiveness was achieved through a host of activities — charity work, cocktail parties, trips overseas, polo and golf, country retreats and society weddings. These became the social preserve of the rich — the only people who could pursue such activities. As cultural forms, such pursuits derived from the British upper classes, and the older members of the great families of the area looked back nostalgically to the halcyon days of the British empire. P. McLeod states:

"...Even as I write I began remembering a childhood that was displaced from Middle Victorian to the twenties and thirties. The older members of these families did not realise, I think, that they were anachronisms and had their chauffeurs drive their electric broughams to Ocean St., tram stop to go to the city. Into the late twenties some kept cows and the Knoxes sheep, at Bellevue Hill and Rose Bay, and this required milkmen and dairy staff..."³⁰

The children of Woollahra first learnt the social graces they were expected to display in the home. While servants "knew their place"³¹ a sense of social difference, attitudes of empire loyalism and the need to become proper ladies and gentlemen, were transmitted both in the home and at school. Connell's remarks on the state-provided education system that existed before World War I accurately describes the role of education at Woollahra's elite schools — Cranbrook, Scots, Ascham and Kambala:

and decorum...The political content conveyed through history and social study classes, in ceremonies and celebrations and in dozens of incidental ways in other activities, was a conservative nationalism, usually of a monarchist and imperialist flavour..."³²

Connell's remarks complement those of G.C. Bolton, concerning the importance of the independent schools. Not only were the boys of Cranbrook and Scots inculcated with the best of British culture, they were groomed to become the leaders in Australia's political, economic and social affairs.³³

From Ivan Chapman's account, Cranbrook experienced a sobering sense of discipline when Iven Mackay became its headmaster in 1933. Mackay was appalled not only with the pupils' snobbishness, but also with their 'slovenliness of speech'. As Chapman relates,

"Once a week the entire school was put in the hands of Mr Lawrence Campbell, (a well known elocutionist) who introduced them to the 'gag', a chunk of wood (with a safety string attached) held tightly between the front teeth, so as to force them to speak with the mouth properly open..."³⁴

Clearly, Mackay understood whom his pupils were destined to be. The drum and fife bands, the debating societies, the holiday excursions to Bowral, Kosciusko and Mudgee — "those dozens of incidental ways in other activities", were preparations for future leadership.³⁵ The school magazines of Scots College, Kambala and Ascham reflect essentially the same activities and assumptions.³⁶ A former student of Kambala recalled the discipline of the school,

"...You were always being told to behave as a lady would...or that your behaviour was not becoming to your station in life..."

She remembered, too, that,

"most of the girls from the Darling Point area were driven to and from school by their parents' chauffeurs ...Not too many of them ever walked to school..."³⁷

An important event in each of these schools' calendar was the annual Head-of-the-River Regatta. Ferries were hired to transport many of the school pupils to the site of the races.³⁸ The practice of hiring the ferries ended in 1932. Mrs and Mr Minmore asserted that this did not dampen enthusiasm for, or dwindle the numbers at, the Head-of-the-River Regatta.³⁹ Indeed the Regatta was as socially

of which it was an imitation. It boldly demonstrated the Britishness of Sydney's Anglo-Australians. As a social event, the G.P.S. Regatta prepared the pupils of Cranbrook, Scots, Kambala and Ascham for a way of life only the affluent could enjoy. It also, as Mrs Pont pointedly remarked, "...allowed one to know who was who..."⁴⁰

If one did not become one of the nation's leaders, one was still expected to partake of the social life of the leading citizens. The social life expected of the pupils of Woollahra's leading independent schools is illustrated most noticeably in the "Old Girls Notes" of *The Kambala Chronicle*. Presentation at court, trips overseas, and being seen at the Polo, are the common themes found in *Kambala's* "Old Girls Notes".

"...Audrey Anderson has taken up residence in Leipzig, music is her line, and good luck to her in Germany..."

...We were so glad to see some Kambala girls here (London) this year, Kathleen Robinson, Shirley Dent and Marjorie Luscombe-Newman, all with the flutter and excitement of a Court Presentation — and Babs Johnson who was also presented...

...Laura Faul is expected back about March next year after a wonderful tour of the British Isles, Norway, Sweden and the Continent...

...Betty, Cynthea and Peggy Lawson left in March by the *Orford* for a tour of England and the Continent...

...Ethel Shand has gone with her father for a trip to the Continent...

...Kathleen Parker left for England in March and Thirza Whitney sailed in June for her trip abroad..."⁴¹

And

"Kathleen McCathie was presented at Court in June...

Marjorie Finlay and Marjorie March were in Sydney for the polo in June..."⁴²

In its December 1933 issue, *The Cranbrookian* devoted several pages to what its old boys were doing. Many had become solicitors, graziers, or had entered commerce and banking.⁴³ Trips abroad, polo and professional careers for the males were part of the social world for which the non-government schools of Woollahra prepared their pupils.⁴⁴

But even these bastions of high standards were not immune to economics. Fifi Hawthorn writes of Kambala:

when the banks closed. It hit schools like Kambala rather heavily. The number of boarders was greatly reduced. At the close of the year (1931) there were only 11 boarders and 145 day girls. The staff all agreed to a cut in their salaries. The school was obliged to forgo its usual fete and concert in aid of charitable and missionary work..."⁴⁵

A.C. Child, the author of a history of Cranbrook school, states that the drop in the numbers of boarders in 1931 and 1932 was particularly serious from

"...the financial point of view and was to continue for the next two years."

Economies, as Child puts it, were made. The teaching staff was reduced,

"four masters were dispensed with — Messrs Hancock, Brighton, Harris and Carroll left at the end of 1933. The domestic staff was also reduced. An extensive advertising campaign of the school in the country newspapers was undertaken and the sale of the school's land holdings was considered..."⁴⁶

Each of the independent schools reduced their fees considerably. At Kambala, for pupils 13 years and over, the fee was 11 guineas per term. If such pupils were boarders the fee was 26 guineas per term. Day pupils' fees in the 7-10 age group were 7 guineas, 11-13 age group, 9 guineas. All of the day pupils' fees were reduced by 2 guineas per term in 1932, and boarders' fees by 5 guineas.⁴⁷

As bleak as the depression years were, none of the schools had been forced to close. The number of pupils declined, but not dramatically, while the people who suffered most were the teaching and domestic staff who lost their jobs, and those who remained to face the wage cuts. These "economies" kept the schools open for the children of the Woollahra wealthy.

The psychological impact of the depression on these schools is expressed most clearly on ceremonial occasions, especially Anzac and Armistice Days. On these solemn occasions the ideas of service, sacrifice and moral fortitude for one's class were emphasised. The speeches delivered on such days likened the depression to that other great crisis, the Great War. On each Anzac Day in 1931, 1932 and 1933 Major General Gordon Bennett addressed the pupils at Kambala, and in each speech he called for the awakening of the Anzac spirit.⁴⁸ The

Day address, called on the Kambala students to show the same courage and determination as the Anzacs "to defeat the present social ailments".⁴⁹

The Anzac Day speech at Cranbrook School in 1931 was given by Dr F.W. Wheatley, Director of Education. Wheatley's views of the Depression's causes and cures were made quite clear.

"...judgement and clear thinking - the result of education...more than ever...are called upon to combat the machinations of clever rogues...Many of our people are not prepared to do a decent day's work...honest work will be our salvation. This lesson you can learn at school...and on leaving school see to it that you stand always on the side of truth, justice and honour..."

