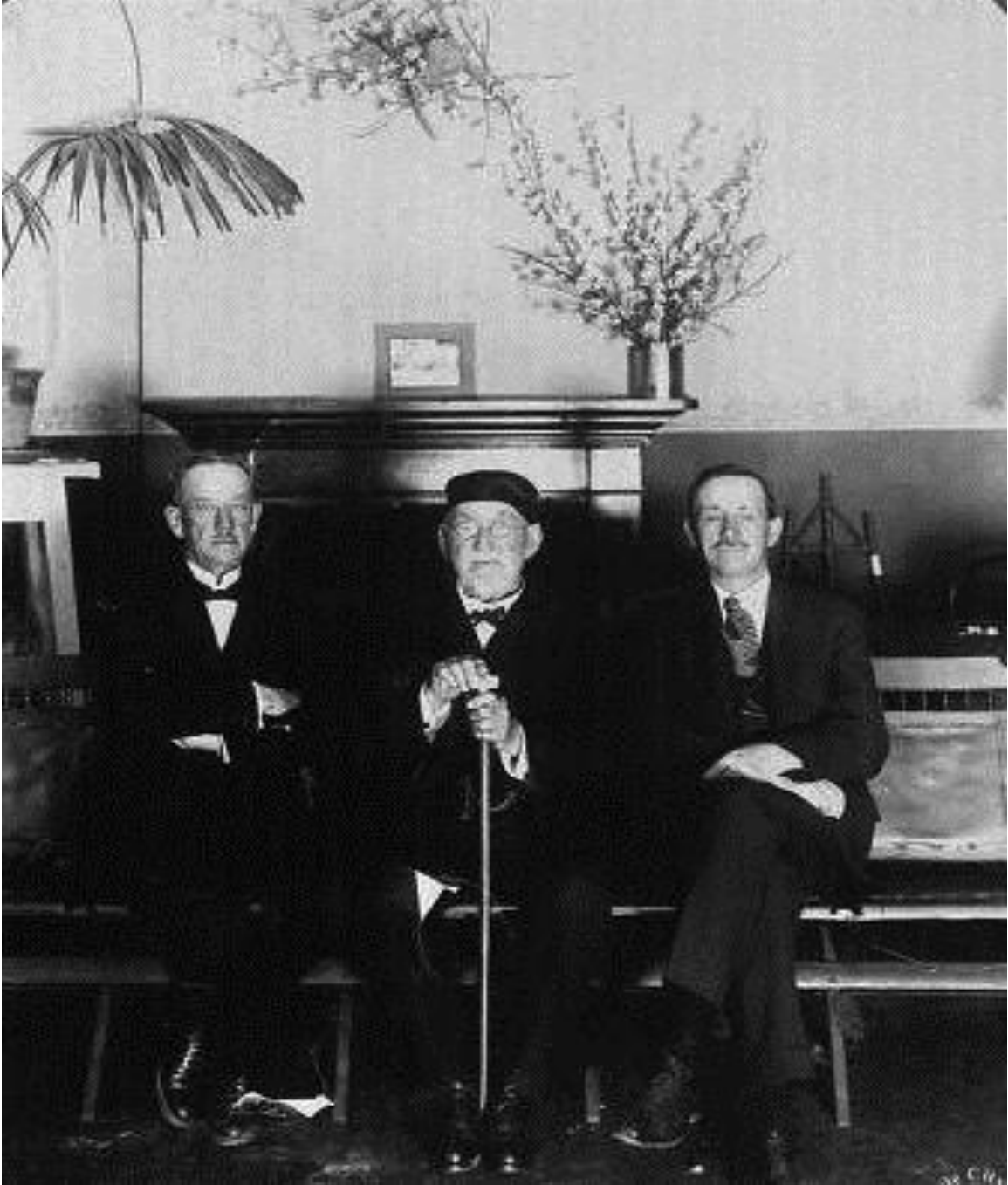


A COUNCIL & ITS CRISES:
CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE IN
FREMANTLE'S COMMUNITY DURING
THREE TIMES OF CRISIS –
THE BUBONIC PLAGUE THE GREAT WAR
THE DEPRESSION ERA

BY

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
History



Three Town Clerks:

Henry T Haynes (1911-20); George Bland Humble (1874-1904) and James Shepherd (1922-1947).

Photo courtesy of Local History Library, Photographic Collection. Fremantle City Council.

Declaration:

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Michelle McKeough

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines three cases studies in Fremantle's history that can be defined as times of crisis. These studies are; the visitations of the Bubonic Plague 1900 to 1904; the Great War 1914 to 1919 and the Depression Era 1929-1933.

Each of the periods in this thesis examines the challenges faced by Fremantle's council, as representative of Fremantle community. Fremantle's council had an engaged sense of what was needed in each crisis and it determined its actions and policy to manage and resolve the challenges in each case. In essence, Fremantle's leaders pursued policies of change, both locally and on a State-level, which would better the lives of its community, in response to three times of crisis.

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Introduction

This thesis will examine the role of a municipal authority in three times of crisis in the early twentieth century: the visitation of bubonic plague (1900-1904), the Great War (1914-1919) and the Depression era (1929-1933). Traditionally, as the governing body representing a local community, a Council has certain obvious obligations and responsibilities. However this thesis suggests that in these times of crisis, the role of the Council in Fremantle went even further. It played the part of protector, confidante and champion – an advocate for, and a part of, the community it represented. In each of the episodes examined in this thesis, the evidence suggests that Fremantle thought of itself as a definable community and, as such, the town's Council had a more engaged sense of what was needed and understood the needs of its community more than the Western Australian state authorities in Perth or, indeed, the Federal government in Melbourne.¹

Fremantle's leaders pursued policies of change, both locally and on a State-level, that would better the lives of its community. Under the leadership of its Mayor, councillors and a committed Town Clerk, the Council proactively sought solutions to the crises it faced. In doing so it had to operate within or against the constraints of higher authority: both State and Commonwealth governments and their various authorities and departments. In each time of crisis, Fremantle Council in essence asked: 'what can we do to get our local people through?' And in each period, the Council successfully created and changed policy, provided funding and devised solutions. In this context, this thesis shows that a local council can be effective amidst the tensions imposed by its relationship to larger authorities and that in a time of crisis it can make a difference for its own community. The constant theme which emerges from the experience of Fremantle was that the Council chose deliberately to act for its own people, within the constraints of a wider

¹ As a matter of style, I have capitalized the various councils, boards and departments following the usage employed within the primary documents: e.g. Local Board, Central Board, Department of Defence, etc.

administrative landscape. The result, across all three crises and spread over nearly forty years, was the emergence of new ideas and conceptions of ‘social policy’, whether in health, sanitation, education, employment or welfare.

This thesis places Fremantle as a town and community as its core. ‘Fremantle’, in this sense, represented multiple identities: a geographical space (e.g. ‘the West End’), a local government entity (the town council), a vibrant self-aware community (captured by and represented in the myriad local newspapers), and an economic apparatus (the port). Fremantle, considered in this way, becomes a lens that allows the thesis to examine three historical events of quite different origins and nature: plague, war and economic depression.

Fremantle remained very much a town apart during the first decades of the twentieth century. It was separated both geographically and socio-demographically from the larger city of Perth, yet its relationship to the capital city and the State authorities based there shaped and defined Fremantle’s responses to the crises of disease, war and poverty. This subjective distance also influenced the reciprocal actions and attitudes of the authorities in Perth. Fremantle and Perth were as distinct from each other socially and culturally as they were geographically. Prior to the Depression era, there was no proper road to link the two centres, making connection between them, even in the most basic physical sense, detached. Fremantle was a working port with a working class population. Perth was the bustling metropolis, where ‘middle-class Western Australians, in increasing numbers, spent their leisure in tennis, golf or yachting on the swan river’.² In all three episodes, the port formed an integral link, whether as the source for the introduction of disease from the Eastern states, or the return of servicemen from Europe (again, sometimes bearing disease), or for its socio-economic importance as a place of employment for large sections of the community. The port provides the backdrop for the ‘dramas’ that played out in Fremantle—in the Council chambers, in the streets and business houses, and in the homes of its citizens. The town’s role as a

² G. Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage, Western Australia since 1826* (Crawley: UWA Press, 2008), p69.

working port, a harbour town and as 'gateway' to the western Australia, defined its demographic, social, political and economic identity.

The focus of the thesis is 'a community in crisis'. It examines the way action and policy were formed in regard to the Fremantle Council's most significant relationships: the relationship between the Council and its own ratepayers; between the Council and the State government and bureaucracy; and, to a lesser extent, between the Council and the Federal government itself. In all of the crises examined here, the challenge faced by the Fremantle Council was to protect the interests of its people whilst working within the funding and administrative parameters set by outside governments.

The early twentieth century decades examined in this thesis places Fremantle within several critical, shared moments in Australian history. The plague, the Great War and the Depression were all national experiences. However, this thesis undertakes its examination at a municipal level. I have taken a 'case study' approach to the three periods under examination—three genuine moments of crisis, social stress and profound dislocation. All were moments of social disruption on a local, state and national level. Yet they all were also crises where the role of the municipality was fundamental to the Fremantle experience. All were externally driven, emerging from beyond the town yet demanding a local response.

The first case study examines the response of Fremantle to the crisis created by visitations of bubonic plague during the years 1900 to 1903.³ The Local Board of Health was responsible for matters of health and sanitation in Fremantle.⁴ However, the Central Board of Health, the State's governing health 'department', was in charge of quarantine. So at the outbreak of plague, with its jurisdiction extending only to the edge of town, the Local Board was forced to act in concert with the Central

³ Outbreaks of bubonic plague occurred in 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904 and then again in 1906. However, this chapter concludes in 1904 because by that time, the issues linking sanitation and plague had been defined and solutions had been developed.

⁴ Due the framework existing in 1900 in which Boards of Health had the authority and responsibility for maintaining and amending issues of health and sanitation within a municipality, the Fremantle Municipal Council itself had little administrative role during presence of the bubonic plague. However, members of the Local Board consisted, in the main, of Council members. Thus, as the public's municipal authority on matters of health and sanitation, it is their actions which are most germane to investigating local responses to the bubonic plague.

Board for the plague's curtailment. The complex and self-contradictory administrative system which underpinned a response to an outbreak of disease forms the focus of this chapter and is the key to understanding Fremantle's response. The town's attempts to combat the plague virus in its midst was inhibited on two fronts: by the lack of a locally-driven policy on health and sanitation, which placed the Local Board under the control of the Central Board of Health, and by the jurisdictional restrictions created by the variety of authorities then existing on the waterfront.⁵ This chapter also examines how the visitations of the plague between 1900 and 1903 resulted in substantial changes to policy regarding sanitation and health in Fremantle and to the administration of Fremantle harbour.

The second case study considers the impact on Fremantle of the Great War of 1914-18. Much has been written about the Great War, in Fremantle and the rest of Australia, especially amidst the current centenary years. The war was a national crisis in which Fremantle took part. However, the essential argument here is that the Great War itself was not the crisis for Fremantle. The crisis was in trying to re-settle returning soldiers into civilian life. In total over two thousand Fremantle men returned home after fighting in the Great War. Their return began with the arrival of the first hospital ships in 1916 and continued until 1919. This chapter will examine what part the Fremantle Council played in their local soldiers' repatriation within the wider administrative and governmental arena. Writing only a few years after the end of the war, Ernest Scott examined the practice and meaning of 'repatriation'. He writes that 'in Australia, the word was employed to describe the difficult function of replacing returned men in civil employment'.⁶ The challenge for the Fremantle Council was to assist its local men to re-settle at home, within the framework of a national policy on repatriation. The prevailing sense of a debt of gratitude powerfully motivated administrative and civil action on a local, state and federal level during the war and in the post-war period. In this, Fremantle's experience was like that of many towns and cities throughout Australia. The chapter examines, from

⁵ The wealth of information on the visitation of the Bubonic Plague in Fremantle suggests that it would repay further research on the plague in Perth.

⁶ Ernest Scott, *Official History of the War of 1914-1918. Volume XI: Australia During the War* (7th edition, 1941) ID no: RCDIG1069950 Digitised Collection, Australian War Memorial, Canberra,

a local point of view, how the Council and community managed, within the financial and administrative framework available to them, to re-establish local returning soldiers into civilian life. At the same time, the presence of returning troops and the international epidemic of pneumonic influenza introduced an old and well-remembered entity into Fremantle: disease and the fear of disease. The threat, both real and imagined, now came from venereal disease and the outbreak of Spanish influenza 1919. As a port-town, Fremantle was once again particularly vulnerable, not only to the presence of disease on incoming ships, but as the first port of call for many returning soldiers.

The third case study considers the turmoil and misery of the Depression era. Whilst the world-wide depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s was an economic phenomenon as well as a social one, this chapter focuses upon the latter aspect only. The economics of the Depression era are well covered elsewhere. Although the impact of the Depression was, once again, a crisis shared on a national level, in Fremantle it presented a particular character due to the importance of the port. Fremantle's reliance on shipping and trade which diminished so considerably during the Depression era, made it particularly vulnerable to the onset of Depression conditions. From 1929 to 1931 the State government essentially left the 'unemployment problem' in the hands of local governments. While there may have been reasonable constraints on behalf of the State and Commonwealth governments, in examining the crisis from a local level, the practical repercussions of this lack of policy magnified the misery of Depression conditions in Fremantle. The burden this placed on local governments informs the focus of this chapter. The main contention is that in the absence of State and Federal government intervention for the relief of Depression conditions, it fell to local governments to initiate policy and make decisions that would be of benefit locally, in the management of welfare for the unemployed.

This thesis takes as its point of embarkation the records of the Fremantle Council using them to examine how the Council responded to the three times of crisis. The Council records for each of these periods embodied the life and livelihood of the people it represented. Second, I have used other relevant government

authorities' records as these reflected and influenced the experience in Fremantle. For the plague years, the Central Board of Health records play as important a role as those of the Fremantle council. During the Great War, I have made use of Defence department and Premier's department records. The Premier's department records were also widely consulted for the Depression era chapter. I have made extensive use of newspaper reports from the major local newspapers of the periods: including the *Daily News*, *West Australian*, *Fremantle Herald*, *the Advertiser*, *the Fremantle Advocate* and the *Sunday Times*. The newspaper reports of the day provide extremely useful statistical data, description and opinion. They are the glue that binds the various primary sources and the colour that brings them to life.

There is a well-established tradition of local histories for Australian towns and communities. In the case of Western Australia, whilst many such histories are not generally academically rigorous, they have an important role to play in capturing Australian life and society at a 'micro' level.⁷ However, there are exceptions to the more sweeping, less analytical nature of the usual local history; Geoffrey Bolton and Jenny Gregory's detailed *History of Claremont* being foremost among them.⁸ Apart from J.K. Ewers' history of Fremantle, there is only one scholarly, archivally-based study of Fremantle covering the whole period of this thesis: Patricia Brown's doctoral thesis, 'The life of a maritime community: A social history of Fremantle 1900-1939', as she writes:

takes its departure from the recognition of Fremantle's identity as a port city with a close-knit fellowship of its citizens and of the sea as having a dynamic impact on the economy and social life of the city.⁹

Brown's thesis investigates the 'dockworker culture' in Fremantle and in examining Fremantle as a port town and the role of the harbour in that town, provides an excellent complement to my own study. Whilst Brown's thesis provides an exploration of 'Fremantle's working class', my thesis analyses the role of

⁷ For example, K. Spillman, *Identity Prized: A History of Subiaco* (Subiaco: UWA Press, 1985).

⁸ G. Bolton and J. Gregory, *Claremont: A History* (Nedlands: UWA Press, 1999); See also E. Tuettemann, *Between River and Sea: A History of Mosman Park, W.A.* (Mosman Park: Town of Mosman Park, 1991) and R. Marchant James, *Heritage of Pines: A History of Cottesloe*. (Cottesloe: Town of Cottesloe Council, 1977).

⁹ P.M. Brown, 'The life of a maritime community: A social history of Fremantle 1900-1939', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Australia (1997), p3.

municipal action in order to examine three specific moments in Fremantle's history. The waterfront and its workers play a part, but are not central to, my thesis. Additionally, Brown's article on women and work in Fremantle during 1900-40 and Leigh Straw's fascinating *Drunks, Pests and Harlots: Criminal Women in Perth and Fremantle 1900-1939* both provide wonderful contextual material for understanding the seedy reputation of the harbor town. Whilst it was tempting to wander into the colourful history of Fremantle's 'moral' welfare, as an understanding of that reputation is important in comprehending the external view of Fremantle at the turn of the twentieth century, the focus here has remained specifically upon the bubonic plague and its relationship with Fremantle's 'physical' welfare, or more strictly speaking, the town's sanitation.

