
Church and chapel music in and around Sydney, Australia, 1788–c1860

James Forsyth

This paper offers a rare chance to understand how an essentially Anglican tradition was transplanted to a colonial settlement during the Georgian period. James Forsyth traces the establishment of primitive worshipping communities in Australia and their initial adoption of the metrical psalms in familiar English versions. This was followed by a period of establishment and liberalisation within the church during which permanent buildings were erected and the hymns of Isaac Watts and John Wesley were gradually accepted. Attention is then focused on the emergence of new material produced by Australian-born poets and composers which helped to establish a discrete Australian culture, thus, inevitably, leading to the disappearance of the old.

The beginnings of the New South Wales penal settlement at Sydney Cove and the steady development of communities in the surrounding areas occurred toward the end of the time frame under consideration at this conference. A great deal of documented evidence is available to indicate how the settlement gradually developed and how the people endeavoured to establish familiar patterns of daily life. Extant written correspondence, newspaper articles, records of the Colonial Secretary's Office, and publications of poetry and music tell fascinating stories.

In this paper I argue that the European settlers were successful in transplanting familiar patterns of life, including organised religion, and that within two generations newly composed music and texts published in Australia document an independent creative life in the colony. Following a discussion of the first churches constructed by the European arrivals, I consider the transplantation of systems of management. Then I focus on the transference of contemporary musical practices, the use of known repertory brought from Britain, and finally the development of new elements of poetical and musical expression.

The church is established

As each community in the new colony was established, a schoolhouse-chapel was built. This served as a building for public worship on Sundays and as a school for the children during the

week. At least one of the teachers was also parish clerk at services on Sundays.

The first permanent churches were built with convict labour in Sydney, Parramatta, and a little later at Windsor, Newcastle and Port Macquarie. Like their English prototypes (many of which contained galleries), if at first there was no gallery, ultimately one was constructed, whatever the religious denomination.¹

Many of the musicians who played from these galleries were regimental bandsmen, for the military presence was very strong until convict transportation ceased in 1856.² The same musicians also played at public and private soirées, Govern-

¹ For example, the following details are from the State Archives Office of NSW, Clergy and School Lands Corporation, quarterly cash vouchers, 1829, ref. 4/302, vol. 1:

St Philips Church at Sydney, for quarter ending 30th September, 1829

- (i) payment 25 July to George Taylor for enlarging the gallery 1.7–30.9.1829 29.04.00
- (ii) altering the gallery and children's seats according to estimate 25.00.00

St James Church No 12, 8 April 1829
to Ja' Pearson

paid for alteration in Singing Gallery 8.8

Similarly in Parramatta the government architect in 1823 gave a report on the inferior state of the walls of St John's Church at Parramatta, supervised the erection of 'a pulpit with two flights of stairs' (a triple-decker pulpit for which a tapestry picture still exists in the present church), and supervised the construction of a new gallery at the rear of the church (Pollon, 1983, p. 125).

² State Archives Office of NSW, Clergy and School Lands Corporation, 1826, Correspondence, ref. 4/320, letter 47. Quarterly cash vouchers lodged with the Colonial Secretary's office indicate that in 1826 the Reverend Richard Hill, the chaplain of St James, had paid regimental bandsmen for both playing and copying the music:

9 December 1826 Mylett and Sullivan – musicians – Free settlers, 3rd Reg. 3 pounds each. They have each also 1 pound per quarter for writing musick. I propose endeavouring to avoid this expense when the regiment is removed.

ment House functions and Sydney's first Theatre Royal (Irvin, 1971).

In addition to the transference of typical English building styles, the system of management was transferred as well. For the maintenance of established centres in the colony, quarterly cash vouchers indicated that each Anglican church employed the familiar officers of an English parish: chaplain, parish clerk, chief and assistant singers, musicians, sexton, pew openers, beadles, gravediggers and bell ringers. It would seem that the typical English Georgian village parish had been successfully transplanted to Sydney.¹