The speech on Founder's Day, by Cranbrook's new headmaster, General Mackay, while not delivered on Anzac or Armistice Days, nevertheless evoked the strident Anzac spirit.

"...At the present time in this great land of Australia there are competing and dividing interests at work, there are men in our midst who seek to break up the community interests into so many class interests, and you will be called upon to decide what is going to be your contribution in the work of combating such efforts..."⁵⁰

Although troubled financially by the Depression, the schools, as reflected in these speeches, stood for the preservation of the existing social order. Psychologically, the Depression seemed to the administrators and patrons, a period of great crisis. The Depression had ushered in a dire threat to the social order. One can only speculate if General Mackay saw the Communist party and radicals in the labour movement as "the men in our midst who seek to break up the community interests..."

Such appeals to revive this Anzac spirit, that other sacrifice Australia made for the British Empire, for the sake of honour and country, are in many ways similar to those made by the various organisations which were formed during the depression to protect British investment in Australia. The New Guard and the All For Australia League appealed to the Anzac spirit during their campaigns. Other organisations, like the Sane Democracy League, the British Empire League and the Constitutional Association, emphasised the need

for Australia to honour its debts (to the British financiers) and not repudiate the interest on them (as Lang proposed). Lang's policies seemed to these organisations to be "a recipe for revolution and chaos".⁵¹

The patrons and administrators of Cranbrook, Scots, Ascham or Kambala may not have had direct links with the New Guard or the All For Australia League. But they shared the same ideas of sacrifice, national honour and loyalty to the Empire and also believed in the consequent need to combat threats to the established social order. The pupils were exhorted to defend their parents' way of life. The parents themselves needed little urging, as they were the ones who had already formed these pro-Empire organisations.

"Mrs Henry Osborne organised a very bright party last month, with the misleading name of 'Depression Party'. As a mark of respect to the bad times, the guests provided the supper, the men making themselves responsible for the drinks and the girls for the food — in accordance with the best rustic traditions of the village hall 'socials'. Mr and Mrs Pat Levy lent their house in Roslyndale Avenue, Woollahra, for the revel, which continued till after four the next morning".

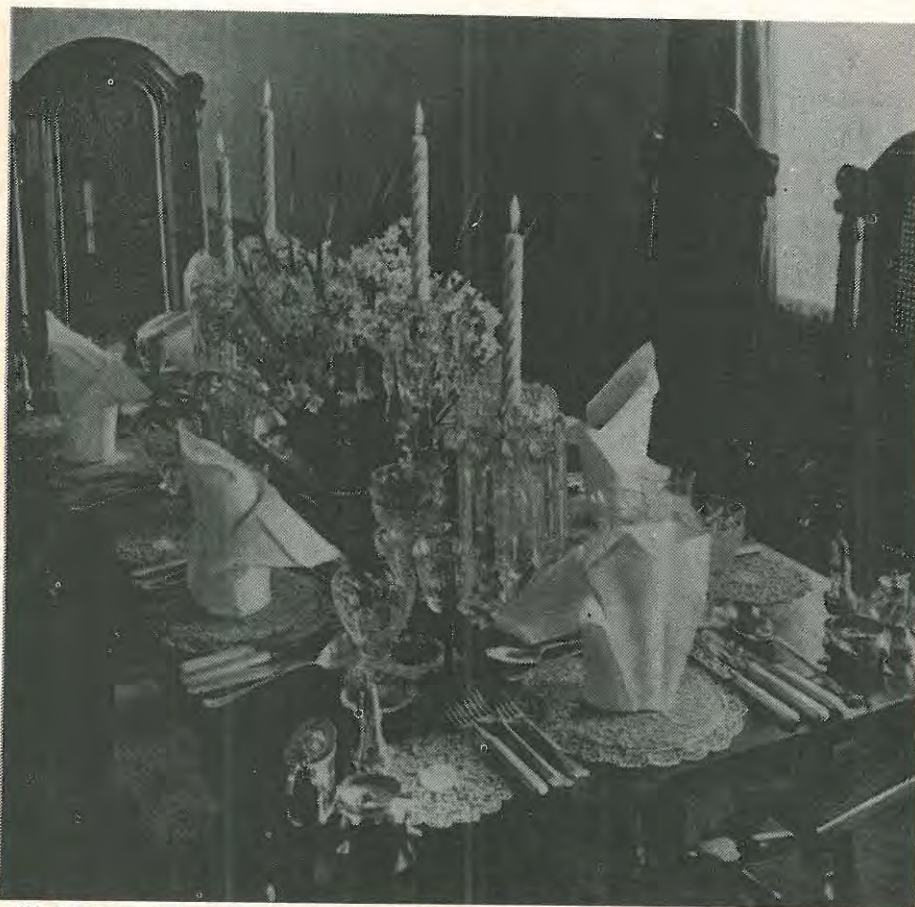
— *The Home*, 2 August 1931, p.10.

Meanwhile, were Woollahra's wealthy able to maintain their social exclusiveness? Did their weddings and parties continue as before? It is hard to measure these activities, but the women's pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the social columns of *The Home* are good guides to what went on.⁵² Examination of these sources shows that the depression did not tangibly affect the social world of the rich. Despite the crisis, the big social weddings continued. For example:

The wedding of Miss Myra Richardson, eldest daughter of Mr and Mrs R. Stewart Richardson, of Wahroonga, to Captain Francique Filhol, Commander of the *Cephee*, was celebrated yesterday afternoon at the office of the Registrar General. The bride was given away by her father, and Mr Neville Laurence, her brother-in-law, attended the bridegroom. The bride wore a fawn tweed ensemble, and a felt hat to match. Her shoulder posy was of lily-of-the-valley. The reception was held last night at the residence of Mr and Mrs Neville Laurence, Koovong, Redmire Road, Strathfield

the *Cephee*. Their future residence will be at Bordeaux, France.

S.M.H 17.3.32 p.4.



"A dinner table at 'Pepper Tree', Glencoe Road, Woollahra, Sydney, the home of Mr and Mrs Horace Sheller. The cut crystal candlesticks are genuine Georgian pieces, and the flower stand is an old Sheffield plate knife basket.

The Home, July, 1931, p.44.

Many middle class couples did postpone their marriages during the depression. They wanted to wait for the recovery so as to be sure to at least have a deposit on a house or a well filled glory box. Such anxieties did not touch the rich of Woollahra. The marriage rate may have declined slightly⁵³, but weddings were still celebrated

in the traditional sumptuous manner:

SOCIETY WEDDING

Gordon - Osborne

Two of the oldest and best known pastoralist families of New South Wales were linked yesterday afternoon by the marriage of Miss Olma Osborne, elder daughter to Mr and Mrs Oliver Osborne, of "Bundarbo", Jugiong, to Mr William A. Gordon, elder son of Mr and Mrs Deuchar Gordon, of "Manar" Braidwood. Although the bride is a country girl she is very well known in Sydney, as she has spent much of her time here and has taken a prominent part in social circles, so that her wedding created great interest.

St. Mark's Church, Darling Point, was beautifully decorated with tall standards of golden daffodils, orange lachenalias, and cream gladioli for the ceremony, which was performed by the Rev. F. T. Perkins. The Bride was given away by her father, and wore a long gown of magnolia tinted satin, the skirt ending in a train. Over it she wore a veil of cut tulle, which reached to the end of the train, and fell from a high coronet of seed pearls. An unusual effect was given by a swathe of tulle, which veiled the bride's face. Her bouquet was of cream and mauve orchids, with trails of smaller orchids.