Almost nothing is written of the outbreak of bubonic plague in Fremantle in existing studies. It does not feature in any of the larger histories of Western Australia, such as the collection edited by Tom Stannage, *A New History of Western Australia*.¹⁰ Frank Crowley covers the subject in a single sentence, that 'in 1900, 1902 and 1903 there were serious outbreaks of bubonic plague' (although he does not specify where).¹¹ Those works on the period focused specifically on Fremantle, such as Brown's *Merchant Princes of Fremantle*, Ewer's *The Western Gateway*, and Hitchcock's *History of Fremantle*, either fail to mention or only mention fleetingly the presence of the plague in Fremantle.¹² Garrick and Jeffery's history of Fremantle Hospital does provide some limited discussion of the plague, but once again it is mostly just an acknowledgment that outbreaks of plague did occur.¹³ As such, little comparable material is available.

The most useful reading on the subject deals with the plague outbreak which occurred in Sydney during these same period. Myra Echenberg's work on 'plague ports' is an illuminating comparative study that shines much light on the similarities

¹⁰ C.T. Stannage (ed) *A New History of Western Australia* (Nedlands: UWA Press, 1981).

¹¹ F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third* (London: Macmillon & Co, 1960), p147.

¹² P. Brown, *The Merchant Princes of Fremantle* (Nedlands: UWA Press, 1996); J.K. Ewers, *The Western Gateway, A History of Fremantle* (Nedlands: UWA Press, 1971); J.K. Hitchcock, *The History of Fremantle: The Front Gate of Australia, 1829-1929* (Fremantle: City of Fremantle, 1929).

¹³ P. Garrick and C. Jeffery, *Fremantle Hospital: A social history to 1987* (Fremantle: Fremantle Hospital: 1987).

in civic reactions to plague at the turn of last century, throughout the world but in Sydney in particular.¹⁴ Grace Karsken's archeological study of the plague in Sydney provided another excellent source of comparative material.¹⁵ Adele Gaskin's excellent work on *Public Health in Fremantle: 1896-1902*, is invaluable in understanding the complexities of the town's health system. Her discussion is limited almost entirely, however, to the water supply and drainage, and does not examine living conditions beyond those, or the complex system of administration for sanitation at the Port, both of which are pivotal in understanding the nature of the bubonic plague outbreak. My own previous work examining the impact of the plague are the only specific studies on the subject; both provide only an initial, limited foray into the bubonic plague in its first introduction to Fremantle.¹⁶

On the Great War and its impact on Fremantle, Deborah Gare and Madison Lloyd-Jones' book *When War Came to Fremantle* and Andrew Pittaway's work provide the best existing studies.¹⁷ Gare and Lloyd-Jones' important insight regarding the 'war-time naivety' in Fremantle in the first year of the war is central to my argument here that the war's real impact on Fremantle only began after the arrival of the first hospital ship in 1916. Pittaway's thorough statistical data is equally as important in understanding the demographic significance in Fremantle of the men who went to war. In a social context and on the subject of repatriation in Fremantle, once again writing on the period is limited. Both Ewers and Hitchcock, the two most authoritative writers of Fremantle history, gloss over the war by referring to it through a veneer of patriotic nostalgia.¹⁸ Ernest Scott's massive contribution to the series on the *Official History of the War of 1914-1918* may now be

¹⁴ M. Echenberg, *Plague Ports: The Global Urban Impact of Bubonic Plague 1894-1901* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

¹⁵ G. Karskens, *Inside the Rocks: The Archaeology of a Neighbourhood* (Alexandria: Hale & Ironmonger, 1999).

¹⁶ Michelle Morrison, 'A twist in the turn of the century: The bubonic plague in Fremantle 1900' in *Voices from the West End* (Welshpool: W.A. Museum, 2012) and 'The bubonic plague in Fremantle: 1900', *Fremantle Studies*, Vol. 5 (2007).

¹⁷ D. Gare and M. Lloyd-Jones, *When War Came to Fremantle, 1899-1945* (Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2015); A. Pittaway, 'Fremantle Anzacs' *Fremantle Studies* Vol.7 (2012) and *Fremantle Voices of the Great War: A history of Fremantle people who served in the Great War of 1914-1919* (Fremantle: Andrew Pittaway, 2015).

¹⁸ Ewers, *The Western Gateway*, pp 117-118; Hitchcock, *The History of Fremantle*, p82.

considered quite dated, yet it provides perhaps the only thorough examination of the issue of repatriation, a subject sadly under-researched in Australian historiography.¹⁹ There are some specific topics however which are well covered in West Australian historiography of the wartime period and which therefore have not formed a major part of my own study, notably the cost of living and the 1917 lumpers strike.²⁰ More importantly, the 1919 waterside workers strike and the issues of conscription and recruitment fall outside of the main focus taken in this thesis, as they did not make any impact on the work of the Fremantle Council.²¹

The Depression era is the most comprehensively studied of the three times of crisis examined in this thesis. Snooks examines the Depression in two detailed accounts whilst Bolton, Crowley, Robertson and Alexander all contribute to the scholarly discussion of this topic. The most important of all books on the period is the authoritative *A Fine Country to Starve In* by Geoffrey Bolton.²² This thesis relies very much on Bolton's work for statistical data, comparative material and its historiographical approach. The text is, however, heavily Perth-oriented, with very little discussion on conditions in Fremantle. The same applies to Robertson's article in Crowley's *New History of Australia* and Alexander's *Australia since Federation*, both of which provide excellent contextual material in examining depression conditions in Western Australia.²³ For an examination of the economic conditions of the Depression Era, Snooks' work is invaluable.²⁴ For work pertaining directly to

¹⁹ Ernest Scott, *Official History of the War of 1914-1918. Volume XI: Australia During the War* (7th edition, 1941), ID no: RCDIG1069950 Digitised Collection, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

²⁰ On the 1917 and 1919 waterfront disputes the authors who have provided the most comprehensive history are: B. Ziino, 'Great War, Total War' in Gare and Ritter, *Making Australian History*, pp341-344; P.M. Brown, 'The life of a maritime community: a social history of Fremantle 1900 - 1939', chapters 3 and 11; Robert Bollard, 'Fremantle in slow motion: Winning back the Melbourne waterfront, 1919', *Labour History*, no. 97 (Nov 2009), pp123-136; and B. Oliver, 'Disputes, Diggers and disillusionment: Social and industrial unrest in Perth and Kalgoorlie, 1918-24', *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. XI (1990).

²¹ I. Turner, '1914-1919', in F. Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia* (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1974) gives a full discussion of the cost of living crisis.

²² G. Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In* (Perth: U.W.A Press; new edition, 1994).

²³ F. Alexander, *Australia since Federation*, 4th edition (West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1980); J.R. Robertson, '1930-39' in F. Crowley, (ed.) *A New History of Australia*.

²⁴ G.D. Snooks, *Depression and Recovery in Western Australia 1928/29 - 1938/39* (Perth: U.W.A Press, 1974) and in Stannage (ed), *A New History of Western Australia*, pp 237-265.

Fremantle, Malcolm Tull's economic studies of the port provide very useful data.²⁵ Reece and Pascoe's *A Place of Consequence* wanders across the Depression era and provides some excellent anecdotal material, but it is not the purview of that text to provide a close examination of any one period.²⁶ Hitchcock began to write his history of Fremantle in 1929; his source material concluded in 1928 and thus the Depression does not enter into his history. Ewers writes of the Depression era, but his work does not examine the subject to any level of depth, and certainly does not review or consider Fremantle's position in relation to the larger events of the time including its relationship to Perth or the socio-economic effects of the depression on the newly made city.²⁷ J. Lunn's unpublished thesis, 'Unemployed protests in Central Perth, 1928–1934: Analysing place and occasion' provides an excellent insight into the unemployed protest marches in Perth during the Depression era; unfortunately no comparative study has been undertaken in Fremantle.²⁸

In general, the authoritative historiography on the Depression era, the work of Bolton and Robertson in particular, has tended to brush past the slowness of both State and Federal governments to implement real solutions to the unemployment caused by Depression conditions. These historians accept that governmental policies were the inevitable and the only way of approaching the crisis. Fred Alexander is essentially the only historian openly critical of the State and Federal governments' response to Depression conditions. My argument in this thesis is that the State and Federal governments absence in such a time of crisis cannot be easily dismissed.

The Fremantle examined in this thesis was a self-defined community caught in three great moments of crisis. Each point of time brought its own restrictions and

²⁵ M. Tull 'Blood on the cargo: Cargo-handling and working conditions on the waterfront at Fremantle 1900-1939', *Labour History*, no. 52 (May 1987), and M. Tull, *A Community Enterprise: The History of the Port of Fremantle, 1897 to 1997* (St Johns, Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 1997).

²⁶ R. Reece and R. Pascoe, *A Place of Consequence: A Pictorial History of Fremantle* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1983).

²⁷ Ewers, J.K *The Western Gateway* pp 132-136

²⁸ J. Lunn, 'Unemployed Protests in Central Perth 1928 – 1934: Analysing place and occasion' (Unpublished honours thesis, Murdoch University, 2007).

administrative limitations, yet as the Fremantle community's representative and spokesperson, the Fremantle Council considered and fought for solutions on behalf of its local people. On each occasion, the Council was able to respond to the challenges it faced, with varying success but with unstinting effort.

Chapter One: Bubonic Plague in Fremantle from 1900 to 1904

Introduction

In April 1900 Fremantle experienced its first outbreak of bubonic plague. Although the exact means of its introduction was never precisely isolated, in all likelihood it arrived with cargo on board trading vessels coming to Fremantle from an infected port. It was considered at the time that Sydney was the most likely point of origin, as Sydney was then itself suffering under a severe epidemic of bubonic plague and ships from Sydney were regularly docking at Fremantle wharves.²⁹ This chapter examines the response of the Fremantle Local Board of Health to the crisis created by visitations of bubonic plague in Fremantle during the first years of the twentieth century. Outbreaks of bubonic plague occurred in 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904 and then again in 1906. The chapter concludes with the 1904 outbreak, as by that time the key issues linking sanitation and plague had been defined and solutions had been developed.

The objective of this chapter is two-fold. It explores how administrative dysfunction during the presence of bubonic plague between 1900 and 1903 influenced and inhibited the management of the disease in Fremantle. Fremantle's attempts to combat the plague virus were impeded on two fronts: by the lack of a locally driven policy on health and sanitation, which placed the Local Board of Health under the control of and in direct conflict with the Western Australian state government's own Central Board of Health; and by the jurisdictional restrictions created by the variety of authorities then existing on the waterfront. In addition, this chapter examines how the introduction of the plague had a profound effect on the port town, resulting in substantial administrative changes within the municipality, from sanitation and health to the running of the harbour itself.

²⁹ The *Pilbarra* and *Marloo*, both from Sydney, were vessels whose cargo was being unloaded into Fremantle during the first two outbreaks of plague in early April 1900.

Origins: Crime and Sanitation in late Nineteenth-Century Fremantle

Fremantle at this time was a small port town with a reputation for drunkenness and criminality. Newspaper articles of the period were peppered with references to the dissatisfaction of merchants and the 'alleged abuses' of the system on the jetties, alongside derisive descriptions of Fremantle's 'criminal classes'.³⁰ In the late nineteenth century, Captain Shaw described Fremantle with these scathing words:

I have been in a good many places in my time, but this is the worst dam [*sic*] hole I ever saw. The West Australian Shipping Association comprises all of Fremantle, and no one will do anything for you. They are half drunk all the time and don't care what they do. The ship has to feed them and give them all the money and tobacco they want or they will make trouble.

Any man who would come or send a ship a second time is a damned ass... I never was so sick of a place in my life, and may the curse of Christ rest on Fremantle and every son-of-a-bitch in it. God dam [*sic*] them all.³¹

Shaw was not alone in his condemnation of the port town. Fremantle's notoriety had been well documented during the latter decades of the nineteenth century, not least of which was its association with the convicts who had lived and served there. As far back as 1870 Governor William Robinson had claimed that the Fremantle Gaol was a 'seaport lock-up for drunken sailors and prostitutes'.³² Indeed, offenders seen by Fremantle's Resident Magistrate included a significant number of women, and severe penalties applied to both sexes. The local newspapers, reporting from the Fremantle court, show that a first-time drunk and disorderly offender, male or female, could easily be sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment with hard labour.³³

³⁰ *Liberty*, 9 January 1892, p12. In regard to the working of the jetties, an article in 1887 states that 'almost every firm in the port, from the oldest to the most recently established, would unite in advocating a change'. *Western Mail*, 16 July 1887, p19.

³¹ Fremantle City Library History Centre, Miscellany File B/SHA

³² His Excellency the Governor to the Right Honourable The Secretary of State, Despatch No. 13, Australian Parliamentary Papers 1870/71-1880. Battye Library, Perth.

³³ For example, see *West Australian*, 10 April 1888, p3, on the previous day's activities in the Fremantle Police Court. See also Dr Leigh Straw's *Drunks, Pests and Harlots: Criminal Women in Perth and Fremantle 1900-1939* for a more comprehensive examination of women and crime in Fremantle during this period.

By 1879 the Superintendent of Police was calling urgently on the authorities for an 'Inebriate Asylum' in Fremantle,³⁴ reinforcing the general perception that 'the main activity in Fremantle itself seemed to be the consumption of grog'.³⁵ In 1881, thirteen years after transportation of convicts had ended, the Superintendent of Police called attention to the 1,400 ex-convicts then living in Perth and Fremantle, describing them as 'idle loafers, and busy rogues' who, owing to their drunken and thieving propensities, required constant police supervision.³⁶

Yet it was not only the convicts and ex-convicts who marked Fremantle out as a place of notoriety. Police records reveal that violent quarrels often erupted among the many sailors who frequented the harbour town.³⁷ There was no regulation prohibiting the presence of the sheath knives that they regularly carried in their belts, making their drunken conflicts potentially fatal. Saloon bars were open until midnight, and as gas lighting was not installed in Fremantle streets until 1883, the dark laneways facilitated lawlessness. The Water Police were employed on beach and jetty duty to supervise activity in these areas and often found themselves escorting seamen safely to their ships, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Seamen deserters were commonplace, and a reward was usually given by the shipping company to the Water Policeman who caught one of these offenders and returned him to his ship.³⁸

Fremantle's reputation for its lack of sanitation equaled its reputation for delinquency. In May 1884, Dr, Alfred Waylen, the Colonial Surgeon, submitted his report on the public health of the colony which revealed that Fremantle had the

³⁴ Report of the Superintendent of Police upon Criminal Statistics and the Police Force for the Year 1878 (1879). Battye Library, Perth.

³⁵ A. Bond, *The Port of Fremantle: Some 19th Century Impressions*, p2, Fremantle Local History collection LH 387.1 BON. Fremantle City Library History Centre

³⁶ *Report of the Superintendent of Police upon Criminal Statistics and the Police Force for the Year 1881*, Battye library, Perth.

³⁷ In 1876, Superintendent Mills of the Water Police had 'for the more efficient working of the department, the assistant Coxswain and two Constables perform the Beach and Jetty duty, leaving four Constables as Boats Crew day and night'. W.A. Police Department files, WAS 2126 Cons. 430 Item 25/664, S.R.O. Perth.

³⁸ See McKeough, M. *Rescues, Rogues & Rough Seas: A History of the Water Police in Western Australia* (Perth: W.A. Water Police and Police Historical Society, 2001)

highest death rate in Western Australia. The report also showed that, due mainly to an epidemic of measles and to both scarlet fever and diphtheria which were endemic in both Perth and Fremantle, both infant mortality and the general death rate (of 17 per 1000) were higher than they had been for some years.³⁹ The use of cesspits was one of the prevailing sanitary problems he identified in Fremantle, as they were frequently situated near the open wells from which the local residents obtained their drinking water, producing frequent cases of typhoid and other fevers. In an attempt to prevent typhoid's regular recurrence, the town's civic leaders made efforts to regulate the use and condition of these cesspits, of which, according to one of the local papers, there were 120 in the West Ward in 1893.⁴⁰ Yet little progress was made. In April 1900, at the first outbreak of bubonic plague, the *Morning Herald* wrote that 'a casual tour of the principal streets of the West End will convince anyone that Fremantle cannot claim to be even a moderately sanitary town'.⁴¹

The most insanitary part of Fremantle was the area defined by the Municipal Council's electoral boundaries as the 'West Ward'. It is this area that will be the focus of this chapter—hereafter referred to as the 'West End'.⁴² With a population in 1900 of '2,650 souls' the profile of the West End of Fremantle was, at the turn of the last century, a reflection of its function as a harbour-side town.⁴³ Comprising the area closest to the harbour and its radial streets, it was the home of much of the town's working population. These workers were employed at the harbour, in the goods sheds and railway yards, in small factories, and in the trading houses and warehouses that surrounded the working port. Ewers in his *History of Fremantle* writes that at the end of the nineteenth century, 'the Fremantle merchants were the

³⁹ *Report by the Colonial Surgeon on Public Health for 1883*, Western Australian Parliamentary Papers 1884, No. 9.