Metrical psalmody

Not only were the architecture and personnel transferred, but contemporary musical practices in the home counties were also transplanted to the colony. It is tantalising to wonder what musical favourites the chaplain of the first fleet, the Reverend Richard Johnson, and later his assistant and successor, the Reverend Samuel Marsden, brought to their Sydney congregations from experiences of Sunday church and weekday meetings in their home Yorkshire villages of Welton and Farsley respectively, Hull Grammar School, and Magdalene College, Cambridge. Correspondence survives to confirm that Johnson was a personal friend of John Newton and William Cowper of the Olney Group.² Also, among the many items packed in Johnson's travelling trunk (Macintosh, 1978, p. 106) was a copy of 'Greenwood's Harmony'.³

Even in Sydney, so far away from the home counties, the only authorised congregational music in the prayer-book services for Anglicans before 1820 was still the singing of metrical psalms in Sternhold and Hopkins' (1562) versification (the 'Old Version'), or Messrs Tate and Brady's newer version (1696). These translations were routinely bound as part of every Book of Common Prayer. To illustrate the point: in October 1814, Governor Macquarie rebuked the Reverend

Marsden for introducing the Reverend William Goode's version (n.d.; c.1800?) of the psalms without consultation. It seems that the Hebridean Scot and Presbyterian, Lachlan Macquarie, firmly took the view that, as Governor of an English penal settlement, he must uphold the common usage of England's established church in its prayer-book services.⁴

Hymns

On the other hand, from the outset, free-church leaders and their followers were regularly singing hymns of Isaac Watts, George Burder and others, including items of their own composing. The missionaries were forever writing to London Missionary Society directors requesting more copies of Watts's *Divine Songs ... for ... Children* (1715 and 1840) and *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707). As late as 26 June 1813, Rowland Hassall pleaded:

you may furnish me with hymn books to the amount of 100 Watts and Supplements bound together or separate, which publications we very much want for the use of public worship – as Watts is used in all the churches – and there is not a copy to be bought in the colony. Therefore if any person would venture 2 or 300 copies I have no doubt they would be disposed of.⁵

Even the Anglican chaplain, Richard Johnson, in his regulations for the first Sydney School, included the singing of Isaac Watts's hymns at the children's weekday morning and evening devotions, and at their catechisms every Saturday afternoon to 'sing one of Dr Watts's Hymns for Children' (Macintosh, 1978, p. 109). As pastor of souls and overall director of the education of the children, Johnson valued the moral instruction contained in these songs. So far it has not been possible to locate any surviving directions about the tunes to which these songs were sung. Perhaps some of the tunes in the more usual metres were so often used that no indications seemed necessary at the time.

Liberalisation

Still the 'liberal' influences of the free churches continued to increase, for Sydney's first Wesleyan preacher, the Reverend Samuel Leigh, arrived in

¹ State Archives Office of NSW, Clergy and School Lands Corporation, quarterly cash vouchers, 1829, ref. 4/302.

² John Newton, once a slave trader, became curate of the village of Olney in Buckinghamshire. He and his assistant William Cowper wrote over 300 hymn texts for their weekly evening meetings. The collection, known as *Olney Hymns*, was first published in 1779. Some texts, such as 'Amazing grace' and 'God moves in a mysterious way', are still in use today.

³ A short title for F. W. P. Greenwood's *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns for Christian Worship*.

⁴ Woolmington, 1976, items 23, 25 (Macquarie to Bathurst, 7 October 1814, *Historical Records of Australia*, 1(8), pp. 336–7; Bathurst to Macquarie, 2 December 1815, *Historical Records of Australia*, 1(8), p. 637); also noted in Yarwood, 1986, p. 51.

⁵ Australian Joint Copying Project, Miscellaneous Index, Entry 99, London Missionary Society Records, 1795–1825.

Sydney in 1815 and opened his first church at Parramatta in 1816 (Pollon, 1983, p. 129). With such evangelical Anglican and free church activity it is not surprising that the first hymn-book printed in the colony was a words-only 'abridgement of the Wesleyan Hymns selected from the larger hymn-book ... for the use of the people called Methodists', set on the presses of the government printer, (convict) George Howe, in 1821 (Wesley, 1821). One hundred and ninety-three hymns were printed in this 'abridgement'. Possibly the people sang the texts to melodies from *The Union Tune Book*, since archival collections include copies of the 1803 edition of the tune-book (Clark, 1803).