There were six bridesmaids, the Misses Joan Osborne-Wilkinson, Daisy Osborne, Nancy McCay, Pamela Osborne, Anne Gordon and Pauline McDonald. Their frocks of lily-of-the-valley leaf green flat crepe were made with full, flared skirts and long, tight-fitting sleeves, and they wore in their hair coronets of tiny beads of the same tone of green, wired to give the effect of garlands of leaves. Multi-coloured hyacinths formed their bouquets, and each bridesmaid had a trail of hyacinths of an individual colour as a finish to her bouquet. Mr R. T. Osborne was best man. The ushers were Mr Dick Allen, Mr John Laidley, Messrs. Forbes Gordon, Bill Osborne, and Leslie Stephen.

The reception was held at the residence of Mr and Mrs Laidley Dowling, Rose Bay Avenue, where the wedding breakfast was served in a marquee erected on the lawn. It was decorated with a profusion of lovely flowers in all colours, huge baskets forming the centre-pieces on the tables, while the pillars of the marquee were twined with green garlands.

Three hundred guests were received by the bride's parents, Mrs Oliver Osborne wearing an ensemble of mist blue camel's hair cloth, the long coat having a deep collar of grey fox fur. Her small hat was of the same material as her coat, and she wore a cluster of orchids. The bridegroom's mother was in navy kasha and wore a navy velour hat, and pinned orchids in her coat.

S.M.H. 2.8.33 p.6

The Church of St Mark, Woollahra, was a favourite wedding spot. Its marriage register records that the depression had little impact on the parishioners' matrimonial festivities. Indeed, statistics drawn from its 1931 marriage register reveal that 10 males and 20 females who were residents of Woollahra were parties to more than half of the 37 marriages celebrated. All except one of the women gave their occupation as home duties. The sole exception was an actress. The occupations of the male residents varied from cartoonist to bank official, from grazier to accountant. In the whole seven year period (1928-1934), only 36 of 349 marriages performed in the church⁵⁴ were between those of working class occupations (domestic servants, fitters, caterers, and labourers). Many of the resident women married graziers. The occupation "grazier" appears 30 times in the marriages registered over a 3 year period. The Depression did not seem to concern the big grazier families in maintaining their preference for big city weddings, at St. Marks.



Mrs C.M. Stodard, whose savouries are so popular amongst a large circle of her friends. Here she is busy with Oysters a la Normandie, Petits Gouts de Sardines Furnees, and Augrettes au Fromage.

The Home, July, 1931, p.24.

As Jean Martin explains,

"...They (the big grazier families), spend their money in characteristic ways: in sending their children to the highest status non-governmental schools, travelling to visit friends and relations scattered throughout the state and beyond, and to take part in the picnic races, the country shows, the city weddings, and other events through which their identity as a group is maintained."⁵⁵

When the polo tournaments were held at Kensington or Cobbitty, cocktail parties and balls for their country visitors were common fare at "Retford Hall", Anthony Hordern's residence.

The dance arranged by a committee to raise funds for the new Kyeemagh Polo Ground was one of the bright spots in the December festivities. Mr and Mrs Anthony Hordern lent the ballroom of their home, "Retford Hall", Darling Point, for the occasion, and polo enthusiasts trooped along in their brightest frocks and moods. Many of the country visitors in Sydney for Christmas were among the merry-makers. Miss Pauline McDonald, only daughter of Mrs Fraser McDonald, of Double Bay, chose the occasion to announce her engagement to Mr Dick Allen, and they were warmly congratulated by their many friends present.

The Home, 1.1.33, p.6.

And as a writer for *The Australian Women's Weekly* remembers,

"...The return of better times has brought a return to polo and Sydney this week will not only enjoy the game, but all the festivities associated with it..."⁵⁶

The Bong Bong picnic races and the mild climate of Bowral attracted many of Woollahra's rich, especially in Sydney's humid months of January and February. The Dangars, Fairfaxes, Willsallens and other prominent Woollahra names had country estates in the Bowral district.⁵⁷ Mary Fairfax kept a permanent staff of eight servants in her country home, none of whom were dismissed because of the depression.⁵⁸ Mrs White, after returning from England in 1932, spent six weeks at a friend's property near Robertson "relaxing". She explained that "most of the Vice-Regal set owned estates in the Southern Highlands ... although we didn't..."⁵⁹

Attendances were down at the Race meetings held at Randwick throughout 1931 and 1932. Phyllis Peter remarks that "fifty bookies'

meeting...⁶⁰ The size of individual bets dropped considerably by 1932. As P. Peter has explained, these are indications of how the Depression affected the gambling of the working people, not the social activities of the rich. Sydney's working class retreated to the pubs and organised "S.P." betting rings. The rich, although fewer of them from the country, continued to display their finest clothes and social graces in the segregated areas of Randwick racecourse. The well-to-do's numbers may have thinned, yet the social activities associated with Race Week were still eagerly enjoyed.

The brightest fixture for Race Week seems likely to be the Mannequin Parade, arranged by Mrs Midge Chisholm, assisted by the Misses Gretel and Mary Bullmore. This will take the form of a Race Tea and will be held at the Wentworth on April 11th, from 4.30 to 6.30. A number of Sydney's loveliest young things will display the new season's fashions. The Governor and Lady Game have promised to be present, and the Country Women's Association will gather the proceeds.

The Home, 1.3.31, p.6.

and, "...The principal cocktail party on Monday in Race Week was given by Mrs E. Brooks, at her flat "Coromandel", Darling Point - dozens flocked to it after the last race."⁶¹

Even the parties not associated with Race Week were hosted and attended by the social elite of Woollahra:

Mrs Henry Osborne organised a very bright party last month, with the misleading name of "Depression Party". As a mark of respect to the bad times, the guests provided the supper, the men making themselves responsible for the drinks and the girls for the food - in accordance with the best rustic traditions of the village hall "socials". Mr and Mrs Pat Levy lent their house in Roslyndale Avenue, Woollahra, for the revel, which continued till after four the next morning.

The Home, 2.8.31, p.10

Nola Lake's memories of the parties and balls she attended during the Depression were more precise,

"...The parties were never short of food...but the food was plainer...the private parties, for example, were often sherry parties, young people didn't drink spirits anyway. And the balls...the young men all had their dinner jackets and tails. And there were always parties in the private homes or formal balls

at the Wentworth or the Australia in aid of the charities."⁶²

Mrs K. Evans recalls that her sister

"...was a member of the fast crowd...never went to university nor worked...she was too busy enjoying herself at the balls and private parties..."⁶³



The base is pastry with a covering of grated cheese and butter. The two circles may be capers or sections of stuffed olives. The cross consists of strips of dhal or fresh caperons. At the top and bottom no design is drawn.

DESIGNING THE COCKTAIL SAVOURY



A primitive design on a pastry base covered with cheese paste. A slice of sardine or gherkin may be laid across this with capers or boiled green peas as toppings. The four diamonds are gherkins.



The base is pastry with a covering of whipped cream and grated cheese. The cross pieces are anchovies. The central design is of black, ripe olive and hard-boiled white of egg. The shaded horizontal lines are strips of caperons. Red, white, green, black.



A design in black and white with green cross of anchovy in the centre. Sections of ripe (black) olives on a base of pastry with a covering of cheese and butter. The diamonds may be made of gherkin.