⁴⁰ *Inquirer and Commercial News*, 2 June 1893, p8.

⁴¹ *Morning Herald*, 11 April 1900, p6.

⁴² For a map showing the boundaries of the West Ward, please refer to Appendix A. Whilst this thesis uses the parameters of the municipally-defined 'West Ward' for its geographical boundaries, for purposes of clarity and to maintain consistency with future chapters, the term 'West End' is used as its reference in the narrative.

⁴³ The entire municipality had a population of 14,623. See Dr. Hope's report for the year 1900, Fremantle Local Board of Health files WAA 612, Series 1342, Item 59, Minutes 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

largest employers of labour at the port, apart from the government. In the 1890s the biggest occupational group comprised industrial workers. This general classification includes lumpers, carpenters, carters, blacksmiths, bootmakers, clerks, mariners and shipwrights'.⁴⁴

A significant number of the dwelling places of Fremantle's workers included boarding houses or tenements that ranged in condition from poor to derelict. In addition, many of the shopkeepers and small traders of the West End lived above or behind their shop-fronts. These residences also shared the ward's dismal living conditions. Among them all, a lack of adequate sanitation prevailed. Bath water and other 'slops' were discarded into communal backyards and alleyways; drainage was woefully inadequate; drinking water was prone to contamination; houses were overcrowded and the insufficient number of 'privies' per household meant they were fetid more often than they were not. The town's system of waste disposal, both human and otherwise, was inadequate. The town, following conventional standards, operated with what was termed a 'single pan' system, which meant that the 'privies' (outdoor toilets) contained a single pan which would be emptied by a contractor and the refuse taken away in carts to be dumped elsewhere. Households mostly shared their lavatory with neighbouring homes, meaning the system became overloaded and (as discussed further below) the resulting sanitary condition was deplorable. The inadequate water supply and drainage created significant health concerns. Attempts to improve the water supply had been a priority for successive administrators since Fremantle's establishment.

In consequence, in 1885 a commission of enquiry was initiated by the Governor, Sir Frederick Broome, into the sanitary conditions of Perth and Fremantle. One of the priorities of this select committee was the issue of water supply. The issues of health and sanitation provoked a scathing report. The committee pronounced 'that the necessity of an immediate supply of pure water to the thickly populated portion of Fremantle is urgent'.⁴⁵ Following the

⁴⁴ J.K. Ewers, *The Western Gateway: A History of Fremantle* (UWA Press: Perth, 1971), p71.

⁴⁵ *Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council appointed to consider The Report of a Commission upon the Sanitary Condition of, and as to a Water Supply for,*

recommendations of the select committee, the Central Board of Health was established for the whole of Western Australia, to be supported on a local level by a system of subordinate, regional, local boards of health.

Fremantle's civic leaders responded, albeit not with haste, to the recommendations of the committee. In September 1886, at a meeting of the town council, the mayor announced that 'the time had now arrived for improving the sanitation of the town'.⁴⁶ On 1 December 1886, the Fremantle Local Board of Health was formally appointed by the governor.⁴⁷ Dr, A.C. Barnett, the Medical Superintendent at the Lunatic Asylum, and Dr, James Hope, Fremantle's Health Officer, were appointed as its medical personnel.⁴⁸ Also appointed were town councillors William Pearse and James Lilly. George Wriford was appointed Inspector of Nuisances. Adele Gaskin, in her study of public health in Fremantle, succinctly describes the role of the local board which:

The local boards had the power to remove nuisances; make by-laws to control infections, diseases and sanitation, to disinfect premises, distribute free medicine, secure the removal of cesspits and to levy rates through the agency of the local municipal council. The Central Board was to ensure that these responsibilities were carried out and that the regulations were promulgated.⁴⁹

In fact, the Central Board stated as much repeatedly during the plague years: that its role was to determine the regulations and that it was the role of the local boards to see that they were adhered to. In April 1900 a member of the Central Board told the *West Australian* that 'people did not seem to appreciate the relative and respective

the City of Perth and the Town of Fremantle, 1885, W.A. Parliamentary Papers, A10, August 1885.

⁴⁶ *West Australian*, 18 September 1896, p2.

⁴⁷ Municipality of Fremantle Council Minutes, Cons 1377, Series 809, Item 5, Minute Books 1885-1890, S.R.O. Perth.

⁴⁸ For more biographical information on Dr. James Hope, see J.H. Stubbe, *Medical Background: Being a History of Fremantle Hospitals and Doctors* (Fremantle: University of Western Australian Press, 1969), pp25-26, and P. Garrick and C. Jeffery, *Fremantle Hospital: A Social History to 1987* (Fremantle: Fremantle Hospital, 1987).

⁴⁹ A. Gaskin, *Public Health in Fremantle 1886-1902* Unpublished thesis U.W.A, (1982), p1.

powers of the Central Board and the local boards of health'. Money explained that the powers of the Central Board were to:

frame such regulations and orders as it might deem necessary to be carried out by local boards throughout the colony. After the Central Board has done its utmost in making these regulations, it is then the duty of the local boards to see that these regulations are properly carried out in their respective districts.⁵⁰

When it came to responding to the outbreak of bubonic plague, therefore, the Local Board's response was limited by the constraints of its powers imposed by the Central Board.

The development of areas of authority over health and quarantine in particular were strongly influenced by the fact of Fremantle's long history as the entry port to the colony for foreign and interstate vessels. Matters of health and quarantine above all had a particular and convoluted construction. The Local Board relied on the Central Board of Health for guidelines and, to a large extent, funding to fight outbreaks of infectious diseases when they occurred if they came from vessels visiting the port. The Central Board set the regulations that the Local Board was required to follow. This meant that when an outbreak of any disease threatened Western Australia via its introduction at the port, the Local Board surrendered its responsibility for issues of health, leaving any suggestion of policy to the authority of the Central Board.⁵¹ This situation was further complicated by the fact that other government departments also had control over specific issues affecting the harbour. The Local Board was responsible for sanitation, but its jurisdiction extended only to the edge of town. It had no real power or authority on the waterfront. The Central Board was in charge of quarantine. The wharves and jetties were in the hands of the Railway Department. The river itself and shipping were under the authority of the Harbour Master. Furthermore, the system of establishing local boards of health meant that the Fremantle Municipal Council itself had no formal administrative role in handling the presence of the bubonic plague in the town. However, the Local

⁵⁰ *West Australian*, 11 April 1900, p6.

⁵¹ Fremantle Local Board of Health files WAA 612, Series 1342, Item 59, Minutes 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

Board included Fremantle town councillors alongside the town's medical officers. Whilst the members acted as officers of the Local Board, and not as Council representatives, their interests as representatives of the people of Fremantle were inseparable. Finally, it is likely that the members of the Central Board during these years would, in all likelihood, have had little personal or professional knowledge of their counterparts in Fremantle, and vice versa. The Central Board's president Dr. Ernest Black was a well-heeled, well-travelled medical practitioner.⁵² In Fremantle, the Local Board's most active member was Dr. James Hope, who since 1888 had been a tireless advocate for improvements in Fremantle and both its medical officer and the gaol surgeon. The boards, in practice, had very little to do with each other until the plague suddenly thrust them into a close working relationship that neither was comfortable with. This complex administrative system is key to understanding the pressures and conflicts that shaped how Fremantle responded to the outbreak of bubonic plague.

Concerns over health, sanitation, water and drainage dominate the minutes of the Local Board's meetings at the turn of the century.⁵³ Numerous by-laws relating to health matters were initiated and were enforced by the Health Inspector. These included the prohibition of such things as expectorating on footpaths, the adulteration of milk, or of cattle from wandering into public streets.⁵⁴ In addition, an 'Inspector of Nuisances' systematically checked houses, factories, street conditions, the quality of the milk—in effect all matters sanitary.⁵⁵ Yet this piecemeal and inadequate system in practice meant that Fremantle's standards of sanitation were allowed to decline. In matters of communal hygiene or sanitation the Local Board was more often than not reactive rather than proactive.

⁵² J.H. Stubbe, *Medical Background: Being a History of Fremantle Hospitals and Doctors* (Fremantle: University of Western Australian Press, 1969)

⁵³ Fremantle Local Board of Health files WAA 612, Series 1342, Item 59, Minutes 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

⁵⁴ In November 1897 an assistant inspector was employed at 8s per day in order that the provisions of the Local Board by-laws might be fully enforced. *Inquirer and Commercial News*, 26 November 1897, p2.

⁵⁵ The report of the Inspector of Nuisances was made to the meetings of the Local Board of Health. Fremantle Local Board of Health files, WAA 612, Series 1342, Item 59, Minutes 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

The battle against typhoid and other diseases was a constant struggle. In 1887, Wriford, the Inspector for Nuisances, informed the Council that 'great difficulty arises from people having nowhere to throw their slops or dirty water, only the street or yard'.⁵⁶ He advised that a system of drainage was necessary: 'yards must be drained but I am at a loss as to where the water is to run to'.⁵⁷ In February 1899, his successor, J.H. Dunne, inaugurated a system of holding tanks to collect the slops and dirty water from the town's larger establishments. These were positioned at the coastal edge of the West End, on the Esplanade and South Beach.⁵⁸ The conditions on the docks were equally appalling. Despite the fact that three or four hundred workers at a time could be employed on the South Quay there were absolutely no latrines for the relief of the workers or visitors. As a consequence, piles of human excreta were found both among the sandalwood lying on the jetties and in the surrounding water.⁵⁹

Improvements to drainage in the flat and sandy landscape of Fremantle would be difficult and costly and, as the Resident Medical Officer pointed out, 'could only be done gradually'.⁶⁰ Referring specifically to the West End, Hope told a meeting of the Local Board in February 1900 that the existing well system meant that residents there lived in constant danger 'of the percolation of impurities' entering the drinking water.⁶¹ Although a Health Officer regularly checked the local dairies to prevent milk being contaminated by tuberculosis in cattle, it was known

⁵⁶ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, WAA 612, Series 1342, Item 59, Minutes 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

⁵⁷ *Inspector of Nuisances Report for December 1887*, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, WAA 612, Series 1342, Item 59, Minutes 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

⁵⁸ *Inspector of Nuisances Report for December 1887*, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, WAA 612, Series 1342, Item 59, Minutes 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

⁵⁹ *West Australian*, 18 September 1896, p2.

⁶⁰ Extract from the report of a meeting of the Fremantle Local Board of Health, in *Morning Herald*, 30 May 1900.

⁶¹ Meeting of 16 February, 1900 Fremantle Local Board of Health files WAA 612 Series 1342 Minutes Item 59 1886-1902 S.R.O, Perth

to the Local Board that typhoid contaminations of the town's wells found its way into the local milk supply, as it was frequently watered-down before sale.⁶²

As the century neared its end, Fremantle and its Local Board of Health found its resources stretched to the limit, most especially in the port's busy centre. During the gold rush of the 1890s the West End of Fremantle had become increasingly overcrowded. Bob Reece and Robert Pascoe write that during these years 'Fremantle bustled with newly-arrived miners so that the streets leading to the Cliff Street railway station had the appearance of an ant track'.⁶³ Although a *Building Act* existed, the Council had no town planning policy with which to supervise and moderate the crude adaptations tacked on to existing dwellings made to cram in all the new arrivals. New lodging and boarding houses were being hastily constructed throughout the West End. Indeed, this rushed development deeply concerned one visitor to the town, who wrote to a local newspaper that, in the 'hurry of construction for clients eagerly applying, no attempt was made to consider health and comfort'.⁶⁴ These conditions overburdened the already straitened sanitary provisions of the West End. Another visitor went further in his denigration of Fremantle, writing that 'on the shores of the ocean, and on the banks of the river a town has been built up with narrow, uninviting streets, which for the most part are dirty and unkempt. Of attempts to beautify them there have been none'. He continued by complaining of 'the general impression of sordidness which everywhere prevails'.⁶⁵ It was into one of these very boarding houses that Fremantle's first plague victim would come from Victoria, to make his home.

⁶² In 1887 the Government Analyst tested samples of milk being offered for sale in Fremantle and reported that, despite it being a prohibited practise, 'some of the milk was up to 28% water'. Cited in Gaskin, *Public Health in Fremantle*, p8.

⁶³ B. Reece and R. Pascoe, *A Place of Consequence: A Pictorial History of Fremantle* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1983), p23.

⁶⁴ *Morning Herald*, 11 April 1900, p6.

⁶⁵ *Morning Herald*, 11 April 1900, p5.

The plague looms: 1900

On 13 March 1900 the *West Australian* reported that a potent epidemic of the bubonic plague had attacked Sydney in New South Wales. 'Scarcely a day has passed without a fresh case being reported', declared the newspaper:

Of the fourteen persons attacked six have already succumbed, and so small is the percentage of recovery in virulent cases, that it is doubtful whether most of the remaining eight will not go to swell the roll of victims'.⁶⁶

Five days later, the *West Australian* reported that the number of plague victims in Sydney had risen to twenty-one.⁶⁷

The Local Board of Health in Fremantle were briefed with the latest knowledge on the disease by the town's Health Officer and board member, Hope, who quoted from Patrick Manson's *Manual on Tropical Diseases* (1898): 'the plague is a specific inoculable disease and communicable epidemic, characterised by buboes, rapid course, high mortality, presence of specific bacteria in the lymphatic glands, blood and viscera'. Hope specifically urged the Local Board to take 'all precautionary measures' to prevent the introduction of the bubonic plague. Whilst he hoped the long voyage from infected ports to Fremantle might make its introduction less probable, nonetheless he said, 'strenuous efforts must be made to have our surroundings as perfectly healthy as possible'.⁶⁸

The local population, however, was left to the fears of its imagination. Much of the Fremantle population would have known, from their school history lessons, something of the bubonic plague that had decimated populations and terrorised Europe in the Middle Ages. Suspicions aside, Fremantle residents were aware that there was frequent trade with ships coming from Sydney, a port which, by its nature, shared many geographical and demographic features with Fremantle. Indeed, John Ashburton Thompson, the president of the New South Wales Board of

⁶⁶ *West Australian*, 13 March 1900, p2.

⁶⁷ *West Australian*, 18 March 1900, p2. Grace Karskens, quoting figures compiled in the Bubonic Plague Register held in the Archives Authority of NSW, writes that during the plague epidemic of 1901-03 in Sydney, the plague killed a total of 103 people. G. Karskens, *Inside the Rocks: The Archaeology of a Neighbourhood* (Alexandria: Hale & Ironmonger, 1999), p191.

⁶⁸ Meeting of 14 April 1900, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, WAA 612, Acc 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

Health had commented during the plague outbreak in 1900 that Sydney port's 'inner city slums' were unfit for human habitation and 'simply ghastly', a stark similarity to the tenements of Fremantle.⁶⁹

The public apprehension was echoed in the newspapers of both Perth and Fremantle, which were filled with plague warnings and dire premonitions. Readers of the *Sunday Times* could absorb an explicit and petrifying account of the plague and its symptoms. The report describes in detail the symptoms of a plague victim: apart from fever, buboes and vomiting, 'the eyes are red, the skin hot, the tongue black, dry and cracked, crusts form on the teeth'. It went on, 'if the patient survives long enough, he wears a dull, stupefied haggard look'.⁷⁰ The *West Australian* contributed to the alarm by describing how the plague germ could lurk in the most seemingly benign places, suggesting that the plague could even be caught from the 'wall-paper' of a house, long after the plague patient has been removed from its vicinity. To defend oneself against the plague, the newspaper recommended plenty of fresh air and sunlight, plenty of soap and water, and a maximum of personal and public cleanliness.⁷¹ (Habits, of course, which would have improved the lives of Fremantle locals regardless of the threat of plague.) The plague, the newspaper added 'mainly finds its victims among the ill-fed and overworked'.⁷²

The knowledge that the overcrowded and often impoverished conditions in which they lived made them easily susceptible to this disease was brought home to the Fremantle community when the president of the Central Board of Health announced that 'the spread of the plague has shown that the disease is due, in a direct proportion, to the degree of perfection or imperfection of local sanitary

⁶⁹ Thompson's comments were made to the *Bulletin* newspaper; cited in Myron Echenberg, *Plague Ports: The Global Urban Impact of Bubonic Plague, 1894-1901* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), p247.