Sydney newspaper columns gave every indication that practices found in English *village* churches had been successfully transplanted. Comparisons made between St Mary's Roman Catholic 'Chapel' and St James Anglican Church, both adjacent to Hyde Park, invariably decreed that the sound of the music made at St James was inferior to that heard at St Mary's. In 1824, 'A Lover of Sweet Sounds' wrote to the *Sydney Gazette*, 23 December 1824, describing what musical forces were present. He also made a judgement about the quality of performance in Sydney Town's premier church of St James, where an instrumental band and singers performed.

Singing psalms is generally intended as a help to devotion, but in the Sydney churches it inspires nothing but disgust, weariness and even ridicule. The truth is, that Saint Cecilia has utterly denied her gifts to the performers, for they set at defiance all time and harmony ... I defy all the frying pans, rams' horns, bagpipes &c. in the world to combine more discordant sounds than proceed from the ill played bassoons, clarinets and flutes, and the cracked and grating voices, which compose the orchestra in the churches.

To crown the whole, as if it were not already enough of this horrid concert, at St James they have lately resumed the practice of chaunting the Te Deum, as a chef-d'oeuvre, in villainous noise. Truly, as I have sometimes heard it said, if an Italian lay buried within ten miles, he would rise from the dead and run out of hearing ...

(*Sydney Gazette*, 23 December 1824, p. 4; quoted in Rushworth, 1988, p. 26)

This would seem very harsh criticism made from the position of a detached listener not actively involved in any musical participation. However, it is becoming clearer that the repertoire and performing traditions brought from the English village parishes were part of a distinctive 18th-century culture of country psalmody or gallery music making for voices and instruments. In this

case the critic was making judgements from the perspective of an educated middle- or upper-class person expecting the music to be art music of *Bel Canto* origins.

The newspaper criticisms did seem to have some effect on those in authority at St James. Colonial, class-conscious Englishmen were sensitive to inferences that their church services exuded village and working-class culture. St James Church was developing as the premier town church of Sydney. The most important people of the region came each Sunday to their allocated and rented pew spaces, starting at the front with the Chief Justice and His Excellency the Governor, then medical, military, naval and civil officers.¹ So the committee of St James voted to acquire a pipe organ to make tangible its pretensions to town church status. This instrument of two manuals, from John Gray of London, as reported by the *Sydney Gazette*,² arrived in October 1827, and was installed in the newly constructed gallery (Rushworth, 1988, pp. 27–8). Other parishes did not procure pipe organs until the 1840s. Gallery bands continued to be employed into the 1830s, when seraphines became fashionable.³

The known repertory of music transplanted from England to the colony included Benjamin Jacob's (1819) *National Psalmody*. On 8 April 1829, the first organist of St James Church, Mr James Pearson, presented a receipt to the chaplain, the Reverend Richard Hill, for reimbursement of a purchased copy of Jacob's *Psalmody*.⁴ The long interludes referred to in the following newspaper report of the official installation in St James Church of Bishop William Grant Broughton as Bishop of Australia might have been those from Jacob's *Psalmody*. (St James Church had risen to the status of Pro-Cathedral at that time.)

The service was not over until after two o'clock, chiefly owing to the length of the pieces of music that were performed on the organ. We do

¹ State Archives Office of NSW, Clergy and School Lands Corporation, Correspondence, ref. 4/320, document 9: floor plan of St James Church indicating names of parishioners, where they sat, and the sliding scale of pew rents paid; drawn by the chaplain, Rev. Richard Hill, 15 July 1825.

² 20 June 1827, 19 September 1827 and 3 October 1827.

³ The seraphine was an English free-reed keyboard instrument which produced sounds similar to an accordion or physharmonia. The seraphine appeared commercially from 1831.

⁴ State Archives Office of NSW, Clergy and School Lands Corporation, quarterly cash vouchers, 1829, ref 4/302, St James Church no. 12, 8 April 1829: 'To Ja' Pearson Esq. One volume Jacob's Psalmody'.

not know who arranged this part of the ceremony, but it was to be annoying to see the service so much delayed, in order that the tune on the organ might be played out; as was the case more particularly when the Bishop was standing in the aisle, and also previously to the commencement of the Litany. The symphonies between the verses were very long. The style of playing we find no fault with, only the length of the pieces and symphonies.