This design may be worked out from any of the materials mentioned in former recipes. The saw shaped pieces should be in black. The circle should be of a section of stuffed olive and the diagonal lines might be in green anchovy.



A pastry of fried bread shape with a whole circle from a centre section of hard-boiled white of egg. The central



The Home, July 1931.

Sydney University seemed untroubled by the depression. Many balls and parties were organised by Woollahra students to raise funds for charity: "There were always balls or garden parties put on by the social group I knew at University."⁶⁴ Fees remained unchanged, and student enrolment dropped only slightly, notwithstanding which, 1935 enrolment figures were still above 1928 figures.⁶⁵

Once at university, the sons and daughters of the rich could enjoy charity balls and dinners. The charities favoured by the Woollahra students were usually the Red Cross or the Benevolent Society.⁶⁶ Their parents were benefactors to a wider range of

curables, Ryde; the R.S.P.C.A.; and the Australian Mothercraft Society. Their philanthropy did not direct itself in that time of crisis to the needs of the poor and the unemployed. A stubborn independence and a desire for work, not charity, may have characterised the attitudes of the homeless and the unemployed, yet little was done on the part of Woollahra's rich to alleviate the distress of Sydney's poorer citizens.

Because of the absence of wealthy members, Father Piquet, of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, concluded that, "...it was the poor who helped the poor..." Canon Hammond, too, was indignant that those of substantial means cared little for the welfare of the unemployed or the destitute. He doubted if more than 5,000 people contributed to the three leading charities.⁶⁷ As sound as these criticisms might be, they do not explain the attitude of the rich of Woollahra to charity or the unemployed.

Unemployment was seen by the rich as a sign of moral weakness — a social disease which needed to be eradicated. Woollahra's rich felt no personal guilt or responsibility for the existing social inequalities which were only heightened by the Depression. They contended that an economic recovery led by a government and business leaders committed to "balanced budgets" would eradicate unemployment.

To the rich of Woollahra, charity was a way of defining and maintaining their exclusiveness. It was part of their conspicuous consumption, as important to them as their membership at the R.S.G.C., the Queens Club or the Union Club. Charity was a cultural form. To the rich it bespoke of their Britishness and their resilience as a social elite. Perhaps to the wealthy women of Woollahra, charity meant what Brian Harrison has observed as charity's meaning to the upper class women of Victorian England,

"Deprived of alternative outlets for their literary and organising talents, and possibly for their emotions, Victorian women derive from philanthropy all the excitements and dangers of penetrating and observing the unknown while at the same time securing the change of scene and activity which is the essence of recreation..."⁶⁸

Many of Woollahra's society women saw philanthropy as one of

British Australian Tobacco Company, Mrs R.J. Whiteman, was on the financial committee for the Home for Incurables, Ryde. The wife of a prominent grazier, Mrs F.W. Hill, saw her main hobby as being the Vice President of the Committee of the "Havilah" Children's Home.⁶⁹ To Woollahra's rich, the importance of charity lay not so much in its altruism but in the way the particular charity was organised as a recreational activity. Whether it was a dance on the decks of the P & O Passenger cruiser *Orford*,⁷⁰ a day of golf at the Royal Sydney,⁷¹ or a tennis party at the Reschs,⁷² "The occasion had to provide enjoyment..."⁷³

At the Royal Sydney Golf Course it was only the rich who enjoyed playing golf. There was a slight fall in membership in 1932, but it increased again in 1933 — coinciding with an increase in membership fees from 13 guineas to 16 guineas per annum.⁷⁴ Some rural members had difficulty meeting their dues, but once again the main victims were the Club's staff. The Management Committee made "economies", such as sacking one of the indoor servants and a cake cook "since cakes are not being purchased", and the Royal Sydney survived.

Golf also had a charitable function. The R.S.G.C. members probably believed they had aided the unemployed sufficiently after they "...agreed to send a donation of £4/4/0 to Woollahra Relief Fund ..." (23.10.31). *R.S.G.C. Minute Book*, Vol.IV, (p.203); or when they "donated £2/2/0 to the Woollahra Relief Fund and no action (was) taken in reference to the Paddington unemployed." (11.2.32). Tree planting to the R.S.G.C. was *more* important, as the minutes show (22.7.31), *R.S.G.C. Minute Book*, Vol.IV, p.154, "...Tree planting. The secretary is authorised to spend up to £85/0/0 in purchasing trees..." (*R.S.G.C. Minute Book*, Vol.IV, p.175).

Trips overseas were another important part of the social world of Woollahra's rich. Trips to Britain were most important, since they strengthened the bonds of Empire. A sense of British superiority had certainly been absorbed by Mrs White. Upon returning to Australia after a *five-year stay* in England and the Continent, she was distressed because

"...everybody was leaning against the poles...you know...on the wharf...every Australian seems to have

been away for five years. And, how bad the Australian people spoke...I had been with good English people. I had developed quite an English accent. Oh! but when I came back. Oh! I heard people speaking. Oh!..."

Her stay in Europe had included *two years* at finishing school in Switzerland and "a year at the University of Sorbonne, Paris, perfecting my French".⁷⁵

A number of the Woollahra society women were, like Mrs White, presented at Court.⁷⁶

"Oh yes, we were very lucky. You had to line up very early in the Mall if you wanted to get into the Throne Room. Only so many people got into the Throne Room. We were lucky. We were very early... Got in...We sat...We watched people being presented...We waited our turn, of course...The King, The Queen Mary...And we had strawberries and champagne...Yes, we had supper afterwards which was very exciting...But of course, we all had to wear feathers in our hair...and a train...and curtseying...to the King...to the Queen...as we moved backwards, backwards...Oh, it was a marvellous experience..."⁷⁷

Burley has noted that "It was not unknown for liners to clear from Australia [in 1932] with more first class saloon stewards than first class passengers" and "During 1931 and 1932 the number of passengers fell to less than one half of their 1927 peak".⁷⁸ He constructed a table for passenger traffic between Australia and Britain for the inter-war period which shows how passenger shipping was affected by, and never really recovered from, the depression. In 1927 183,000 passengers travelled between Australia and Britain, while in 1932 the number fell to 86,000. The highest figure for the 1930s was 146,000 in 1938. These figures show the overall movement of passenger shipping figures between Australia and Britain, but the table does not reveal how the depression affected the travelling of the rich. Indeed, the difficulty of finding details of passengers' place of residence and occupation makes it hard to chart their movements overseas.

Nevertheless, despite the depression's effects on passenger shipping in general, the Woollahra well-to-do were still travelling abroad:

ion and sun-shiny hair, has been a striking figure at Sydney social events during the last month or two. It is over three years since this attractive Anglo-Australian last paid us a visit. During her stay in Sydney she has been the guest of her father, Mr Ernest Watt, and Mrs Ernest Watt, at "Coromandel", Darling Point. She will return in April to her home in London in time to be present at the wedding early in June of her step-sister, Miss Inez Travers, to Dr. Pringle. Miss Pauline Watt is now quite settled in London and has a most attractive flat in Beaufort Gardens.

The Home, 1.3.32, p.4.

and:

Mrs Eustace Molroyde, of Darling Point, is taking two of her daughters (Joane and Norah) abroad this month. They will leave by the German liner *Oder*, and France will be their destination. They will probably spend about a year in Paris for the girls to perfect their French. Their future plans are uncertain, but it is doubtful if they will return to Sydney under three years.