⁷⁰ *Sunday Times*, 11 March 1900, p5. The *Sunday Times* report was also quoting from Patrick Manson's *Manual on Tropical Diseases* (1898) from which Dr. Hope had read out these same descriptions, among other information, to the Local Board at its February meeting.

⁷¹ *West Australian*, 13 March 1900, p2.

⁷² *West Australian*, 13 March 1900, p2.

arrangements'.⁷³ In Fremantle, the local residents were painfully aware that sanitary arrangements were far from perfect.

Contributing to the sense of general unease were the varied and incomprehensible responses of local authorities, the stories of which were published in local papers. The *West Australian* published the news that in Melbourne, in reaction to the Sydney outbreak, the railway authorities ordered 'that all NSW passengers per train' should disembark just outside of the city, and 'put out their tongues for official inspection'.⁷⁴ With similarly questionable logic in Western Australia, the harbour authorities in Albany had the livestock on board a vessel coming in from Adelaide unloaded into the harbour from where they had to swim ashore.⁷⁵ In May, shortly after the outbreak of plague in Fremantle, this type of 'reactionary' response was curbed in Western Australia under the direction of a new president of the Central Board of Health. Dr. Ernest Black was appointed to the position in great part owing to his previous work in the plague hospitals of Bombay.⁷⁶

The bubonic plague was better understood in 1900 than it had been for centuries past. Yet there remained gaps in the knowledge of the medical and scientific experts, including, most significantly, the role the rat played in the spread

⁷³ Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 25, Item 4, Fremantle Correspondence, S.R.O. Perth.

⁷⁴ *West Australian*, 20 March 1900, p4.

⁷⁵ The vessel carrying the livestock had previously berthed in Sydney before making its way to Albany. Manager, Millars' Karri and Jarrah Forests, Ltd to Dr. Black, 18 May 1900, Central Board of Health Files AN 120/4 Acc 1003 Box 31 Item 6 Bubonic Plague – Shipping to Staff, S.R.O, Perth

⁷⁶ Dr. Black had worked for P & O and spent some time with them in Bombay when he visited the plague hospitals there. He wrote to the Central Board offering his services, as 'Dr. Ashburton Thompson of Sydney told me you were in want of a surgeon for plague duty'. Letter from Dr. Ernest Black to Central Board of Health, 12 May 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 6, Bubonic Plague – Shipping to Staff. It is interesting that Black must have been an acquaintance of Dr. Ashburton Thompson, and it is very likely there was contact between the two doctors, although there are no extent documents in the records of the Central Board; perhaps the correspondence took place privately. Certainly there were many of the same practices for both prevention and treatment of the Fremantle plague as were conducted in Sydney and it would be safe to assume Dr. Black would have sought advice from the much more experienced Sydney doctor. In 1906 Thompson published his research on the plague in the *Australasian Medical Gazette* 25 (1906), 'The Epidemiology of Plague'. For a fuller discussion of the career of John Ashburton Thompson, see Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, pp263-5.

of the disease. The Venice Convention of 1897, the first of its kind to deal exclusively with bubonic plague, identified the association of the rat with plague epidemics, but 'far from suspecting an insect vector, the Venice Conference stated that plague appeared to take place by means of the excretions of patients and consequently by contaminated linen, clothing and hands'.⁷⁷ Dr. Hope told a local newspaper that 'it had been a great question in the minds of authorities on plague as to whether the bacilli were carried on cargo'. Yet he quite correctly suggested that the disease was generally propagated either by rats or by men handling cargo on which rats had died or had deposited excreta. 'The transmission was generally brought about by inoculation, meaning, by means of fleas from rats or punctures in the skin', he added.⁷⁸ In his focus on the rat as the main source of the plague contagion, Hope was following the path taken in Sydney. As a recent study of the global plague epidemic in the late 1800s concludes, in trying to stem the spread of plague in Sydney the central sanitary approach adopted was rodent control.⁷⁹

With the threat of bubonic plague looming, and its mostly likely carrier the rats living on board ships, Fremantle had particular reason to feel insecure. As the primary port of entry for all ships coming to the colony, it was most at risk. What was of central importance, and of greatest concern for the Fremantle Local Board, was the identification of responsibility for protecting the local population from plague. With multiple authorities on the waterfront, who was responsible for stopping the plague infestation from even coming ashore? And who would be responsible for dealing with its effects if it did spread into the town?

The division of responsibilities between the Fremantle Municipal Council, the Fremantle Local Board of Health and the other agencies with authority on the

⁷⁷ By 'insect vector' Echenberg is referring to the insect as a source of the plague contagion. See Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, pp79-80.

⁷⁸ *Daily News*, 1 May 1900, p1.

⁷⁹ Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, p255. It is interesting to note that Thompson, as president of the NSW Central Board of Health, also had financial conflicts to contend with, yet his were the reverse of those experienced in Fremantle. Echenberg writes that 'Thompson insisted that rat killing rather than cleansing was the more effective priority, but initially he could not win over the politicians, both Mayor Harris and Premier Lyne were unwilling to spend the money to expedite rodent controls'.

harbour had since 1886 been a continual source of frustration for the Local Board of Health. As noted above, the Local Board was responsible for sanitation within its jurisdiction yet this did not extend to the wharves and jetties—the precise area where plague-ridden rats would be found. The wharves and jetties were under the authority of both the Railway and Customs departments, which had no medical expertise and over which the Local Board had no power. The river itself and shipping were under the control of the Harbour Master and once again the Local Board could impose no demands on that body. In consequence, the Local Board had very limited ability to take control of the sanitation and rat menace in its own town. The domain of the Central Board over issues of health in Fremantle also interfered with the Local Board's autonomy. Since 1886, when an infectious outbreak occurred that was considered to affect the State as a whole rather than a single locality, the Central Board had exerted authority over its containment. Yet most significantly, this was an implicit understanding between the local and central boards, created when the situation demanded. There was not a defining clause or article in the Public Health Act which made clear when and at what time the Central Board should step in to take control from a local board in a health crisis.⁸⁰ For example, during the small-pox epidemic of April 1893, the Central Board had assumed financial responsibility for quarantine and vaccination, whilst the actual work was undertaken by the local health officers. In 1900, with the bubonic plague looming as a likely threat to the whole of the State, and Fremantle merely its initial entry point, the Fremantle Local Board quite naturally expected the Central Board's direction and assistance.

On 21 March 1900 whilst reports of the Sydney plague deaths were being published in the newspapers, the Fremantle Local Board addressed its concerns in a letter to the Central Board. The Local Board's secretary, George Bland Humble, took care to remind the secretary of the Central Board of the traditional division of roles.

⁸⁰ Public Health Act, Further Amendment Act 1895, 12 October 1895. This was made clear during a conference of delegates from the various local boards of health, held in Fremantle in January 1895, at which the powers of the Central Board to assume control outside of municipal boundaries was debated but dropped without a resolution being moved.

At the same time he expressed the hope that the Central Board would be able to take fiscal responsibility for the plague precautions. He wrote:

This Board is desirous of carrying out as effectively as possible all the regulations of the Central Board of Health for the prevention of the Bubonic Plague in our midst. You are aware that the Local Board is confined to its Health Rate which was struck last December, and no plague was apprehended at that time, so that we are practically—so far as extra expenses incurred through the issue of these regulations — without funds. Under the circumstances, I am requested to ask, if the additional charges will be paid by the Central Board as was done some years ago, when small pox was introduced into the Colony.⁸¹

Above all, the Fremantle Local Board wanted the Central Board's *financial* support. Indeed, the Mayor himself reflected publicly that 'people failed to recognise the financial difficulties in carrying out the health improvements'.⁸²

Humble went on in his letter regarding the rumours spreading among the town's population that the rats on the wharves were already infected with bubonic plague, and asked the Central Board how more of these rats were to be prevented from getting ashore from visiting vessels. Fumigation was at this time considered by the Local Board as the best first step in disease prevention, yet the town's Health Officer did 'not have the power to order vessels from the wharf for the purposes of fumigation'. Given the belief that the disease was spread through direct contact with rats and their fleas, it was essential that someone should have access to the wharves to prohibit the spread of the contagion. If the Local Board could not take control of fumigation and therefore rat destruction, then it made sense to put the responsibility for plague precautions into the hands of the Central Board. Bland concluded that, 'we shall be glad to learn that every necessary precaution is being adopted to prevent the introduction of this fearful plague into this town and Colony'.⁸³

⁸¹ G.B. Humble to Secretary, Central Board of Health, 21 March 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 25, Item 4, Fremantle Correspondence, S.R.O. Perth.

⁸² *Daily News*, 1 December 1900, p 1.

⁸³ G.B. Humble to Secretary, Central Board of Health, 21 March 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 25, Item 4, Fremantle Correspondence, S.R.O. Perth.

'Precautionary Regulations' for keeping the plague from entering Western Australia were established at a special meeting of the Central Board on 1 April 1900.⁸⁴ The regulations were formalised under Section 111 of the Health Act (1898) as published in the *Government Gazette* of 3 April 1900, a copy of which was sent to the Fremantle Local Board with an accompanying letter stating, 'the Central Board in making the regulations has done all in its power, it is for your board to do its part and see that they are fully complied with'.⁸⁵ The Local Board's role was implicit in these directions: it was powerless to take action on its own account, rather it was merely the 'enforcer' of the Central Board's decisions. Unfortunately, it was specifically this conception of the division of responsibilities that would prove so inadequate once the plague took hold.

Rather than providing the Local Board with more power to act, the initial response of the Central Board, was to place the onus of dealing with the rats on the harbour squarely in the hands of the various waterfront authorities. The Collector of Customs and the head of the Railway Department were issued with an urgent directive to destroy all rats in sheds and other buildings under their control.⁸⁶ Yet with little to compel them to do so, the various departments did not act with any sense of haste or urgency. When the president of the Central Board personally visited Fremantle and performed inspections on various locations, he wrote to the Railway Department letting them know that their existing system for rat destruction was 'practically ineffectual'.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 3, Bubonic Plague – Prohibited articles to Regulations. S.R.O. Perth.

⁸⁵ See: letter from Dr. Ernest Black to Central Board of Health, 12 May 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 6, Bubonic Plague – Shipping to Staff; and Minutes of the Local Board, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Acc 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902.

⁸⁶ President, Central Board of Health, to Collector of Customs, Fremantle, 22 March 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 3, Bubonic Plague – Prohibited articles to Regulations, S.R.O. Perth.

⁸⁷ President, Central Board of Health, to Under Secretary for Railways, 23 March 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 3, Bubonic Plague – Prohibited articles to Regulations, S.R.O. Perth.

When it came to the prevention of plague, the key measure in the Central Board's policy was the annihilation of rats, yet its procedure for stopping rats from actually coming ashore from incoming ships was similarly ineffective. The Central Board preferred a system of tarring the ropes that tied the ships to the wharves to inhibit the rats from making their way down the ropes to the shore. This was challenged by the Local Board who complained that the policy was inadequate. It had in its service men with a seafaring background and direct experience with the practical workings of the harbour, and so insisted adamantly 'that rats will swim ashore or from one vessel to another' so that the tarring of ropes was not sufficient to stop them from landing.⁸⁸ The Local Board preferred a system of fumigation, which would kill the both the rats and the plague germ at the same time. Both systems were kept in place, yet despite the precautions, the bubonic plague was not prevented from finding its way ashore.

The Plague arrives: April 1900

On Thursday, 5 April 1900, a local employee of the Railways Department, William Campbell, complained of feeling ill. On Saturday he was admitted to Fremantle Hospital suffering a headache and vomiting. By Sunday he was dead of bubonic plague. Campbell was only nineteen years old when he became the first victim of the disease in Western Australia, dying at the Fremantle Hospital on 8 April. Campbell had migrated to Western Australia from Victoria only five or six months earlier and was living in a boarding house at 10 Bay Street, not far from the docks where he worked. He was employed at the No. 1 goods shed on Fremantle Harbour. His job was to unload cargo from ships arriving from the Eastern colonies. At the time that he was struck down, he had been unloading merchandise from the steamers *Pilbarra* and *Marloo*, both from Sydney.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ G.B Humble to Secretary. Central Board of Health, 31 March 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 25, Item 4, Fremantle Correspondence, S.R.O. Perth.

⁸⁹ Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

When the staff at the hospital sent a message to the district medical officer, Dr. Thomas Lynewolde Anderson, that 'a suspicious case' had died there, Anderson suspected plague and promptly ordered a post-mortem examination.⁹⁰ He also ordered that both the hospital and the house where the deceased had been living were to be strictly isolated.⁹¹ Bubonic plague was immediately confirmed by the examination of cultures obtained from the organs.⁹² Fremantle's methodology in dealing with the plague victims followed the control measures already established in New South Wales. In Sydney, the authorities followed 'the two conventional approaches recommended by the Venice protocol of 1897: first, isolation, quarantine and special burial techniques and, second, incineration and the cleansing or demolition of property'.⁹³ Similarly in Fremantle, contacts were inoculated with 'Haffkine's anti-plague vaccine' a prophylactic serum which was developed at the Haffkine Institute in Bombay by Waldemar Mordechai Haffkine during a plague epidemic in 1897.⁹⁴ Contacts were then sent into quarantine at Woodman's Point.⁹⁵

The question of how to dispose of the plague-infected body of William Campbell presented an immediate problem. There was no crematorium at the port of Fremantle, and as per the newly established plague regulations, infected remains

⁹⁰ Anderson had been Quarantine Officer, but as of Quarantine Orders of 2 April 1900 was made Senior Medical Officer. One of Anderson's first efforts in Fremantle was to establish an office in Cliff Buildings, with J.K. Hitchcock as Secretary.

⁹¹ Dr. Anderson to President, Central Board of Health, 13 April 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

⁹² Report of Dr. Anderson to President, Central Board of Health, 13 April 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, File No 1: Bubonic Plague – Infected Rats, Instructions.

⁹³ Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, p257.

⁹⁴ As reported in a letter of 15 March 1901 from the Secretary, Central Board of Health, to the Under Secretary, Colonial Secretary's Office, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 3, Bubonic Plague – Prohibited articles to Regulations, S.R.O. Perth. For a full discussion of Haffkine's plague inoculation, see Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, pp60-62.

⁹⁵ The Heritage Council of Western Australia's heritage register lists Woodman's Point Quarantine Station and states that 'land was reserved for a quarantine station at Woodman's Point in 1876' (State Heritage Register, no. 499). Again, it is interesting to note that in the NSW case 'from the beginning Thompson had opposed the isolation of contacts, just as he had earlier opposed asylums for lepers, but he had been overruled by the New South Wales government of Sir William Lyne, who sought isolation "in accordance with popular feeling"'. Thompson understood that 'humans were not plague vectors'. Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, p252.

could not be buried in the local cemetery. The regulations stated that ‘The body of any person who shall die of the malignant infectious disease known as bubonic plague shall not be interred in any cemetery, but shall be buried with such precautions as shall be approved by the Central Board in an isolated place specially set apart for that purpose’.⁹⁶ In regard to what those precautions should be in practice, the matter was decided by Dr. Anderson who, in order to satisfy not only the regulations but the fears of the public mind, needed to get the plague victim’s body as far and as safely away from the population as possible.

The body of the first patient was placed in a lined coffin and 2 cwt of iron placed in the coffin with the body removed by an undertaker and assistant, placed on the health launch and taken out 18 miles to sea, and after holes had been bored in the coffin, it was lowered into 19 fathoms of water. Each person who handled the body and coffin thoroughly disinfected their hands after doing so.⁹⁷

The day following William Campbell’s death, another young patient, Sydney Wilson, was diagnosed with the plague at 129 South Terrace. The house, including the attached tenement, was immediately isolated and a guard placed on duty night and day. The guard was employed in order to keep potential looters away and to keep the quarantined persons inside from leaving the building. The men employed to watch infected premises were engaged by the Central Board at 8 shillings per day.⁹⁸ The patient was kept in the house and nursed by his father, sister and mother, under directions given by Dr. Anderson. Wilson had been employed as a storeman by ‘Messrs G. Wood and Son, General Merchants’, on Cantonment Street in Fremantle. He had suddenly taken ill at home on Sunday afternoon, 8 April 1900, after having been at work as usual on the Saturday. His duties as storeman included the loading and unloading of cargo, and in carrying out his work prior to becoming ill, he, like William Campbell, had likely handled cargo from the steamers *Pilbarra*

⁹⁶ Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 1, Bubonic Plague – Infected Rats, Instructions, S.R.O. Perth.