(*Sydney Monitor*, vol. 11, Wednesday morning, 8 June 1836)

Another tune-book, *A Collection of Psalm Tunes ... Harmonised for Four Voices, with an Arrangement for the Organ or Piano Forte*, edited by W. J. Johnson (1854), the organist and choir master of Christ Church, Sydney, was 'Printed and published by W. J. Johnson & Co., at their Musical Repository, Pitt Street, 1854'.

The contents of this collection were thirty tunes for metrical psalms together with a sprinkling of tunes from Wesleyan sources (see Panel A for an index of tunes).

Johnson, in his preface (Sydney, 9 May 1854), explains the rationale for his edition:

to supply the Church Choirs of these Colonies, with a collection of good plain melodies, suitable to the metrical version of psalms now in use; ... the grand and devotional compositions of eminent men of the last three centuries, have been selected, as being best suited for congregational use, and known generally by the whole Protestant world ... It is hoped that this Selection will be found useful in supplying a deficiency long felt, both in the Sanctuary and privately, in this Colony; and also, that its contents are characteristic of what Church music ought to be.

In addition to this collection, evidence for the use of other specific tunes is found in the titles of thirty-three hymns and chants on three pinned barrels of the 1856 Walker barrel and finger organ installed in the west gallery of St Thomas's church, Port Macquarie (see Panel B for a list of tunes on the three barrels).

An Australian repertoire

While the transplanted elements differed little from their antecedents in the Old World, those elements which were new developed along lines influenced by the character of the new environment. It seems that the first expressions of 'new' were to be found in newly composed texts that may have been set to known tunes, and only later did newly composed tunes begin to appear. The changing tradition can only be reconstructed from the printed examples, although almost certainly orally transmitted material (now lost) existed.

Panel A

Johnson (1854): index of tunes

Common measures

Abridge
St Ann's
St James's
St Matthew's DCM
St Stephen's
York
Oxford
London
Manchester
Irish
Tye DCM
St Mary's
Paston
St David's

Long measures

Old Hundredth
Angels' Hymn
Emmanuel
Wareham
Rockingham
St Alban's
Morning Hymn
Evening Hymn
Babylon Streams

Short measures

Mount Ephraim
St Michael's
St Bride's

Peculiar measures

Kirkby's 148th Psalm
Easter Hymn
Anniversary
Hanover

Panel B
Index of tunes pinned on barrels of barrel and finger organ (1856)

J. W. Walker Barrel and Finger Organ of 1856 in the gallery of St Thomas's Anglican Church, Port Macquarie, New South Wales. Details from J. Stiller, Adelaide, November 1985.

Barrel 1

1	Old Hundredth	LM
2	Horsley	CM
3	Eaton	6.8s
4	New York	CM
5	?	
6	Mount Ephraim	SM
7	Hanover	55.55.65.65
8	Easter Hymn	77.77
9	Helmsley	87.87.47
10	Tallis Chant	
11	Randall Chant	

Barrel 2

1	?	
2	?	
3	Creation	LM
4	Darwell	66.44
5	Abridge	CM
6	?	
7	Arabia	CM
8	?	
9	St Bride	SM
10	?	
11	Langdon Chant	

Barrel 3

1	Surrey or Carey	88.88.88
2	Wareham	LM
3	Sicilian Mariners	87.87
4	Devizes	CM
5	Cambridge New	CM
6	?	
7	Irish	CM
8	?	
9	London New	CM
10	Shirland	SM
11	Mornington Chant	

Poetry

Writers of poetry on religious themes were of two kinds: missionaries to the Pacific region, and literate European immigrants who wrote for personal satisfaction and the local newspapers.

Among the missionaries to the Pacific Islands who were adept at translating English texts into the languages of the indigenous inhabitants was the Congregationalist William Pascoe Crook. Crook had lived among the natives of the Marquesan Islands (Peacocke, 1995). After returning briefly to England, he arrived in Sydney in 1803 to join the missionaries already there. A letter of 17 May 1814, to his London Missionary Society directors, contains the following:

I send another copy [of the Tahitian hymns] with a hasty translation of two of them. I cannot vouch for the translation, but you may be assured that it is not far from the truth.¹

Another letter of 25 September 1814/15 tells of Crook's attendance at an execution on Gallows Hill in 'The Rocks' area of Sydney Cove, how he wrote and printed a poem which reflected upon the incident, and how he then had his congregation sing it during a meeting.