The Home, 2.2.31, p.10.

The social world of the Woollahra elite, therefore, with its schooling, parties, charity, golf and overseas trips, continued during the depression much as before. Its rituals were never threatened, even in the darkest days of the crisis, as the dole queues lengthened along the streets of Redfern and men died jumping the rattler.

Depression at the Top? Responses of the High Bourgeoisie of Woollahra to the Great Depression.

The responses to the Depression of Woollahra's social elite were as varied as one might expect of any social group. Miss N. Lake had firm ideas about the rich of Woollahra's attitudes to the Depression, "...Those who were well off were careful to be tactful..."⁷⁹ Her father, the Chief Mechanical Engineer in the N.S.W. Railways, was "forcibly retired" by Lang in 1932. As he was British, he received a very small pension. The Lake family was forced to move from their large home in Jersey Road, Woollahra, to an apartment in Wollaroy Road, Double Bay. Most of their furniture was sold. Three of the four domestics employed were given notice. Her family needed to, "...keep up 'appearances' and to be tactful...", in Woollahra where the socially prominent lived.

The Pont family found the Depression a most difficult time. Mrs Pont explains, "...my father was a lawyer, ...didn't have a single case in two years...People simply couldn't afford his services...but we were still able to live because my father had private means..." The Pont family throughout the Depression employed "three domestic servants and a full-time gardener".⁸⁰ Labour was relatively cheap. Mrs Pont's family, like many other families in Woollahra, could afford domestic servants either on a full-time, "live-in" basis, or as "casuals". This perhaps may have indicated a response of the rich to the Depression. It was a change which, in fact, hardly affected their way of life. The "economies" resorted to by Mary Fairfax and the Royal Sydney Golf Club may have been a common response of the upper classes to the Depression. Laying off staff may have swelled the ranks of the unemployed but it reduced wage bills.

These responses of the rich of Woollahra to the Great Depression need to be anchored in material reality. As Schedvin⁸¹ has shown, the Depression affected the various sectors of the Australian economy differently. The wheat farmers in the marginal areas of N.S.W. and other states, were left poverty-stricken. The newspaper, clothing and food industries, while suffering setbacks, did not share the fate of the building and construction industry. The building industry was left in total ruin by the Depression. During the boom years of the 1920's, the building industry had been the pacesetter. As a labour-intensive industry, it had employed many of Sydney's semi-skilled and unskilled male workers. With the onset of the Depression, most of Sydney's building workers joined the burgeoning army of the unemployed. The building industry came to a standstill. The well-to-do of Woollahra responded to this situation in a particular way. They had innumerable garages built and expensive alterations made to their properties, throughout the 1928-1934 period.⁸²

Five hundred and forty five garages were built in Woollahra during this seven year period. In the same period, seven garages were built in the Redfern municipality, and twenty three were erected in the Municipality of Bankstown.⁸³ Six of the garages in Redfern were built by petrol pump proprietors. Seventeen of the garages in Bankstown were built before 1931. In both the Bankstown and the Redfern Council Minutes, estimated costs of the garages are never forwarded. Each of the garages built in Woollahra had an estimated

cost — none cost less than £70. Most were built of brick and many were double garages. Some examples of the garages built in Woollahra during 1928-1934 are, "...Lieutenant-Colonel W.A. Harrison — garage, 'Edgecliff House', corner of Edgecliff and Ocean Sts., £360- approved..." "...Dr H.G. Humphries — garage, No.9 Darling Point Road, £290- approved..."⁸⁴

Garages were not the only things which the rich had constructed during the Depression. Many of the residents made expensive alterations to their homes. Some examples are, "...Dr N. Gregg — alterations and additions, 40 Cranbrook Road, £1,000- approved..." "G. Mant — alterations and additions, No. 67 Drumalbyn Road £1,300- approved..." "Dr J. Flynn — Balcony, 23 Greenoaks Avenue, £450- approved" "Estate of H. Fairfax — additions, No. 32 Victoria Road, £1,500- approved".⁸⁵ Several of Woollahra's residents built houses during the Depression years. Examples are, "...Warwick Fairfax, house and garage, Lot 2, 'Ginagulla' Estate, Victoria Road, £30,000- Approved..." "...W. Ditfort — house and garage, Lot B re-subdivisions, Drumalbyn Road, £3,120- approved..." "David Jones — residence and garage, Lot 4, Victoria Road, £4,000. That approval be granted".⁸⁶

Contrary to an accepted myth, suicide was not a common response of the rich to the economic crisis. The rich may have contemplated suicide, but few carried it out. In fact, Woollahra's suicide rate was one of the lowest of Sydney's suburbs. Thirteen suicides were committed in Woollahra in 1934. This was its highest figure. In comparison to the number of suicides committed in the city of Sydney municipality or the nearby Randwick municipality, this tally of 13 is gruesomely overshadowed. The City of Sydney consistently recorded 25 suicides or more, yearly. Its highest number of suicides was 41 in 1933. From 1931 on, Randwick municipality never had fewer than 14 suicides annually.⁸⁷ The picture of the stockbroker jumping from his skyscraper office needs to be replaced with that of the worker gassing himself in a bare, shabby kitchen.

An important response of Woollahra's rich to the Depression was the way they perceived the economic crisis. To many of them, the Depression seemed to be over by the end of 1932. Mrs White's remark on her return to Australia was "oh, you see I was here only for the

Miss N. Lake had definite ideas on when the Depression began and ended, "...After Wall St. crashed everyone lost confidence...when Lang was removed the country seemed to return to its senses..."⁸⁹ These sentiments are echoed in the *S.M.H.*, *The Home* and *The Sydney Mail*.

In contrast, the Depression had not ended for Sydney's working people by 1933. A. Ryan was adamant that the recovery only began when the Second World War began, "I think I told you of a boy around here (Lidcombe). From the time he left school till the war broke out he never had a job. He never knew what it was to earn money. There were dozens of boys like that...couldn't get work anywhere..."⁹⁰ D. Shaw's father and two brothers, all Kurri coalminers, did not commence fulltime employment until 1939.⁹¹ Schedvin claims that the economic recovery was very slow in Australia, and incomplete even at the beginning of the Second World War. Schedvin states that it was "probably unduly weighted by the unemployment problem."⁹²

Most of the pro-empire political organisations had branches in the Woollahra area. De Groot, a leading New Guardsman, had an antique furniture business in Rushcutters Bay. The N.S.W. Constitutional Association, the political body which was instrumental in fermenting opposition to Lang and which may have played a part in Lang's dismissal, found its greatest following in Woollahra.⁹³ Its members included many of Sydney's leading citizens, Sir Kelso King, "Quambi, Woollahra; Richard Windeyer, Edgecliff Road, Woollahra; P.S. Willsallen, Wentworth St., Point Piper; C. Lloyd-Jones, Yarranabbe Road, Darling Point; K.E. Winchcombe, Greenoaks Avenue, Darling Point; and G.M. Goldfinch, "Lyndhurst", Salisbury Road, Rose Bay.