⁹⁷ Dr. Anderson to President, Central Board of Health, 13 April 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

⁹⁸ Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

and *Marloo*, as goods from both those vessels had been delivered to the company's warehouse. On later inspection, the Health Inspectors found the work premises to be kept in a state of cleanliness, due to 'a vigorous use of disinfectants', and free from rats, confirming their suspicions that the actual cargo from the ships was the source of the contagion.⁹⁹ As a result, every passenger and each member of the *Pilbarra's* crew was examined by the local medical officer. All their personal effects and luggage were placed in the hold of the ship where they were fumigated with sulphur for three and a half hours.¹⁰⁰ What happened to the *Marloo* and its crew is not recorded. No further fatalities from contact with either the *Pilbarra* or the *Marloo* occurred.

Sydney Wilson died at 3.30 am on 12 April, three days after his diagnosis. His mother, father and sister were sent on to the quarantine hospital at Woodman's Point later the same evening in a horse and pauper hearse.¹⁰¹ The horse, hearse and driver were kept for the use of all plague patients and contacts, and were themselves also kept in isolation at Woodman's Point. In dealing with his remains, the authorities chose a different course to that used for William Campbell. In the afternoon following Wilson's death, Dr. Anderson had the unfortunate job of removing the affected gland to send it to Perth Hospital for examination. Wilson's body was 'wrapped in three sheets soaked in carbolic acid and then placed in a plain coffin not lined'.¹⁰² The coffin was placed in the hearse and taken to a funeral-pyre constructed by the Public Works Department. Dr. Anderson and Dr. Harvey, the acting principal medical officer for the Central Board, witnessed the burning of Wilson's body. A mounted policeman was sent the following morning early and he

⁹⁹ Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁰⁰ Principal Medical Officer to Central Board of Health, 16 April 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁰¹ The hearse had been 'engaged from Mrs. Jenkins, a local undertaker, at £2 per week'. Dr. Anderson to President, Central Board of Health, 13 April 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁰² Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

reported that the fire had completely burnt down and there was 'nothing but ashes remaining'.¹⁰³ The Central Board administered these precautions in order to inhibit any chance of the plague contagion spreading further, but also to prevent panic among the community. It was important to be seen to be taking extreme measures for the health of the population.

However, when it became public news in Fremantle that the bubonic plague had indeed entered the port, a general anxiety swept the town. Both citizens and administrators were alike alarmed, for although there was now a preventative inoculation, and a chance of recovery for cases diagnosed early, the plague appeared in Fremantle, as it had in Europe in the Middle Ages, like a virulent and frightful phantom. Popular concern manifested itself in a frenzy of cleaning among Fremantle residents. The day following Sydney Wilson's death, the *Morning Herald* reported that, 'such is the demand for disinfectants caused by the outbreak that only a small supply exists in the wholesale houses of Perth and Fremantle, which, owing to the large demands received from customers, would likely be exhausted Monday next'. The representative from the *Morning Herald* was shown telegrams from Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, 'that showed that a supply of the principal disinfectants could not be obtained at any price'.¹⁰⁴ (The paper also pointed out that the lack of disinfectants was brought about not only by the rush of demand due to the plague outbreak but was aggravated by a condition of the Boer War by which the Queen had forbidden the exportation of carbolic and phenic acids during the continuance of the war.)

When residents discovered that the authorities had buried William Campbell at sea, they complained vehemently to the local papers that the body could be eaten by fish, which would then be caught and eaten by the townspeople. A reporter from the *Morning Herald* took up this issue with Dr. Anderson, who insisted there was no

¹⁰³ Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁰⁴ *Morning Herald*, 13 April 1900, p5. Echenberg writes that 'greater Sydney became drenched with disinfectants', so much so that as the disinfectants 'washed through the sewer system, Darling Harbour was filled with dead fish'. Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, p253.

danger that the 'bubonic germs' would disseminate throughout Fremantle in that way.¹⁰⁵ The practice of burial for plague victims also provoked a strong protest from the Inspector for Fisheries, who wrote to the Central Board: 'I defy contradiction when I say that a body stricken down with bubonic plague, buried at sea and accessible to crustaceans and fish, will have a very serious effect on the industry'.¹⁰⁶ He was correct. A few days after the burial of William Campbell, the *Morning Herald* had informed its readers that:

One result of the appearance of the plague at the port has been almost a cessation of fishing operations. The public took a decided objection to the burial at sea of the victim Campbell and has taken a decided objection to any fish other than the tinned article. The fact that the body of Campbell was wrapped in three sets of strongly disinfected sheets, and placed inside a lead coffin, which was enclosed in a strong jarrah coffin, the whole being heavily weighted so as to secure its going to the bottom of the sea, does not appear to have reassured the public mind.¹⁰⁷

Two days later the same newspaper reported that 'A poor fisherman yesterday was obliged to throw away a hundred weight of fish because he could not sell it in Subiaco, where he has hitherto done good trade'.¹⁰⁸

In the days following Sydney Wilson's funeral pyre, there were several newspaper articles complaining that parts of the skeleton could be seen at the site. Both the local and central health boards were forced to revisit the scene in order to quell the public mind. With almost comical diligence, the Central Board sent Coxswain Hopkins to dig up Wilson's remains and ensure they were buried securely. He reported on 23 April that some old bones, probably the remains of a bullock or cow, could be seen from the roadway, but he was satisfied that the remains of Wilson could not have been seen by anyone, adding that it 'would have been necessary to search for them amongst the ashes as they were in such small

¹⁰⁵ *Morning Herald*, 13 April 1900, p5.

¹⁰⁶ Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁰⁷ *Morning Herald*, 11 April 1900, p6.

¹⁰⁸ *Morning Herald*, 13 April 1900, p6.

particles'.¹⁰⁹ The officer in charge of the Public Works Department who had built the funeral pyre and the Mounted Policeman, William Brodie, were also sent to check on the remains. The public works man testified to the Chief Medical Officer that nothing at all remains 'to which any exception could be taken by even the most sensitive'.¹¹⁰ William Brodie wrote that he had to rake through the ashes to find any sign of remains.¹¹¹ Such was the paranoia of a frightened public unused to dealing with such an alarming disease.

The fight for control: the Local Board versus the Central Board

When the Fremantle Local Board of Health was first informed by Dr. Anderson that the plague had been identified in Fremantle, it immediately wrote to the Central Board on the matter of establishing a central authority on the harbour, urging 'that there should be a Board appointed to have full control of all health matters at the Port whether it be jetty, wharf, railway sheds, quite irrespective of either harbour or railway departments'.¹¹²

An emphasis on plague precautions and regulations was key to the Central Board's initial program to inhibit the spread of the disease. It authorised Dr. Anderson to appoint three inspectors to supervise the fumigation of ships, as their preferred practice for preventing the plague from spreading from ship to shore. Dr. Anderson had hoped to second Coxswain Hopkins of the Water Police as his second in command. However, on 17 May Mr. Robert Carrick was appointed in his place at the rate of £3 per working week of six days. In order to defray the costs already

¹⁰⁹ Report of Coxswain Hopkins to Dr. Anderson, 21 April 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹¹⁰ Public Works Department, Officer in Charge, to Chief Medical Officer, Central Board of Health, 21 April 1900, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹¹¹ Report of William Brodie, Reg. No. 475, 21 April 1900, 're: Visiting the place where Wilson's body was cremated', Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹¹² G.B. Humble to President, Central Board of Health, 21 April 1900, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 25, Item 4: Fremantle Correspondence, S.R.O. Perth.

mounting to the Local Board for plague precautions, all overtime, including Sundays, was charged directly to the ship owners.¹¹³ One of the three inspectors was given the role of 'Disinfecting Inspector'; this inspector had to work seven days a week and was the first to enter an infected house to fumigate it.¹¹⁴ Hence, these Inspectors were paid very little to undertake an unpleasant and potentially life-threatening job under stringent conditions. The same divisions of labour and reward occurred in Sydney: as Echenberg writes, 'the most menial tasks of rat-catching and cleansing carried with them the lowest pay and the highest risk'.¹¹⁵

The Central Board had one single concern when bubonic plague was discovered at the entry-port of the State: to isolate the disease and stop its contagion from spreading. Daily missives were sent from the Central Board in Perth to the Local Board in Fremantle, demanding strict procedures for cleansing; not only to the effected dwellings from which plague victims emerged, but to the town's streets and shoreline.¹¹⁶ The boards had not yet embarked on a campaign to improve general hygiene or sanitation in the town. At this early stage, the focus was more specifically centered on the sites at which the plague contagion had been located, to stop it from spreading from these points outward. On the day of William Campbell's death, his house in Bay Street was treated in aggressive fashion. Everything in the patient's room was burnt; the walls, floors and ceilings of all rooms were scrubbed down with strong phenyle solution, then chloride of lime was sprinkled about the rooms; finally, sulphur was burnt for twelve hours. It took two days to complete this procedure and an inventory of all goods destroyed was kept. In addition, everything in the hospital that had come in contact with the plague patient was also burned.

¹¹³ Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 31, Item 6, Bubonic Plague – Shipping to Staff, S.R.O. Perth.

¹¹⁴ Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 31, Item 6, Bubonic Plague – Shipping to Staff, S.R.O. Perth.

¹¹⁵ Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, p250.

¹¹⁶ The minute books of the Local Board at this time are replete with references to 'letter received, Secretary Central Board of Health'. Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Acc 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902.

Larger efforts were also begun to control the possible spread. Also on 8 April, a working party was sent to dismantle the insanitary jetties areas of the West End. It had long been remarked that the condition of the jetty was completely unsatisfactory, despite the fact that it had never been permissible for ships coming in to Fremantle to throw their rubbish overboard. As far back as 1853 penalties for this type of misdemeanour had been laid out in the *Government Gazette*. In January of that year, the penalty for 'throwing ballast or other rubbish from a vessel in the precincts of a port' was £50 (yet strangely the penalty for throwing a corpse overboard was only half that).¹¹⁷ Coxswain Hopkins led the party to clean this area, and in his report to the Board wrote that he had found the jetty in an 'abominably filthy state'.¹¹⁸ All the refuse was collected from the jetty and placed in small boats and towed out to sea by the Health Officer's launch *Waratah* and was then thrown overboard. Disinfection of the wharves and rocks was then started, using chlorine of lime, carbolic acid and other liquid disinfectants. At the same time, an incinerator for 'the carcasses of dead rats, cats, dogs and other dangerous matter' being removed from the jetties and harbour was installed at the sewerage farm. In another sign of the importance placed on these measures, the Mayor asked if the Government would assist with the cost of the incinerator, to which the Central Board replied that 'the Government do not intend to spare any expense in trying to stamp out the plague. We must have that incinerator'.¹¹⁹ In an attempt to improve the sanitary provision of the wharves, to minimise the spread of contagion, the district medical officer ordered that latrines 'should at once be erected on the river wharf and also at the goods sheds near the jetty, by the Railway Department'.¹²⁰ Unfortunately, however, latrines were not installed with any great haste, which one of the newly appointed Inspectors was to learn to his great cost. When he needed to 'answer a

¹¹⁷ *Government Gazette*, 25 January 1853, p4.

¹¹⁸ Report of Coxswain Hopkins to Dr. Anderson, 13 April 1900, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹¹⁹ Meeting of 14 April 1900, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Acc 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902.

¹²⁰ Dr. Anderson to Central Board of Health, 23 April 1900, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

call of nature' whilst on duty on the jetty, he 'had to move a distance from his post', and it earned him his dismissal.¹²¹

The plague precautions were slowing down the movement of cargo on the wharves. When work was attempted at night in order to make up for this delay, this also met the disapprobation of the Central Board. In August its president wrote to the Berthing Master at Fremantle that 'no ship may work at night without direct permission from me. Please instruct the Agents to apply to me by telephone in each case'.¹²² The aim of the new regulation was the adequate inspection of cargo. Rats, the biggest disseminator of the plague germ, made their home amongst the cargo in ships, so it was vital that this potential threat was reduced as much as possible. Some steamers had 'ample electric power' whilst the inspectors and the president of the Central Board considered that the light from 'flare-up' lamps was not sufficient for careful inspection.¹²³ The impact to trade was considered secondary to the importance of inhibiting the spread of plague, so the vessels with insufficient light for night-time inspections had greater delays at the docks as they sat waiting for daylight and their turn to be inspected. The Central Board also took the precaution of ordering all ships with stock to be landed at Robb's Jetty (see map, Appendix A) and considered prohibiting any stock from being carried on passenger boats as 'the presence of fodder on deck will attract rats and these animals are thus brought more closely in contact with passengers'.¹²⁴

In addition to destroying rats at the harbour's edge, the Central Board instituted a program of rat-catching in the town of Fremantle.¹²⁵ It offered the

¹²¹ Memo to Dr. Anderson from Health Inspector Colledge, 3 May 1900, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹²² President, Central Board of Health to Berthing Master, Fremantle, 12 August 1900, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 31, Item 6, Shipping to Staff, S.R.O. Perth.

¹²³ Inspector G.S. Walker to Central Board of Health, 14 August 1900, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 31, Item 6, Shipping to Staff, S.R.O. Perth.

¹²⁴ Dr. Anderson to Central Board of Health, 23 April 1900, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹²⁵ Phyl Garrick writes that 'Ferrets, especially trained to hunt rats, were imported from W. Scarffe, a bird and animal dealer in Melbourne, and a keeper was paid to work, feed and house the hunters'. I

public a tuppence per rat, or two shillings for every dozen dead rats that were caught and handed in.¹²⁶ Coxswain Hopkins was commandeered from his normal duties at the Water Police to take charge of the collection of the dead rats. He would then give a voucher to the rat-collector to take to the Local Board (in the person of the Town Clerk), who would give the collector their fee. The public however were loath to bring themselves into contact with the potentially plague-bearing rodents, and therefore did not enter into the program with much fervour.¹²⁷ The president of the Central Board, Dr. Black, following a visit to Fremantle, expressed his dissatisfaction with the way the plague precautions were being carried out without 'any sort of sense of urgency'. Dr. Black told the *Daily News* that 'he was sorry to find that the people of Fremantle were not sufficiently alive to the true state of affairs, especially in regard to the destruction of rats. He pointed out that up until that time, whilst offering a reward of two shillings per dozen rats, the Central Board had only received applications for six dozen rats.¹²⁸ Whilst addressing the rat-problem was a sensible and reasonable initial response to the threat of plague, wider and more binding measures were obviously necessary.

Immediately following the death of William Campbell, and cognisant of the problems that the dual authority on the waterfront presented, the Local Board wrote to the Central Board that:

the Government be requested to bring in a new Quarantine Bill next session, enacting that all sanitary matters should be under the control of the central and local boards of health, as the present diversity of control hampered all parties in their work and caused delays. In some cases it prevented instead of aiding the eradication of disease. At present the

found no reference to this in Fremantle; it is possible the ferrets were employed only in Perth. See P. Garrick and C. Jeffery, *Fremantle Hospital: A Social History* Fremantle: Fremantle Hospital, 1987 p106.
¹²⁶ Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 25, Item 4, Fremantle Correspondence, S.R.O. Perth.

¹²⁷ Repeated references to the Fremantle populace's lack of interest in the rat-catching program are found in the correspondence between the Central and Local boards at this time. Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 25, Item 4, Fremantle Correspondence, S.R.O. Perth.

¹²⁸ *The Daily News*, 2 May 1900, p3. Black was, in all likelihood, following the example set by his counterpart Thompson in Sydney, where the same rewards were offered. In Sydney, by contrast, rats were being destroyed on a much bigger scale. Echenberg writes that during the Sydney plague, '45,000 rats were destroyed and at any given time some 3,000 men were employed in cleansing operations'. Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, pp254-55.

jetty was under the control of the Harbour Master, who would only take orders from his chief officer, the Premier. The wharves however, were under the control of the Railway Department and hence there were many obstacles to prompt or effective action.¹²⁹

On 16 April, a Quarantine Bill was passed in the Legislative Assembly that included 'Port Regulations for the control of plague in regard to shipping' and which were put immediately into effect. Unfortunately, the bill did nothing to amend the jurisdictional chaos. Its primary precaution was to define controls to aspects of shipping such as the order that 'all intercolonial boats should be considered as having come from an infected port even if they had not touched at Sydney'.¹³⁰

On 23 April, Dr. Anderson felt confident in reporting that, as there had been no fresh cases since the initial two victims, he believed the outbreak to be at an end.¹³¹ Both optimistically and boastfully, Dr. Black (president of the Central Board) told the *Daily News* at this time that 'the Local Board had nothing to do with dealing with the outbreak of bubonic plague, it was all done by the Central Board. Neither the Central Board nor the Local Board stamped it out. The true explanation is that these were simply two isolated cases of persons who received the infection most probably from cargo or while on board the boat, and there was not infection in Fremantle at all'.¹³² He was wrong. Within a fortnight, another plague victim was found dead in his home. Arthur Malet, a Frenchman recently arrived on the *S.S Gera*, was staying in a boarding house at 35 Florence Street, South Fremantle, when he was discovered to be suffering from the plague. He was the only plague victim, at this time and over the course of all future outbreaks, from outside of the West End area.¹³³

¹²⁹ *West Australian*, 11 April 1900, p6.