I told my people that if they would come together on Saturday evening, I would give them an account of the dying behaviour of the criminals [Turner and Foley]. The next day [Wednesday] Foley was executed and my mind being much impressed I composed the hymn, got it printed and sent a copy to each of our stated leaders. We had a large congregation and a very pleasing opportunity of singing other hymns I composed as you will see on occasion of the opening of our new meeting house.²

These word sheets are important documents in the early history of Australia which so far have not been located.

European immigrants, on the other hand, gradually accepted and acclimatised to the Australian environment and began to write material that respected the new conditions. One such example, from a pamphlet entitled *Gold Fields, Ancient and Modern*, was published in Melbourne in 1855, at the time of the gold rush (Anonymous, 1855). The anonymous author examined the biblical references to mining and refining metals, after which he or she composed a poem entitled *The*

¹ Australian Joint Copying Project, Miscellaneous Index, Entry 99, London Missionary Society Records, 1795–1825.

² Australian Joint Copying Project, Miscellaneous Index, Entry 99, London Missionary Society Records, 1795–1825.

Miners' Hymn. Each line of the eight-verse poem is given a biblical source as justification for its being there (Panel C). There is no indication that it could be sung, but since the poem is in Common Metre, any number of tunes would do. Possibly *Martyrdom*, *St Stephen*, *Winchester Old* or *Dundee* would be suitable.

Another published poem, of no date, as a response to Australian conditions is W. E. Stopford's 'Hymn of Praise to be Sung after Long Drought'. The text of two verses is set to the tune *Helmsley*. On the same page appears the doxology set to Tallis's *Canon*. The text of both hymns is laid out with an SATB harmonisation on two staves. The words of the 'Hymn of Praise' immediately cry apologies to 'Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending', and display characteristics of an amateur poet using a given metre for his own purposes (fitting the words to the tune requires some thought).

Lo, here it comes in clouds descending,
 Sheets of water drench the thirsty plain;
 Creeks are running bankers,¹
 Dams are storing water,
 Tanks are overflowing,
 Hearts are full for blessed rain.
 Ev'rywhere is growth upon the land awakened,
 Life abounds where all before was dearth.
 Clods disintegrating,
 Grass is re-appearing,
 Seed is germinating,
 All the fruits of Mother Earth.

It would seem that the leaflet was printed in a country town for distribution among a local congregation. Although the two items appear on the same page, it is not likely that they were meant to be sung in succession, since they are not in the same key. *Helmsley* is in the key of A major, while *Tallis's Canon* is in G major.

Music

In the process from old to new it is the written text where artistic creativity is first manifest. Then, with time and consolidation of a community, musical creativity tends to be displayed. Among those who lived in colonial New South Wales were individuals with varying degrees of musical training and compositional skill. A retired Lieutenant of the 1st Regiment, NSW Volunteer Infantry, and now Schools Music Inspector, James Churchill Fisher, composed a small collection of congregational psalm tunes. Publication of these original hymn tunes was advertised on page 5 of the *Sydney Illustrated News*, 15 April 1865. The journalist wrote:

We have received from the composer, Mr Fisher, a small work, entitled, 'Congregational Psalmody' ... These tunes are twenty five in number, and rejoice in the names associated, we should suppose, with the localities in which the author has at different times sojourned, and with the memories with which, 'sunny or sad', he has thus linked his melodies ... These remarks apply particularly to those marked, 'Avondale', 'Springhill', 'Clara', and 'Gartham'. In one or two instances, of which 'Sydney' is an example, the narrowness of the line between originality and recollection has caused the author, unwittingly doubtless, to assimilate his strains too closely to the productions of other composers ...

Is this perhaps Sydney's first publicly recorded instance of plagiarism?

So far it has not been possible to find a surviving copy of this *Congregational Psalmody*.

¹ Some of the language of more regional usage might need explanation – for instance, 'Creeks are running bankers' = 'The streams are flowing fast and overflowing their banks'.