Many of the wealthy citizens of Woollahra, would, no doubt, have agreed with Henry Manning (a resident of Woollahra, a member of the N.S.W. Constitutional Association and Attorney-General in the Steven's government) that "if Lang had remained in power another twenty four hours our state would have been involved in revolution..." John McCarthy maintains that Manning was a man of considerable tact and coolness and not given to colourful rhetoric.⁹⁴

Rhetoric or not, Woollahra's well-to-do shared Manning's fears. A. Ryan, the ex-domestic who worked in Woollahra, was resolute that

"...in Jack Lang's day...they started that...New Guard...

and all those wealthy people paid into it...they did... I *know* they did. And I know that a man came to the door and collected...They (the rich) didn't join it, but they supported it...Yes..." She stated further that:

"...Only once did I ever hear them discussing the New Guard...Never, never...did they discuss the New Guard... not at any of those big dinners...But at one of the dinners, a New Guardsman came to the door to collect a cheque...at the wrong time..." And more importantly, "...Yes, it was true,...they were going to...Lang would've disappeared because I heard that, even at that stage...That if Lang returned, he'll disappear. That was the words that he used..."⁹⁵

Lang was loathed by many of Woollahra's citizens. Miss N. Lake remarked that "Lang had to be stopped. He was a Red Ragger...He seized the monies of the N.S.W. Savings Bank..." She saw the New Guard (of which her 71 year old father was a member), as "representing sober citizens...It (The New Guard) was a bastion between the mob and the rest of the population..."⁹⁶

Mrs K. Evans said her parents knew "...The Campbells...Eric and his wife, quite well..." She recalled that her brother had joined, "an organisation that Eric Campbell had formed during the seamen's strike in 1925 and 1926...Nothing came of it...But then there was the New Guard and he joined that immediately..."⁹⁷

One of Mrs Minmore's brothers, a surgeon, who had served as an officer in the Great War, "...enthusiastically joined the Guard..." Her younger brother, a law student at Sydney University, at the time, was attracted to the Guard as it seemed like a bit of good fun and adventure..."⁹⁸

When Mrs White returned from her five year stay in England and the Continent, "...There was much talk among my (her) friends of Lang..." "They said Lang was right — a right liar..." Another incident Mrs White distinctly recalled was the day of Lang's dismissal, "...On the evening Governor Game dismissed Lang I attended a show at the Tivoli. Before it commenced a one-minute standing ovation was given to the governor for his action..."⁹⁹

Although Sydney was not thrown into civil war or revolution, the rich of Woollahra had planned for all contingencies. John James, the

was organised (by the New Guard) for the early morning hours in the grounds of Barker and Knox Colleges and in the Royal Sydney Golf Club as well as the scrub around Sydney..."¹⁰⁰ The two brothers of Mrs Minmore were "picked up very early each morning and taken to the Royal Sydney for army drill..."¹⁰¹

The wealthy citizens of Woollahra rallied to the cause of "sound finance", loyalty to the King and the Empire. They stood for the banishment of Lang and repudiation and Bolshevism. Culturally, economically and politically, they turned to Britain in the Great Depression.

The Depression brought out all the resilience the rich possessed as a social class. They clung tenaciously to their values and attitudes and their entire social world, even though it never appeared to be seriously endangered. In many ways, the economic downturn separated the rich of Woollahra from the parvenus, the would-be-rich. Needless to say, the rich had always inhabited a different world from the ordinary working people in Sydney. The Depression only exacerbated their differences. Bread and dripping was a staple diet in the homes of many Sydney workers. Caviar and whitebait were necessities for the musicales and the masked balls in the dining rooms of Darling Point. Only now and then did talk of the unemployed and the depression intrude.¹⁰²

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

This article and "Domestic Service in Woollahra During The Depression" (published in *Bowyang* No.1, April 1979) rely heavily on oral interviews with (or written communications from) former domestic servants and their employers who lived or worked in Woollahra during the early 1930s. All of the people interviewed who were not domestic servants have been given fictitious names. This is in accordance with their wishes, as they gave me their information on the understanding that their identity would not be disclosed.

One of the domestics, Mrs Avah or "Burr" Ryan, is now dead. Peter Sekules, in his *Jessie Street: A Rewarding But Unrewarded Life*, criticises me for referring to Mrs Ryan as A. Ryan, commenting

Avah was Mrs Ryan's first name, and "Burr" was her nickname. Whether her second name was Susan I do not know, but I do know that many of Sydney's rich employers called their female domestics "Susan", just as many Edwardian ladies called them "Jane". To the rich the name was suitably short and easy to remember — as Mrs Riversedge noted when she remarked in a short story by Saki "when I get maids with unsuitable names I call them Jane; they soon get used to it." ("The Secret Sin of Septimus Brope" by Saki [H.H. Munro]). The feelings of the domestic servants or what they thought about this arrangement were never considered.

Some historians continue to scoff at the interview as a source of evidence. What many of them tend to overlook, however, is that many of the sources which they jealously guard and uphold as "hard evidence" — such as Royal Commissions, wills, birth certificates, parliamentary debates and papers etc. — are themselves based on the spoken word. (See Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians* (Paladin 1977) p.13-18).

The interview, and oral history generally, do have serious limitations. But these arise when the historian treats the interview as a "piece" of history in its own right, instead of integrating it in a wider framework with evidence from many other sources. Such contemplation of navels reveals little, but social history which is informed and guided by theory may fruitfully use oral history to illuminate many points.

The following is a list of the people interviewed for the two articles, or who wrote letters detailing their experiences.

Mr J. Allen, the present secretary of the Royal Sydney Golf Club. His father was a member of the Royal Sydney in the 1930's. He stressed the exclusiveness of the R.S.G.C. during the Depression, and now.

Mrs K. Evans, was a resident of Darling Point during the Depression. She now lives in Paddington. Her family were close friends of the Bushells, the Reschs and the Campbells. Mrs Evans went to the University of Sydney during the period 1930-1933. Her final comments on the Depression were "...We all suffered one way or another."

Mr K. Graham, spent his boyhood and youth in Rose Bay. He left the area when he was 30, in 1948. He has fond memories of the social life in the inter-war period. He now resides in Brisbane. He works part-time as a commerce teacher for the Department of Education.

Miss F. Hawthorne, is the retired headmistress of Kambala, Church of England School for Girls. She took up the position of headmistress at Kambala in 1933. Her descriptions of school life were most helpful.

Mrs D. Hocking, was employed as a domestic servant by Dr Vicars of Beach Road, Darling Point. When the Depression "set in", her husband, a butcher by trade, joined her in domestic service. She was later employed by the Wirths, "of the circus fame". She now lives alone at Nowra.

Miss N. Lake graduated from Sydney University and she became a cadet journalist for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. She reported many of the social events of the rich which appeared in the *S.M.H.*'s social columns. Her family declined economically during the Depression.

Mrs O. Leek, worked as a casual domestic for the Vickerys. Apart from the arduous work of washing her employer's clothes, her lasting memories of the Vickery's home was "their pet peacocks". She is a widow now living in a Housing Commission house at Pagewood, quite close to the G.M.H. factory.

Mr P. McLeod, is an employee of the N.S.W. Education Department. He and his family live at Minto. Mr McLeod's memories of "Ginagulla" during the inter-war period are most illuminating. When the writer last spoke to Mr McLeod, he was seriously considering writing about the "private fiefdoms" of Bellevue Hill.

Mrs J. Mephane, worked as a domestic servant in three different Eastern Suburbs "situations", from 1920 until the outbreak of the Second World War. Only her third job proved "interesting", as her mistress was "kind". She now lives at Toongabbie.

Mrs P. Minmore, is a life-time resident of Woollahra. She is an ex-pupil of Kambala and a graduate of Sydney University. She received her degree in 1933. Her father, during Lang's ministry, was a senior civil servant. Both of her brothers were active members of the New Guard.