¹³⁰ Memo from Dr. Harvey, Principal Medical Officer, to Central Board of Health, 16 April 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹³¹ Dr. Anderson to Central Board of Health, 23 April 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹³² *Daily News*, 14 April 1900, p3.

¹³³ How he contracted the plague is left unexplained by the extant documentation on the subject, and no other passenger of the *S.S Gera* was infected. It can be surmised that he contracted the disease whilst on the docks in Fremantle.

Following Malet's death, the ratepayers of South Fremantle complained to the Fremantle Municipal Council about the delay that occurred in the removal of his body to Woodman's Point quarantine hospital (where it was to be cremated). Malet's body had been kept in the house in South Fremantle for about nine hours or more before being removed, which, they stated, had caused them 'considerable fear and alarm'. After receiving this complaint from the South Fremantle residents, the secretary to the Local Board, G.B. Humble, wrote to the Central Board asking if they might be more hasty in removing dead bodies from residential areas in the future.¹³⁴ On 23 May Humble received a curt reply, the gist of which was that there was no unnecessary delay; the Mortuary at the Quarantine Station was not completed, so the body could not be taken there, and the Crematorium was not yet completed, so the Public Works Department had to make arrangements for a funeral pyre, which obviously required some time. The four 'contacts' from the boarding house in South Fremantle were removed to Woodman's Point on 17 May following the discovery of Malet's body. Likewise, the 49 passengers of the *S.S Gera*, were also taken to Woodman's Point.¹³⁵ A funeral pyre was prepared for Malet's body, 'about 8 feet away from Wilson's grave'.¹³⁶ The transport of all of the plague contacts were made under mounted police escort. Dr. Anderson described the cremation of Malet in his report to the president of the Central Board, letting the president know that he personally supervised the proceeding.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ G.B. Humble to President, Central Board of Health, 17 May 1900, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 25, Item 4: Fremantle Correspondence.

¹³⁵ Dr. Anderson's report to President, Central Board of Health, 23 May 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹³⁶ Officer In Charge, Public Works Department, to Dr. Anderson, Re: Burial of Remains (Malet), 17 May 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4 Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹³⁷ Dr. Anderson's report to President, Central Board of Health, 23 May 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth. Anderson wrote that 'everything was conducted quietly and decently and the burial service was read by one of the deceased's co-religionists', suggesting that Malet was perhaps Catholic.

What we learn from the procedures involved, from the time of the precautions being announced to the third victim dying, is how *little* the Fremantle Local Board had actually to do with dealing with the plague in its midst. The regulations, the instructions, the burial of the bodies, cleansing, fumigation and quarantine—in all these areas the Central Board had authority. At no point was the Local Board proactive or in control of plague prevention. The words of Councillor Webster, the chairman and perhaps most vocal member of the Local Board, are representative of its sentiments at this stage in the plague outbreak. He told a local newspaper that ‘owing to the laxity that was shown by Dr. Black and the other health authorities in Perth, the plague was brought to Fremantle, and once it came here it was a matter not of local concern alone but one of importance to the whole colony, and therefore it is only right that the Central Board of Health should now undertake the work of remedying the evil that it has permitted’.¹³⁸ Put simply, as far as the Local Board were concerned, the prevention of plague spreading into Fremantle was taken out of its hands and was neglectfully managed by the Central Board, so that body should now be held responsible for the ensuing difficulties. It may seem a childish response, but the entire ‘plague crisis’ was dominated by this juxtaposition between the two boards: the paternalistic domination of the Central Board over a neutered and powerless Local Board.

After Malet’s death, a lull followed in the presence of the plague in Fremantle. Throughout May, no new cases of the disease were reported. However, on 12 June, forty-two year old John Fitzpatrick, the cook at Maitland’s restaurant in Market Street, was diagnosed with plague. Eleven contacts from the restaurant were sent to the Quarantine Station.¹³⁹ Two days later, the daughter of a restaurant owner, Kate Maitland, was also diagnosed with ‘true plague’.¹⁴⁰ On 19 June, fourteen-year old Henry Scott was diagnosed with plague and he along with six contacts was also sent to Woodman’s Point. John Fitzpatrick and Kate Maitland died of the plague within a

¹³⁸ *The Daily News*, 3 May 1900, p2.

¹³⁹ Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, File No. 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports.

¹⁴⁰ Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, File No. 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

week of their diagnosis. Young Henry Scott and all the contacts from both addresses were sent home free from contagion on 30 June, apparently proving that if caught early, the plague could be contained and was not as dire as people initially, and understandably, feared.¹⁴¹ In fact, the very low fatality rate as plague outbreaks progressed had the effect on the Fremantle population of making them almost ambivalent to the presence of plague in their midst.

Fremantle: The physical environment and the Local Board of Health

We return now to the first case of plague, to examine the physical reality of having the bubonic plague in Fremantle's midst. On visiting William Campbell's house following his death, the Inspectors for the Central Board of Health found that the Bay Street house 'contained seven persons, and was in a very dirty condition'. Similarly, Wilson's house on South Terrace provided an example of the overcrowded and squalid living conditions that seemed to define West End accommodation at that time. Dr. Anderson wrote to the Central Board that 'in all there were twenty persons in this one house'.¹⁴² The report following the diagnosis of young Henry Scott of his home at 31 Collie Street was more troubling:

The principal defect was caused by the floors being laid slightly below the level of the yard at ground floor level. The house is flanked on either side by houses of similar design and a tenement of two rooms is placed above the east entrance. The latter is occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Kienan and three children. No. 29 contains Mr. and Mrs. Allen and 2 children, No. 31 Mr. and Mrs. Scott and 5 children, No. 33 Mr. and Mrs. Kelly and 5 children.

¹⁴¹ At no point in my research could I find a written policy defining when patients were considered cured or safe to be allowed to return from Woodman's Point. However, Echenberg writes that in Sydney, 'To be declared cured a patient had to go for ten days without a fever and to be completely free of tumors'. Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, p251. This timing accords with the amount of time patients tended to be kept in Woodman's Point, and as the doctors in Fremantle seem to have followed the procedures set by the Venice Protocol, it is probably safe to assume the same policy was carried out in Fremantle.

¹⁴² Report of Dr. Anderson to President, Central Board of Health, 13 April 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, File No. 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

The report further described how only two toilets were provided for the whole of the twelve adults and fifteen children living there. The toilets were described as being 'in an extremely dirty condition, the seats and risers [i.e. stands] being saturated with offensive matter'. The natural earth floor around the toilet was also in an offensive state 'and no ventilation to the conveniences was provided'.¹⁴³ The Inspectors' report on the Maitland restaurant in Market Street, where both John Fitzpatrick and Katie Maitland had been diagnosed with the plague, was just as condemning. Refuse of various kinds had been tossed, apparently from the bedroom windows, onto the road in Market Street but had rolled down into the eaves and gutters and stayed there; the gutters were then 'choked up with offensive matter'.¹⁴⁴

Maitland's Restaurant was not alone in being in such an insanitary state. There were numerous hotels and restaurants throughout the West End in which employees and owners lived in these overcrowded and unhygienic conditions, as a report from the Secretary of the Coastal Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union testified. The secretary wrote to the Central Board about the unsanitary condition of the kitchens and sleeping accommodation in 'many of the hotels and eating houses in and around Fremantle'. In some cases he described the kitchen as being no larger than a cellar 'with little ventilation, less sunlight, and no drainage'. In addition he wrote that 'the sleeping accommodation' consisted of 'a bunk or several bunks crowded in an outhouse particularly close to the closets'.¹⁴⁵ Maitland's restaurant's premises had been inspected by the Chief Inspector of the Central Board a considerable time before the outbreak of plague there and Mr. Maitland had been warned then that unless he made some 'alterations in his sanitary arrangements he

¹⁴³ Report of Dr. Anderson to President, Central Board of Health, 22 June 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, File No. 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁴⁴ Report of Dr. Anderson to President, Central Board of Health, 22 June 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, File No. 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁴⁵ T.G. Taylor, Secretary, Coastal Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union, to Central Board of Health, 12 September 1901, Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons 1003, Item 1004, Hotels Perth & Fremantle.

must expect the outbreak of some serious illness'. Unfortunately the Central Board's records showed that 'nothing whatever was done'.¹⁴⁶

The presence of plague in these homes and businesses initiated a series of inspections from the health officers, which eventually led to vital, long term improvements in hygiene and sanitation in Fremantle. These same inspections, however, whilst having a profound effect on Fremantle's general well-being, were generally seen by residents as an unwelcome intrusion. It was the practice at the time to fumigate all homes in which a plague patient had been residing. Should the Inspector feel that any of the furniture, bedding or any other effects was in a state of sanitation that might be further dangerous to the public health, he had the authority to burn these, without consultation with the contacts, who by that time were in isolation at Woodman's Point. The Central Board did pay compensation for these goods, usually if they contributed to the earning of a livelihood. The case of Baileys and Sutherland's restaurant in 1903 makes a valuable case in point. The owners were compensated £6.8.2½ for the goods which were destroyed during fumigation. Among these were cooked ham, corned beef, bacon, '1 pair fowls and 11 loaves of bread'.¹⁴⁷ Yet of greatest concern for the owners were the loss of their reputation and the consequent loss of business. They wrote to the Central Board that 'after struggling to build up a business which was a decided convenience to the people of this town and to visitors also we have been ostracized and ruined and we are now in great doubt as to whether we shall be able to carry on at all, as there is keen competition here, and the public will naturally go where no taint of plague has been'.¹⁴⁸ The Central Board could not compensate them for their enforced removal to Woodman's Point, or for their loss of business.

¹⁴⁶ As reported in a letter from Dr. Black to the Undersecretary, Colonial Secretary's Office, 5 July 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Acc: 1003, Box 30, Item 4, Compensation, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁴⁷ Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418E, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, First Series of Cases, January-February 1903.

¹⁴⁸ Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418E, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, First Series of Cases, January-February 1903.

Yet like all other administrative decisions that govern this period of plague in Fremantle, there seems to be an arbitrary element to the policy for payment of compensation. James Gardner, following his contracting the plague and his stint at Woodman's Point, was given compensation for '5 linen handkerchiefs and 1 silk handkerchief, 3 silk neck ties, 6 linen collars, 3 wool skull caps, some shoes, shirts and trousers', totalling £2.17.6. He was then given compensation for 'his swag of clothing, which was evidently taken by one of the contacts on their release'. The board's recommendation explained that 'Gardner is 55 years of age and is destitute and at present owing to his late illness, is unable to do any work. There is no proof of the existence of the missing articles, but the Board after careful enquiries feel satisfied making the above recommendation'.¹⁴⁹

Nevertheless, the Fremantle contacts still had a slightly better time of it than their Sydney counterparts. Grace Karskens writes in her work on Sydney that, following the outbreak bubonic plague in 1900:

the official response to the outbreak was particularly hard on the people of the waterfront areas. Their streets were quarantined and barricaded, houses where plague had occurred were marked out and sometimes torn down. Shopkeepers went broke when their stores were boycotted, and people returned to their houses or businesses to find their lodgers gone, their tools of trade thrown out, their carpets and furniture ruined, their possessions ransacked and stolen by the 'cleansing' teams.¹⁵⁰

No such extreme measures, or responses, were to be seen in Fremantle, despite the obvious negative impact on many individuals.

The Local Board, as we have seen, had no jurisdictional control over plague prevention. However in May 1900 it did take nominal control over the area which would have most impact on the local population: the sanitation of the town itself. Initially, the main role of the Local Board was in the treatment of plague patients' homes. The procedures for doing so followed the recommendations of the District Medical Officer, Dr. Hope, following procedures

¹⁴⁹ Central Board of Health Files, 7 April 1903, AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418D, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, Fifth Series of Cases, February-March 1903.

¹⁵⁰ Karskens, *Inside the Rocks*, p193.

established in plague conditions during the previous decade in India. It was Dr. Hope's contention that in cases where the house had not been disinfected, a fresh outbreak could occur as many as thirty-four days after the first case. Dr. Hope's opinion was that if the house were thoroughly disinfected immediately and then left unoccupied for one month, it would be perfectly safe. However, 'the house would need to have the walls, floors and ceilings thoroughly washed again and cleansed and all woodwork repainted'.¹⁵¹ These procedures were time-consuming and costly, and left to the owners to carry out, which was not a reliable way to ensure they were done.

The boarding house of the Martinelli's in Bay Street remained unoccupied for five weeks before the Health Inspector considered it safe. As a boarding house, it is probable that the Martinelli's income depended on having boarders in residence and paying rent, so this five-week period would have had a significant impact on their income. In addition, many personal and sentimental items were destroyed in the act of disinfecting the house. The list of articles which M.S. Solomon, the Disinfecting Supervisor, deemed 'necessary to burn for the proper disinfection of house in Bay Street' as they were 'very dirty and full of vermin' included all the stretchers and bedding, a box with wedding cake ornaments, a photo album and photos and clothing. There is no record of where the Martinelli family moved following their release from Woodman's Point; it is only recorded that 'the key of the house has been handed over to the agent of the house, H. Smith, Rialto Chambers, High St'.¹⁵²

The occupants of the house in South Terrace fared much better than those of Bay Street, losing nothing of significance from their possessions and being able to return in a much shorter time. Only ten days after their removal to

¹⁵¹ Report on Supplementary Regulations, from District Medical Officer, Fremantle, to President, Central Board of Health, May 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Acc: 1003, Box 31, Item 3, Bubonic Plague – Prohibited articles to Regulations, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁵² Dr. Anderson to President, Central Board of Health, 8 June 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Acc: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

Woodman's Point, Disinfecting Inspector Solomon wrote to the Central Board that the house was disinfected and ready for habitation, although he added that 'the downstairs room in which the patient took ill is not a fit place for anyone to sleep in and is infested with rats, there being no less than about 30 holes'.¹⁵³ The disinfection of the house at 28 Florence Street (which had been occupied by the plague victim Arthur Malet) took fifteen days to complete. Maitland's restaurant in the Imperial Buildings on Market Street was declared safe to be reoccupied on 4 July, only three weeks after it had been vacated, and the restaurant reopened for business on 6 July. However, the Central Board gave the owners of the restaurant and of Nos. 29, 31 and 33 Collie Street a list of fairly dramatic improvements that were required to be made, including additional toilets with adequate ventilation and the removal and reconstruction of the drains, among other items of improvement.¹⁵⁴

In early October 1900, four months after the appearance of the plague among the families in the Collie Street tenements, Dr. Anderson wrote to the President of the Central Board that he had 'twice visited Collie Street to see what progress was being done and on each occasion warned him that he was not complying with the necessary conditions'.¹⁵⁵ Dr. Anderson then sent the Central Board's inspector to Collie Street to make a formal report. Inspector Walker reported that none of the improvements had been made, including the requirement to 'provide a separate earth closet for each tenement, and also for Aerated Water Factory, four in all'.¹⁵⁶ He also noted that there had been no change to the 'manure and refuse pit', or to the

¹⁵³ M.S. Solomon, Disinfecting Supervisor, to Dr. Anderson, 23 April 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Acc: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁵⁴ Dr. Anderson to President, Central Board of Health, 4 July 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Acc: 1003, Box 31, Item 4, Bubonic Plague – Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁵⁵ 6 October, 1900 from T.L Anderson, Medical Officer, Fremantle to President Central Board of Health. Central Board of Health Files AN 120/4 Acc: 1003 Box 25 Item 4 Fremantle Correspondence. S.R.O, Perth

¹⁵⁶ Report of Inspector Walker to President, Central Board of Health, 8 October, 1900, Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Acc: 1003, Box 25, Item 4, Fremantle Correspondence, S.R.O. Perth.

stormwater and other drainage. In other words, the twelve adults and fifteen children continued to share a toilet in a yard where manure, rain and storm water gathered with the leaking effluent from the single toilet.

In May 1900 four special inspectors, besides the Inspector of Nuisances, were appointed to go from house to house with the object of examining the sanitary arrangements of householders and business people.¹⁵⁷ The Local Board was expected to pay the salaries of the inspectors even while their reports were sent directly to the Central Board for action. The inspectors, armed with instructions from the Mayor to give the occupiers of dwellings and other buildings one hour's notice to cleanse their surroundings, systematically made house-to-house inspections throughout Fremantle, beginning in the West End. Any recommendations of the inspectors were enforceable under the Health Act, not under the local by-laws which were the domain of the Local Board. This discrepancy caused further misunderstanding and conflict when it came to the enforcement of the reports; in other words, in making the owners actually carry out the required changes to their premises. The Local Board had no power to act under its own by-laws to enforce the regulations of the Central Board.