Panel C
The Miners' Hymn

Source: Anonymous (1855) *Gold Fields, Ancient and Modern*, Melbourne: W. Clarke

For honest toil, not ceaseless ease,	Proverbs 10:4
From Fatherland we come;	Romans 12:11
To pitch our tent where'er we please,	5 Prov. 16:3 [sic]; James 4:13,15
And there to make our home.	Hebrews 13:14
The precious ore has lured us here,	Job 33:1,6
To seek it where it lies;	Proverbs 3:16
While hope our steady search shall cheer,	Job 3:21
To gain a glittering prize.	Deuteronomy 8:9,12
To strive for earth, frail nature craves,	Proverbs 30:8,9
For coming age prepare;	Psalms 37:25
And Heaven will bless the hand which saves	Acts 20:35
And gives to want a share.	Ephesians 4:28
But wisdom has a merchandise	Proverbs 3:14,15
More precious still than gold,	Job 36:19
Or rubies bright, which nothing buys,	Isaiah 4:1
Yet Wisdom can unfold.	Ephesians 4:28
Bids grovelling hearts the world admire,	1 John 2:15
But Christian love resign;	Colossians 3:2; Romans 12:2
For holier things our hearts require,	Matthew 6:19, 20, 33
In Heaven itself, a mine.	Matthew 13:44; Ephesians 1:18; 2:7
Lord, teach us this one thing to choose,	Luke 10:42
Sufficient, if alone;	Revelation 5:12; 1 Corinthians 3:22
Without it we must lose our souls,	1 Peter 6:17
E'en were the world our own.	Matthew 16:26
May faith and love our labour bless,	Galatians 5:6; 1 Corinthians 13:3
Our basket and our store;	Deuteronomy 28:16
And o'er the distant wilderness	Isaiah 41:17,18
A stream of mercy pour!	Isaiah 35:1,4,6,7
For faith this richer prize reveals,	Hebrews 11:25,26
Without the least alloy;	Ecclesiastes 2:8,11
And love the glorious treasure seals,	Romans 8:37,38
Where all is peace and joy.	Revelation 7:15,17

The biblical references from the King James Bible for the first verse are as follows:

Proverbs 10:4

He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand:
but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

Romans 12:11

Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.

5 Proverbs 16:3

This is a curious reference since there is no 'Fifth Book of Proverbs'. It might be a typesetting error or even some cryptic code known only to members of a group or club. Various combinations of Proverbs 3:16, 5:16, 5:3, 3:5, 16:5 proved unhelpful. However, Proverbs 16:3 can be readily associated with the references for lines 1 and 2:

Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.

James 4:13,15

Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city,
and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: ...
For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

Hebrews 13:14

For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

Conclusion

In the microcosmic society of Sydney Town and surrounding regions, the culture of a Georgian Anglican village and town church gradually disappeared after the 1840s as ripples of the Tractarian Movement were felt. The colonial architect, Edmund Blackett, was the leading designer of Anglican churches in the fashionable Gothic revival style. Choristers of Christ Church wore robes from the first service in the sandstone gothic revival building completed in 1845 (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 September 1845; quoted in Rushworth, 1988, p. 366). Interior furnishings of many new buildings were arranged so that the Table was now visible in the sanctuary, since pulpits were being placed to the side and separated from the minister's desk. In free churches, where preaching was still the central focus, tall pulpits and roomy galleries continued to abound. Many large Roman Catholic churches continued to include west end galleries for singers and instrumentalists to provide a musical backdrop to the rites of the Latin Mass.

To conclude, the British colonists were successful in transplanting Georgian parish church life to the new land. Even though conditions at first were primitive and society brutal, the chaplains, other clergy and missionaries steadily reconstructed known structures until, with the help of convicts, emancipated convicts, the military and free settlers, they had established familiar patterns growing from simple village to more sophisticated town church and cathedral parish. Just as in the visual arts, for the European painter, exotic new scenes at first evoke images in European terms and symbols, so with music. It took some time for European settlers to come to terms with the new landscape and environment. It took some time for musical life to express itself in anything other than European figures. But in the lively and developing new society, literary and soon musical languages both began to express the ethos and vitality of the new environment.