Mrs L. Pont, was a teenager during the Depression years. Her father was a solicitor. His business was seriously affected by the Depression. The Pont family in the period 1930-1932 were forced to live on "independent means". Her parents were "not part of the Vice-Regal set, although they knew many of them". She still lives in the Woollahra area.

Mrs A. Ryan, saw much of the social life of Woollahra's well-to-do, as a "casual domestic help". She remembers clearly the two social worlds of depressed Lidcombe where she lived, and prestigious Woollahra.

Mrs G. Selwood, was a "live-in" domestic in three different situations from 1930 until 1940. The information she provided about domestic service was most revealing. She is now a resident of West Ryde.

Mrs D. Shaw, entered domestic service in Woollahra in 1932. She has bitter but humorous memories of her years in domestic service. At the time she was interviewed she was still working as a "live-in domestic servant" for the Trahlee family. She has since left that "situation" and is now touring Australia by motor car.

Mrs White is a member of one of Sydney's oldest established families. In the 1930's her circle of friends included the Knoxes, the Fairfaxes, the Dangars and the Willsallens. Although having "missed" most of the Depression in Australia (she returned to Australia in 1932) her way of life — the long trip abroad, the presentation at Court, her instruction in French — was similar to many wealthy young women at that period. She is still a resident of Point Piper.

NOTES

1. J. Mackinolty, "Sugar Bag Days: Sydney Workers In The Depression", M.A. Thesis, Macquarie University, 1973; N. Wheatly, "The Responses of a Community to the Great Depression: Social and Political Activity in Balmain, 1929-35", B.A. Thesis, Sydney University, 1971; N. Wheatley, "The Unemployed Who Kicked", M.A. Thesis, Macquarie University, 1975.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Mackinolty *op. cit.* p.14-16.
4. *Ibid.*, pp.112-113.
5. D. Shaw, conversation, 12.5.1976.
6. Even then most of the studies have been made by political scientists, economists and sociologists, for example: E.W. Campbell, *The 60 Rich Families Who Own Australia* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1963); Sol Encel, *Equality and Authority* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1964); Brian Fitzpatrick, *The Rich Get Richer* (Melbourne: Rawson's Bookshop, 1944); C.D. Kemp, *Big Businessmen* (Melbourne: I.P.A., 1964); J.N. Rawling, *Who Owns Australia?* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1939); H. Rolfe, *The Controllers* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1967); E.L. Wheelwright, *Ownership and Control of Australian Industry* (Sydney: Law Book Company, 1957). Two exceptions to this trend might be D.R. Hainsworth, *The Sydney Traders* (Melbourne: Cassell 1971) and Margaret Kiddle, *Men of Yesterday* (Melbourne University Press, 1961). Two more recent examples include John Rickard, *Class and Politics* (Canberra: A.N.U. Press, 1976) and Humphrey McQueen, "Shoot The Bolshevik: Hang The Profiteer: Reconstructing Australian Capitalism 1918-21" in E.L. Wheelwright and Ken Buckley eds. *Essays In The Political*

7. C.B. Schedvin, *Australia and the Great Depression* (Sydney University Press, 1970) p.211.
8. G.C. Bleek, *Everybody's Crazy* (Sydney: Currawong Publishing Co., 1943) p.16.
9. *Ibid*, p.17.
10. Gwyneth M. Dow, *Samuel Terry: The Botany Bay Rothschild* (Sydney University Press, 1974) p.1.
11. *Census of Commonwealth of Australia*, 30 June 1933, Part 1, pp. 126-8 & 131-3.
12. *Ibid*, p.141-3.
13. Encel, *op. cit.*, p.387-89.
14. Municipality of Woollahra *Rate Book*: Edgecliffe Ward (pp.58-84); Bellevue Hill-Rose Bay Ward (67-79, 83); Double Bay Ward (60-91); Point Piper Ward (43).
15. Woollahra *Rate Books*; and 1931 Wentworth Electoral Role.
16. Municipality of Woollahra *Minute Books*: 1930 (8.9.1930, p.308); 1931 (12.1.1931, p.12); 1932 (11.1.1932, p.9); 1933 (23.2.1933, p.54).
17. Peter Spearritt, "An Urban History of Sydney, 1920-1950", Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1976, p.301.
18. Right throughout the depression: See Council *Minute Books*.
19. Royal Sydney Golf Club, *Minutes*, General Volume IV, p.150.
20. J. Jervis, *The History of Woollahra* (Sydney: Halstead Press, 1960) pp.116-17.
21. W.J. Allen, Secretary R.S.G.C. 25.5.1976.
22. See G.C. Bolton "The Idea of a Colonial Gentry", *Historical Studies*, Vol.13 No.51 (Oct. 1968): "Essentially, they [the Australian upper classes] expected private schools to fulfil a similar role to Eaton and Harrow, Oudle and Marlborough ... the moulding of young minds into the pattern acceptable for a ruling class..." (p.326)
23. See *The Scotsman* (the Scots College magazine) 1928-30 and the Annual Reports of the Scots College Council, 1930-33 (held in the Presbyterian Church offices, Margaret St., Sydney).
24. A.C. Child, *Cranbrook, the First Fifty Years: 1918-1968* (Pymont: Wait & Bull, 1968) pp.53-55.
25. Ivan Chapman, *Iven G. Mackay: Citizen and Soldier* (Melbourne: Melway, 1975) pp.138-9.

26. See Z. Nittim, "The Architecture and Urban Development of Kings Cross", Ph.D. Thesis, Architecture, University of New South Wales, 1970, especially Chapter V — "The Cross between the two world wars": "With films and magazines disseminating information on the American way of life, the indications are also that certain sections of the Sydney population might have succumbed to the glamour of apartment life in a fashionable part of town which was a fashion with the rich of New York". (p.136-7). Flat building was not confined to the Kings Cross area. Innumerable flats were built in the Woollahra municipality during the twenties and early thirties. (See Woollahra Council *Minute Books*, 1927-34). The prestigious, socially important journal, *The Home*, edited by Sydney Ure-Smith, extolled the fashions of Hollywood.
27. D. Cole, "That Crimson Thread of Kinship: Ethnic Ideas In Australia, 1870-1914", *Historical Studies*, Vol.14 No.56 (April 1971).
28. K. Amos, *The New Guard Movement 1931-1935* (Melbourne University Press, 1976).
29. J. Ritchie, *Australia As Once We Were* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1975) pp.228-9. See R. Ward, "Two Kinds of Australian Patriotism", *The Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol.14 (Feb. 1970). Ward notes that "this tendency for imperial patriotism to be identified with leading citizens and for local patriotism to be identified with the common people is very deep seated in our society and in our history". See also J.H. Fingleton, *Cricket Crisis* (London: Cassell 1946) Part 1; and a later book, W.F. Mandle, *Going It Alone: Australia's National Identity In The Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane 1978), Chapter 2, "Pommy Bastards and Damn Yankees: Sport and Australian Nationalism".
30. P. McLeod, letter, 23.4.1976.
31. Mrs Pont, conversation, 2.10.1976.
32. See R.W. Connell & T.H. Irving's forthcoming book *Class Structure in Australian History*, p.30.
33. G.C. Bolton, *op. cit.*
34. Chapman, *op. cit.*, p.141.
35. *The Cranbrookian* Vol. XI (3) 1933; X (3) 1930 for descriptions of holiday excursions.
36. See *The Scotsman*, *Kambala Chronicle* and *The Ascham Magazine*.
37. Mrs. P. Minmore, conversation, 19.7.1976.
38. See *Kambala Chronicle* Dec. 1929, p.8; *The Scotsman*, Vol. XVII (Feb. 1930) p.18; and *The Cranbrookian*, Vol. XIV (1) (Sept. 1933) p.4.
39. Mr. and Mrs. Minmore, conversation, 19.7.1976.
40. Mrs. Pont. conversation. 2.10.1976.