The continued separation of powers put the Local Board at ever greater variance with the Central Board. On 30 May, less than two months after the plague had taken its first victim, Fremantle's Medical Officer, Dr. Hope, expressed his frustration with the Central Board in a letter to the Local Board. He accused the president of the Central Board of denouncing the Local Board to the newspapers and condemning the Local Board for 'inaction and neglect'. Dr. Hope said Dr. Black had done this 'before any word had been sent to the Local Board of Health, notifying its derelictions'. Hope railed against the number of regulations sent to Fremantle by the Central Board, regulations which had 'been hurriedly framed, impracticable and arbitrary'.¹⁵⁸ The Local Board itself also reacted strongly to Black's criticisms, only

¹⁵⁷ Meeting of 12 May 1900, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Acc 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902.

¹⁵⁸ Extract from the report of a meeting of the Fremantle Local Board of Health, *Morning Herald*, 30 May 1900.

here the outrage was expressed on the subject of funding. Since the first outbreak, the Local Board had been engaged in disputation with the Central Board over the payment of the work of plague precautions, such as the additional inspectors, cleaning teams, and so on. This structural conflict over the struggle for funding was integral to how the Fremantle Local Board responded to the plague and it was linked intrinsically to the way funding for health was set up in the early years of last century.

The Fremantle Local Board of Health, like all other health boards across Western Australia, charged a 'health rate' worked out at a certain amount per rateable pound. In Fremantle's case from 1900 to 1903 this rate was set at '1½ pence in the pound'.¹⁵⁹ In levying a health rate, the board was prohibited by Act of Parliament from providing for 'special matters', meaning they could not set aside a sum for some unforeseen event, they could only charge a rate which would cover the costs of their pre-determined health programs. In Fremantle at this time this was mostly drainage and rubbish removal. The Local Board's ability to levy funds was controlled by a Health Act which forbade it: first, to levy at the beginning of the year a rate which would provide for more than its ordinary sanitary work or, to afterwards levy a special rate for a special purpose; second, to borrow from the general municipal rate for health work; and third, to overdraw its health banking account and repay the overdraft by increasing the health rate the following year.¹⁶⁰ We see here how unable the Fremantle Local Board was to pay for the increased expense brought on by the additional plague precautions. With regard to such a special matter as the appearance of bubonic plague, the board felt quite justified in looking to the Central Board of Health to pay the cost of eradicating a disease which had obtained a foothold in the colony, arguably through no fault of Fremantle's own doing.

¹⁵⁹ Minutes of Local Board of Health meetings, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, ACC 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁶⁰ Minutes of Local Board of Health meetings, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, ACC 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

The chairman of the Local Board made reference to the financial burden that plague conditions were imposing on Fremantle in May, telling a local newspaper that 'considering the limited power which they possessed and the inadequate means at their disposal', the Local Board 'had done a great deal toward cleansing the town'. Councillor Webster also told the newspaper that Mayor Solomon had an assurance from the Premier that any extra expense the Fremantle Local Board of Health had to bear on account of the introduction of the plague would be refunded by the government.¹⁶¹ Yet when the Local Board had made its application for money to cover the cost of work undertaken solely on account of the Central Board, the *Daily News* reported the Mayor as complaining that 'the [Central] Board disclaims all responsibility with regard to the expenditure that we incurred on its account and the Colonial Secretary declines to pay us anything'.¹⁶² The minutes of the Local Board's meeting following the initial plague outbreak substantiate Webster's statement. There, on 12 April 1900, the Mayor reported to the board 'that the Government had agreed to bear the additional cost entailed in carrying out the regulations'.¹⁶³ Yet only some reimbursement, some of the time, was in fact made to the Local Board from either the Central Board or the Colonial Secretary. Once again, with rather repetitive occurrence, there remained no cohesive or defined policy for financial arrangements between the boards. This more than anything else shaped the way the Local Board responded as the plague crisis continued over the following years.

The plague returns: 1901-1902

In early March 1901, before the plague returned to Fremantle, Dr. Anderson warned a meeting of the Fremantle Local Board of Health that as Perth was now having 'serious trouble' with the plague, it was likely that Fremantle would again too.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ *The Daily News*, 3 May 1900, p2.

¹⁶² *The Daily News*, 3 May 1900, p2.

¹⁶³ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, ACC 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902.

¹⁶⁴ *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, 29 March 1901, p6. On the outbreak of plague in Perth in early 1901, the Central Board hired a new nurse for the quarantine station. Her application provides an interesting side note: 'I am anxious to join your list of nurses for Quarantine work should you have

Sadly, he was soon proved correct. At the outbreak of a new bout of bubonic plague in March 1901, Fremantle's sanitary condition became the focus of public attention. Whilst during the initial outbreak in 1900 the response was to isolate the disease and stop it from spreading, at this second outbreak questions were asked as to why Fremantle was experiencing the disease again. The first place people looked was toward the insanitary condition of the port itself.

At this time and for at least another year or so, in many of the steamers and sailing vessels, no proper 'shoot' was provided in which to carry the contents of latrines down into the water, causing 'a considerable amount of filth' to be deposited around Victoria Quay.¹⁶⁵ The Local Board made a request to the Harbour Master to 'compel vessels to provide shoots or screens on the side nearest to the wharf when in Port, in order to carry the contents of latrines down to the water'.¹⁶⁶ Further on the subject of the condition of the wharves, the *Sunday Times* reported that 'the terrors of the plague are treated with startling levity by that hide-bound monopolistic fraternity known as the Federated Steamship Owners' Association. To them the plague is a mere trade nuisance, and regulations to prevent its spread are treated as they treat the resolutions of hostile unions – to be ignored, defied, ridiculed and resisted'.¹⁶⁷ In early April 1901 the Central Board acknowledged to the Local Board that despite the harbour regulations and the health by-laws, the departments were failing to do their job in both prohibiting the discharge of garbage from ships and dealing with the destruction of rats on and around the harbour.

one. I have a certificate for General Hospital work and have had some experience of "small-pox" on the Quarantine Station in South Australia and have a testimonial form the Medical Officer there. I will endeavour to appear in answer to any urgent call for any disease whatsoever you may have in Quarantine solely from a desire to see something of the diseases which cannot be met with in ordinary practice. Trusting that your list is not over crowded.' Application, 19 February 1901, to Secretary, Central Board of Health, Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 31, Item 6, Bubonic Plague – Shipping to Staff, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from the Secretary, Fremantle Local Board of Health, to the Chief Harbour Master, 24 June 1902, Cons. 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1902/080, Victoria Quay – Sanitary Conditions, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁶⁶ Secretary, Fremantle Local Board of Health, to Chief Harbour Master, 24 June 1902, Cons. 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1902/080, Victoria Quay – Sanitary Conditions, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁶⁷ The *Sunday Times*, 23 March 1902 p9.

The Central Board had to resort to employing the use of an Order-in-Council in order to give it the power to serve notices for the enforcement of the regulations upon the responsible officials.¹⁶⁸ When the responsible departments neglected to clean up the wharves and jetties this was not just a concern in regard to sanitation and plague, it was a reflection on Fremantle as a town; and when Fremantle appeared insanitary, the blame went immediately to the Local Board. That body, once again emphasising the need to have *one authority* with control over the port, advocated that the whole of the harbour area 'should be included in the jurisdiction of the Central Board of Health, when the Inspectors could see the regulations properly enforced'.¹⁶⁹ The reason that this surrender of their own power (such as it was) was being discussed was two-fold: the continued battle with the controlling authorities on the wharf to do their part in carrying out the sanitary regulations was obviously significant, but it was the financial burden on the Local Board of carrying out these same regulations that was really the primary motivation for its wish to have the Central Board take control.

The Local Board's position was that the costs in overseeing plague precautions, when those precautions were directed toward the wharves and shipping from whence the plague was likely to come, should not be borne by them alone. Yet Dr. Anderson, attending a Council meeting himself to explain the Central Board's position, suggested the Local Board spend some money on cleansing, such as rat scavenging and rubbish removal: £1000 'well spent now', he suggested, might prevent the necessity for expending £20,000 or £30,000 later on. With reference to the cost of doing this, Dr. Anderson informed the Local Board that Dr. Black, the president of the Central Board, had made it clear that his board's financial

¹⁶⁸ These officials were identified in the correspondence as 'the Chief Harbour Master, Pier Master and Locomotive Superintendent'. Secretary, Central Board of Health, to G.B. Humble, 4 April 1901, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 25, Item 4: Fremantle Correspondence, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁶⁹ Meeting of 17 February 1901, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Acc 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

responsibility was simply for the quarantine station and that all other expense had to be borne by the Local Board.¹⁷⁰

Yet the lack of authority possessed by the Local Board was equally evident in several symbolic exchanges. Being at this stage free of plague, when the Perth patients and their contacts were being transported through Fremantle town to the station at Woodman's Point, the local population and health board were concerned about contagion. The Local Board wrote that it took the greatest exception to the practice, 'no matter whether the medical officers consider it safe or otherwise'. The board suggested that patients and contacts might be conveyed direct by sea to the Quarantine Station, 'but whatever method is adopted this Board absolutely objects to the route through the town being resorted to'. The secretary of the Local Board wrote to the Central Board that 'there appears to be a nervous dread amongst some of the ratepayers in the town, that the passing of the conveyance carrying the plague patients through the town to the Quarantine Station may cause the introduction and the spread of the disease in our midst'.¹⁷¹ In response the Central Board wrote that 'the public might be somewhat pacified by the fact that it is the intention of this board in the future by to convey patients by rail', which was duly introduced that same year.¹⁷² Throughout, it was clear which body was in charge.

Despite the conflict over who was responsible for what, the Fremantle health authorities were active in making improvements to the sanitary condition of its town. At this point the Local Board had five inspectors and fifteen drivers and drays dedicated to sanitary improvements, and much of their focus was the removal of rubbish.¹⁷³ (The board also had fifteen men and four boys employed 'scavenging' for

¹⁷⁰ Meeting of 17 February 1901, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Acc 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁷¹ G.B. Humble to President, Central Board of Health, correspondence of 21-23 March 1901, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 25, Item 4: Fremantle Correspondence, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁷² Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 30, Item 7, Gardiner, Mrs to Infected Premises, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁷³ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Acc 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

rats around the West End area, so their financial commitment was considerable.¹⁷⁴⁾ The sanitary contractors Laudehr and Gillespie were in charge of the removal of night soil and to assist the board with the removal of rubbish from the back-yards of town.¹⁷⁵ The procedure for the removal of the night-soil was in itself controversial. It was carted each night to the foot of Cliff Street, to four box-drains which 'projected out seawards for some twenty or thirty yards and there expelled into the harbour'.¹⁷⁶ The issues of hygiene caused as result of this practice were that the waste was then carried by the sea on to the piles of rotten seaweed lying on the beach next to the Esplanade. The whole method was unsatisfactory not only to the standards of sanitation that the Local Board was trying to establish at the time, but to the sensitivities of the locals who had to bear the offensive sight and smell. One of the Fremantle papers declared that 'the foreshore for about a quarter of a mile is a seething mass of putrified corruption'.¹⁷⁷

When the plague reappeared into this insanitary state in Fremantle in March 1901, the first new victim was Charles Sydney Jones, who at only twelve years of age was a carter in the employ of Messrs. Ross and Co, wholesale confectioners and sauce-manufacturers on Mandurah Road, South Fremantle. When he became sick on 28 March, Dr. Anderson was called and he took cultures from the boy's swellings and confirmed that it was plague.¹⁷⁸ Jones lived at 34 Bay Street with his parents, not far from the tenement in which Fremantle's first plague victim, William Campbell, had lived in 1900. Just prior to his illness Jones had been making trips to Perth for his work, where the plague had been present for most of the month previously. Hence the Central Board did not quarantine his workplace (where he

¹⁷⁴ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Acc 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁷⁵ It must be noted that 'back-yards' as referred to here were simply the areas behind the shop-fronts and business premises in the town, which often joined or merged with each other, and not the modern conception of private and personal leisure space in a residential setting.

¹⁷⁶ *Sunday Times*, 1 February 1903, p13.

¹⁷⁷ *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, 29 March 1901, p5.

¹⁷⁸ Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 30, Item 7, Gardiner, Mrs to Infected Premises, S.R.O. Perth.

only worked outside the building), but they inoculated all the workers there and took their names and addresses, so that if they did not turn up for work they could be visited to 'ascertain the cause of their absence'.¹⁷⁹ The second victim of 1901 was Alice Cox, aged twenty-three, who was a wardsmaid in the Fremantle Hospital. She was diagnosed with the plague on 29 April; the Central Board immediately placed the whole hospital under quarantine whilst Cox was removed to Woodman's Point.¹⁸⁰ The cause of Cox's infection, like that of Jones, remained undiagnosed. Alice Cox survived but unfortunately Charles Jones died during his convalescence at Woodman's Point.

On 5 February 1902 due to 'the virulent existence of Plague in the other States', an Order-in-Council was made for a renewal of plague regulations.¹⁸¹ The existence of plague prompted the Local Board to resume fumigation of passengers' luggage, even though it was not considered necessary by the Central Board. Dr. Hope reported stubbornly: 'Notwithstanding the instructions of the Principal Medical Officer, and the refusal of the Central Board of Health to undertake this work, it is being done. I ordered it to be done when vessels reach Port, and the Water Police are carrying out the work under my instructions'.¹⁸²

Nearly a year later, the plague struck Fremantle again, this time with more force. It was at this point, and for a full year following, that the true horrors of the plague impacted Fremantle. On 22 May 1902, John McLure of Essex Street died in the private hospital where he had been mistakenly under treatment for typhoid. He had been living in a tenement next to the Port Flour Mill where he worked. The following day Dr. Hope wrote to the Local Board that a second occupant of the Essex street house was also ill with bubonic plague, with the house placed in quarantine pending the decision of the Central Board. The second victim living in the house in

¹⁷⁹ *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, 29 March 1901, p6.

¹⁸⁰ Dr. Anderson stated at this time that 'having got rid of the disease patients will not be affected by the presence of fresh contacts'. *West Australian*, 29 April 1901, p3.

¹⁸¹ Central Board of Health files, Box 31, Item 3, Bubonic Plague - Prohibited articles to regulations, S.R.O. Perth. Echenberg writes that between 1900 and 1908, Sydney and Brisbane experienced mild outbreaks 'every year'. Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, pp266-67.

¹⁸² 6 May 1901 Dr Hope to G.H. Humble, Fremantle Local Board of Health Files, Cons: 2790, WAS: 1153, Item 1902/043.

Essex Street, a twenty-four year old man named Edward Punch, was also working at the flour-mill next door. Punch died on 26 May. The house and the mill and grain store were quarantined, and for the first time, yellow posters declaring the premises to be infected were pasted on both the flour-mill and McClure's house.¹⁸³ The house was later condemned as 'unfit for habitation'.¹⁸⁴ The reason for mistaking John McClure's symptoms for typhoid was due to the fact that Fremantle was at the time also enduring a regular outbreak of that disease. The initial symptoms of both were recognized as high fever, lethargy and stomach ache.¹⁸⁵ The health inspectors in Fremantle were occupied with this typhoid outbreak, which was endemic to Fremantle and therefore strictly a local issue. Stretching its resources to the limit, the Local Board was nonetheless still required to assist the Central Board regarding plague precautions.

That the Fremantle Local Board was struggling with the financial burden of the extra costs of plague precautions is evidenced in their applying to the Premier's Department for financial assistance. Immediately on the recurrence of plague in the town, the Local Board had come under fire from the Central Board once again regarding 'the insanitary condition' of Fremantle. It accused the Local Board of not carrying out a number of their regulations and further ordered that if it did not carry them out within forty-eight hours, the Central Board would 'appoint some person or persons to perform such duties'.¹⁸⁶ In response to the order, the Local Board wrote to the Premier requesting the sum of £500 'to carry out the instructions of the Central Board, in the matter of cleansing the town'. The funds were allocated, and the Local Board was able to inform the Premier that the money had been spent on 'five extra men, two carts, one Ganger, one extra Clerk issuing

¹⁸³ Fremantle Local Board of Health Files, Cons: 2790, WAS: 1153, Item 1902/032, Outbreak of Plague – Cleansing of Fremantle, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁸⁴ Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons 1003, Item 1902/0806, Fremantle plague inspections.

¹⁸⁵ *West Australian*, 1 August 1902, p2.