41. *The Kambala Chronicle*, 1929, pp.19-20; 1930, p.29; 1932, p.15; 1933, pp.18-19; 1934, p.24; 1935, p.20.
42. *Ibid.* 1928, p.17.
43. *The Cranbrookian* XIV (1) 1933 p.31; XI (3) 1931 p.21.
44. *The Scotsman* XVIII (Feb. 1931) .
45. Fifi Hawthorne, *Kambala: a History for the Kambala Old Girls' Union* (Sydney: Wentworth Publishing Co., 1972).
46. Child, *op. cit.*, p.88. Hawthorn remarks that just before her appointment as headmistress the Kambala School Council reduced the domestic staff by five: conversation with Fifi Hawthorne, 27.7.1976.
47. Stated in conversation by G. Wilson, Principal of Scots College; R. Donziger, Headmistress of Ascham School; M. Bishop. Headmaster of Cranbrook School. The exact reduction was never stated.
48. Hawthorne, *Kambala*, pp.98-106.
49. "Armistice Day" Speech, in *Kambala Chronicle*, 1931, p.8.
50. *The Cranbrookian*, XI (3) 1931, pp.7-8; XIV (1) 1933, p.5.
51. See J. McCarthy, "All for Australia: Some Right Wing responses to the depression, 1929-1932", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol.57, Part 2 (June 1971); Humphrey McQueen, *The Social Character of the New Guard*, Arena No. 40, 1975; N.S.W. Constitutional Association Papers, *Minutes*, 21.10.1929-2.5.1934, Box 2, Fisher Library, University of Sydney; E. Campbell, *The Rallying Point* (Melbourne University Press, 1965); Amos, *op. cit.*
52. Miss Nola Lake, after graduating from Sydney University in 1933, became a cadet journalist for the Sydney Morning Herald. She and two other women were reporters for the women's page. Miss Lake maintains that the endless reports about polo tournaments, charity dances, society weddings and vice-regal garden parties were the ways in which Sydney's most prominent citizens actually behaved. The reports were not fictions designed to allay their fears — conversation, 2.9.1976.
53. See *N.S.W. Statistical Register 1927 to 1934-35*; Phyllis Peter, "Social Aspects of the Depression in N.S.W.", Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1964, p.135.
54. See W.A. Barder, *Wherin Thine Honour Dwells: The Story of the One Hundred Years of St Marks Parish Church, Darling Point* (Sydney: D.S. Ford printers, 1948) p.34.
55. See J. Martin, "Marriage, the Family and Class" in A.P. Elkin ed., *Marriage and the Family in Australia* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1957) pp.36-7.
56. A.W.W. 24.6.1933, p.29.
57. *Ibid.*

58. P. McLeod, conversation, 6.6.1976.
59. Mrs. White, conversation, 28.9.1976.
60. Peter, *op. cit.* p.112.
61. *The Home*, 2.11.1931, p.4.
62. Miss N. Lake, *op. cit.*
63. Mrs. K. Evans, interview, 1.9.1976.
64. Miss N. Lake, *op. cit.*
65. *Official Yearbook of N.S.W.*, 1929-30 to 1934-35.
66. Miss N. Lake, *op. cit.*
67. Peter, *op. cit.* pp.131-33.
68. See Brian Harrison, "Philanthropy and the Victorians", *Victorian Studies*, Vol. IX (4) (June 1966) pp.353-74.
69. See *Who's Who in the World of Women: New South Wales* (Sydney: Reference Press, 1936) Mrs Whiteman and Mrs Hall are only two of the many leading names of Woollahra found in this book. According to Dr. Beverley Kingston, all of the women whose names appear in the book donated 10 guineas towards its production costs.
70. See *The Home*, 2.1.1930, p.8.
71. Municipality of Woollahra Minutes, 1932, Letter of 27.6.1932: Benevolent Society Organising Committee, p.261.
72. According to Mrs Evans, "the Reschs tennis courts were often used for charity fetes or garden parties in aid of charity.
73. Mrs. White, *op. cit.*
74. Royal Sydney Golf Club *Minute Book*, Vol. IV, 17.8.1932.
75. *Ibid.*
76. The "Old Girls Notes" from the *Kambala Chronicle* indicate that presentation at Court was part of becoming a society lady in the eyes of the Woollahra set. The social pages of *The Home* often made references to presentations at the English court.
77. Mrs. White, *op. cit.*
78. K. Burley, *British Shipping and Australia 1920-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1968) p.149-151.
79. Miss N. Lake, conversation, 28.9.1976.
80. Mrs. Pont, conversation, 2.10.1976.

81. Schedvin, *op. cit.*
82. See Municipality of Woollahra *Minute Books*, 1928-1934.
83. See Redfern Council *Minute Books* (held at Waterloo Council Chambers) and Bankstown Council *Minute Books* (held at Bankstown Council Chambers) 1928-1934.
84. Municipality of Woollahra *Minute Books*, 1931 (11.5.1931, p.133); 1930 (13.1.1930, p.12); 1932 (20.1.1932, p.4 and 14.11.1932, p.78).
85. *Ibid*, 12.5.1930, p.177; 23.3.1931, p.80; 27.4.1931, p.99; 8.5.1933, p.210; 8.1.1934, p.10.
86. *Ibid*, 30.11.1930, p.393; 11.4.1931, p.133; 12.10.1931, p.285; 8.2.1932, p.58).
87. N.S.W. Statistical Registers, 1926-27 to 1934-35.
88. Mrs. White, *op. cit.*
89. Miss N. Lake, *op. cit.*
90. A. Ryan, interview, 29.3.1976.
91. D. Shaw, *op. cit.*
92. Schedvin, *op. cit.* p.309.
93. See papers of the Constitutional Association, Fisher Library, Sydney University: Box 6, District Membership Lists.
94. See J. McCarthy, "A Law and Order Election: New South Wales June 1932", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Association*, Vol. 6 Part 2 (June 1974).
95. A. Ryan, *op. cit.*
96. Miss N. Lake, *op. cit.*
97. Mrs. K. Evans, conversation, 1.9.1976. Mrs. Evans' brother was possibly one of the 500 armed returned servicemen secretly organised by Eric Campbell to help the police during the drawn-out seamen's strike. Prime Minister Bruce had a Commonwealth police force created through the Peace Officers' Act, and he had also called on John Scott, an ex-major in the A.I.F., secretly to organise a few hundred armed men. This "loyalist" force, however, was not needed, as the arbitration court did its job. See David Potts, *The Twenties*, (Melbourne: Cheshire 1970).
98. Mrs. Minmore, *op. cit.*
99. Mrs. White, *op. cit.*
100. John James, "The Guardsmen are Born", *Nation*, 11.3.1961, p.11.
101. Mrs. Minmore, *op. cit.*
102. Miss N. Lake, conversation, 2.2.1976.