¹⁸⁶ Secretary Campbell, Central Board of Health, to G.B. Humble, 27 May 1902, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS: 1153, Item 1902/032, Outbreak of Plague – Cleansing of Fremantle, S.R.O. Perth.

notices and one inspector employed by the Local Board'.¹⁸⁷ The work required was extensive. The task of overhauling and cleansing the evacuated houses within the infected area of Essex Street commenced two days after Edward Punch's death and was undertaken by a gang of twenty men under the direction of Dr. Anderson and Inspectors Lockwood and Walker, of the Central Board. A day later, ten more men were employed, with a couple of drays, to remove all the rubbish.¹⁸⁸

On 2 June, Dr. Anderson wrote to the Local Board that a rat caught in a trap in Essex Street was found to be suffering from plague. In view of this discovery, it was considered that the outbreak of plague had assumed a far more serious aspect. What the infected rat suggested was that the contagion had not been brought into port from abroad, but had remained, most likely in the soil, from the very first plague contagion of 1900 (hence its re-appearance in Essex street). The level of precautions was immediately increased, as the two boards decided it would be safest to offer public inoculations. These were to be carried out by Dr. Anderson in the 'Supper Room' on the ground floor of the Town Hall. The other impacts were also worrying. It was understood by all that any outbreak of plague in Fremantle would affect the commercial well-being of the State as a whole. The secretary of the Central Board voiced as much in a letter to the Local Board, writing that not only the Fremantle community would suffer, 'but also our trade in an astonishing degree'.¹⁸⁹ Yet the consequences were paradoxical. As far as the long fought battle of financial responsibility for plague precautions was affected, establishing that the plague bacillus was *endemic* to Fremantle in fact meant that the onus for paying for its containment and eradication *could* be put squarely on the shoulders of the Fremantle Local Board.

Despite the presence of the plague-ridden rat, it was a full month before another plague case was reported. On 7 July, Dr. Anderson reported to the Local

¹⁸⁷ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS: 1153, Item 1902/032, Outbreak of Plague – Cleansing of Fremantle, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁸⁸ *West Australian*, 29 May 1902, p5. For the members of the Fremantle public game enough to take advantage of the clean up to scavenge for rats, and so earn the six-pence per dead rat on offer, they were instructed to take them 'to the old morgue near no.2 goods shed'.

¹⁸⁹ Fremantle Local Board of Health Files, Cons: 2790, WAS: 1153, Item 1902/032, Outbreak of Plague – Cleansing of Fremantle, S.R.O. Perth.

Board that a case of bubonic plague has occurred on the premises of C.H. Warley & Co, Imperial Buildings, 41-43 Market Street, Fremantle. The patient, Charles Lai, was employed and living on the premises. He was thirty-two years old and his condition was critical. Fourteen contacts, all also residing at the premises, were removed to quarantine.¹⁹⁰ As a result of this new case, the Central Board declared an emergency to exist under the provisions of section 10 of the Health Act of 1898. This was done, according to the Central Board, 'in order to facilitate the general cleansing of the town'; in practice, it allowed the Local Board to take further steps in improving the sanitary condition of the town.¹⁹¹ The *Western Mail* seemed to support that view, reporting that 'for months the health authorities have been improving the condition of affairs in Fremantle'.¹⁹² In addition, when Mayor Alexander was asked by a ratepayer what the Council proposed to do to improve the town, he replied that not only was the Local Board committed to the betterment of Fremantle but also appealed 'to every ratepayer and householder of Fremantle to clean up their premises and so cooperate with the governing body in making the town better'.¹⁹³

A more vigorous response: The plague in 1903

It was not until 1903 that the plague returned once again to Fremantle. On 26 January, Dr. Anderson reported to the Central Board that a victim of bubonic plague had been taken to Woodman's Point and that nine contacts would be removed there the following day. The victim, nineteen year-old Hugh Murray, was employed as a waiter at 'Bailey & Sutherland's Fish & Eating Shop' on the corner of Market and Bannister streets, where he also lived. It was Dr. Anderson's opinion that 'the virus must have been kept alive and active by rodents since last case of plague in July last year'.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Dr. Anderson to the Secretary, Fremantle Local Board of Health, 7 July 1902, Central Board of Health files, Box 31, Item 1, Bubonic Plague – Infected Rats, Instructions, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁹¹ Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc No:1003, Box 31, Item 1, Bubonic Plague – Infected Rats, Instructions, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁹² *Western Mail*, 31 May 1902, p50.

¹⁹³ *West Australian*, 24 May 1902, p7.

¹⁹⁴ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1903/08, Bubonic Plague, S.R.O. Perth.

This new outbreak, some six months after the previous case, was seen as an indictment of both Fremantle and its Local Board of Health. The renewal of plague immediately caused Fremantle trade some hardship. Overseas ports declared Fremantle an infected port and all vessels leaving Fremantle were required to be quarantined until ten days after their departure. Closer to home, in a new regulation announced by the Central Board, all vessels and lighters coming to Perth from Fremantle were held off the wharves until they had been inspected by an official of the Central Board.¹⁹⁵ Certainly, despite its efforts towards improvement, the sanitary condition of Fremantle was a threat to the local people. The *Sunday Times* offered a sharp rebuke, saying: 'A more hopelessly imbecile and negligent board of health does not exist in the commonwealth of Australia'. The newspaper provided a vivid description of Fremantle's drains. 'Drainage of back-yards', it wrote, was 'by means of open box-drains down the middle of the right-of-ways, and are choked with filth and offal of every description'.¹⁹⁶ From the infamous Bay Street, one resident complained to the Local Board, calling its attention to:

the condition of the street drain in Bay Street between Point and Market Streets. This is in a disgraceful condition, the water and other matter is stagnant and the stench is at times unbearable, there has been [*sic*] five cases of typhoid in our immediate neighbourhood within two months, my daughter is now attacked with this dreadful scourge and I am satisfied that she has contracted it owing to the condition of the drain.¹⁹⁷

Dr. Anderson suggested that the entire block 'bounded by Market, Bannister, Packerham and High Streets', should be reviewed by health inspectors.¹⁹⁸

On 27 January, two more cases were declared. The day following Hugh Murray's diagnosis, his workmate and fellow resident, twenty-year-old Nicholas Bucich, was diagnosed with plague. A waitress at the restaurant, Lucy Butterworth,

¹⁹⁵ *West Australian*, January 30 1903, p7.

¹⁹⁶ *Sunday Times*, 1 February 1903, p13.

¹⁹⁷ Mr. T.H. Sharp to Fremantle Local Board of Health, 14 June 1902 Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1903/08, Bubonic Plague, S.R.O. Perth.

¹⁹⁸ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1903/08, Bubonic Plague, S.R.O. Perth.

who lived nearby in Arundel Street, was also identified as being infected.¹⁹⁹ Bucich's death was registered three days later. Then on 12 February a fifteen year old girl, Rosemary Smales, became the third victim in matter of weeks. She lived out of town, in East Fremantle, but was a 'tailoress' employed at 'Batger, Tailor, High Street'. In the common yards at back of the tailors' shop in High Street, ten infected rats had been found in the two weeks prior to Smales' illness. In fact, Dr. Anderson, following the reports of the health inspectors, said 'practically the whole of the central portion of the town' were confirmed to have plague-infested rats.²⁰⁰

This rat menace was an absolute nightmare for Fremantle's Health Officer, Dr. James Hope. He wrote an impassioned plea to his Local Board, in which he stressed that the outbreak Fremantle was facing was serious and needed immediate action—and that the solution was a commitment to getting rid of the rats: 'WITHOUT RATS, WE WILL PROBABLY BE WITHOUT PLAGUE', he wrote. 'No spasmodic effort will effect this, but it must be one DETERMINED AND PROLONGUED CRUSADE against—and to the utter extermination of—rats'. Hope urged that if the board spent money immediately on getting rid of the rats in the town, it would stop future outbreaks of plague, would save lives and prevent panic and, of not least importance, would stop 'the disorganisation of commerce which result from continued outbreaks of plague'. In recognition of the difficulty he could foresee in the Local Board being able to pay for the rat-extermination program necessary to the town, he recommended that it approach the Government for financial aid in this moment of crisis.²⁰¹

In the same long and fervent letter, Dr. Hope admonished the Fremantle population, writing that

¹⁹⁹ Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418E, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, First Series of Cases, January-February 1903, S.R.O. Perth.

²⁰⁰ Central Board of Health Files AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418A, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, Second Series of Cases, February 1903, S.R.O. Perth. On the diagnosis of Rosemary Smales with plague from High Street, Dr. Anderson drew a plan showing where infected rats were found which went from Victoria Quay to the Town Hall. See Appendix B.

²⁰¹ Dr. Hope to the Secretary, Fremantle Local Board of Health, 4 February 1903, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1903/08, Bubonic Plague, S.R.O. Perth. All capitalisation is as in the original.

past experience has gone to show that there is an UTTER DISREGARD of self-preservation with the public, for they are strangely indifferent to their duties in assisting local authorities in dealing with any outbreak or sickness, which necessitates combined action, even where no expense is necessary, but only the expenditure of a little labour.²⁰²

The 'little labour' to which he referred was the continuing lacklustre response to the rat-catching program in Fremantle. His other complaint, that the Fremantle public were 'strangely indifferent' to reporting illness in their community, had long been a cause of complaint among health officials in the town. In 1887 the Inspector of Nuisances had pointed to the problem that many households either delayed or avoided reporting the presence of serious diseases. This often prevented him from locating the cause of the infection and ensuring that the proper precautions were carried out to minimise the danger to other occupants of the house. He wrote in his report in that year 'the public seem to think that it is my duty to find out for myself all the nuisances in the town not for them to tell me any they know of so in many cases it leaves me in the dark'.²⁰³

The continuing disinclination of Fremantle residents to contact the authorities could be attributed to the costly changes they were required to make following one of these inspections, but it could also be attributed to the kind of 'moral judgements' that accompanied the visit of a health inspector. Such an occurrence publicly announced to one's neighbours that the home was unsafe, unhygienic and inferior. Yet, strangely and considering the disdain with which Fremantle had been historically described in the newspapers of the period, there is little condemnation during the plague years directed toward the residents of the homes and tenements that came under attack, even though there had been a precedent for this sort of 'class bias'. Dr. Hope himself had written a scathing report on Fremantle mothers in his report for 1897. Reporting on the terrible infant mortality in the town, which in 1897 made up 39 per cent of total deaths, Hope said

²⁰² Dr. Hope to the Secretary, Fremantle Local Board of Health, 4 February 1903, Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1903/08, Bubonic Plague, S.R.O. Perth. All capitalisation is as in the original.

²⁰³ Inspector of Nuisances Report for December, 1887 Fremantle Local Board of Health files WAA 612 Series 1342 Minutes Item 59 1886-1902 S.R.O., Perth

'this is a serious reflection upon the mothers in our midst. It is a growing habit of this class to give up the maternal nourishing of their children and when sickness follows this neglect of children they are too indifferent to nurse, they are equally indifferent as to their fate'.²⁰⁴ His pejorative reference to 'this class' of mother left no doubt to which social and economic group he felt was to blame. Likewise, the Inspector of Schools during the 1903 outbreak wrote to the Central Board asking if children could be kept in school during the plague outbreak, as the schools were 'good, sanitary places' and the children would be much better there than at home and 'in gutters and other unsavoury places'.²⁰⁵ Presumably this was where such children would otherwise be left to roam by their thoughtless parents.

Yet in the myriad letters, exchanges and newspaper articles among the participants on the subject of plague in Fremantle at this time, apart from Dr. Hope's occasional outburst, there was a distinct absence of social judgment or criticism. This stands in contrast to the example of Sydney. Grace Karskens writes on this subject that:

In retrospect, the outbreak of plague can be seen as a catalyst which drew together all those longstanding, increasingly hysterical 'slumland' stereotypes, the fears of working people, of Irish and Chinese, seamen and foreigners. It was an opportunity seized by the government, with the sanction of public opinion, to both control and reshape the city's wharves and to purge the city of its perceived moral, physical and social ills.²⁰⁶

Yet despite the 'indifference' of the Fremantle public, the Central Board were determined that drastic action needed to be taken. Its secretary wrote in his letter to the Local Board that 'my board can arrive at no other conclusion than that much of the soil of Fremantle, and particularly the back-yards of the business portion of the town must be infected, as rats infected with plague have been found in various portions'.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Published in the *West Australian*, 18 January 1898, p5.

²⁰⁵ Inspector of Schools to President, Central Board of Health, 1 February 1903, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Acc 1003, Box 25, Item 4: Fremantle Correspondence, S.R.O. Perth.

²⁰⁶ Karskens *Inside the Rocks*, p196.

²⁰⁷ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1903/08, Bubonic Plague, S.R.O. Perth.

There was some discussion in the papers and among the health authorities on the occasion of the 1903 outbreak, as to whether the virus had ‘in some manner been preserved since the last outbreak at Fremantle’.²⁰⁸ In other words, whether the disease was actually *endemic*. The significance of this must be emphasized. The way the disease would be stamped out or controlled would depend on the conclusions of the health officials, yet no conclusion was officially determined or announced. If the bacillus was proved to be in the soil of Fremantle, then the health risk would be considered to be specific to Fremantle. An endemic disease would be purely a matter for the Local Board, which would then be free to take action as it saw fit but then would be unable to call on the Central Board for assistance with funding. The Central Board, as its previous behavior had demonstrated, would certainly feel no obligation to financially assist a town that it had bluntly accused of dereliction of its duty for the past two years. Strangely, and considering the importance of Fremantle’s strategic position as the entry-port of the State, the prospect of endemic bubonic plague was given no further consideration by the health authorities. Yet at this time, on the other side of Australia, Ashburton Thompson was building a case in Sydney that ‘the plague organism did not live in the soil surrounding humans’.²⁰⁹

On 14 February, twenty-seven year old Percy Cartwright was diagnosed with plague at the end of his working day as a ‘yardman’. Cartwright worked and lived at ‘His Lordships Larder’ on the corner of Mouatt and Phillimore streets. He was removed to quarantine on 16 February along with fifteen contacts who had all been inoculated. Dr. Anderson noted in his report that ‘two infected rats were obtained from the yard adjoining this place’.²¹⁰ Percy Cartwright died on 18 February, four days following his diagnosis. The same day Percy Cartwright died, Norman Rovenstrunk was diagnosed with plague. Norman was a fifteen year old who lived in Bellevue Terrace but worked at Sandover & Co, which was situated on the corner of Mouatt and High Street, the corner immediately south of Percy Cartwright’s

²⁰⁸ *West Australian*, 13 February 1903, p4.

²⁰⁹ For more on Thompson’s work on this subject, see Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, pp 263-65.

²¹⁰ Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418B, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, S.R.O. Perth.

residence.²¹¹ Seven of Rovenstrunk's contacts were inoculated and removed to Woodman's Point. Sandover & Co, one of Fremantle's major business houses, was closed down. Six days after his diagnosis, young Rovenstrunk died.²¹²

The Central Board had already informed the Mayor that it intended to distribute leaflets dealing with plague precaution in Fremantle and, critically, that Haffkine's prophylactic would be issued to all medical practitioners free of charge, 'provided that returns are forwarded by those gentlemen for Statistical purposes, giving the date of inoculation, name, age, dose administered, and result, if possible'.²¹³ Following this second set of cases in the new year, there was a rush among the public to take up these inoculations, with Dr. Anderson administering them to 500 people in one day.²¹⁴ The President of the Central Board, whose letters at this time seem to indicate a new sense of appreciation for the efforts of the Local Board, wrote to the Under Secretary that the local body was doing everything possible 'with a view of awakening the people of Fremantle to the necessity of cleansing their town thoroughly and placing their premises in such a condition as will minimize the spread of the disease'.²¹⁵ Noting that the special medical officer Dr. Anderson was personally supervising the work in Fremantle the President conceded that the 'Fremantle Health Authorities are, I think, endeavouring to do their best to co-operate in this, but we do not expect much from their efforts—infected rats are still being found'.²¹⁶ The president noted here that the Central Board were also 'considering the advisability of declaring all premises infected from which infected rats have been found', however this did not occur.²¹⁷

²¹¹ Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418C, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, S.R.O, Perth

²¹² The *West Australian* reported that 'a sad feature of his death was that he was the chief support of a widowed mother, to whom he was greatly attached'. *West Australian*, 25 February 1903, p7.

²¹³ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1902/032, Outbreak of Plague – Cleansing of Fremantle, S.R.O. Perth.

²¹⁴ Reported in the *West Australian*, 20 February 1903, p5.

²¹⁵ CBH to Under Secretary 17 February 1903 Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418B, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, S.R.O. Perth.

²¹⁶ fCBH to Under Secretary 17 February 1903. Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418B, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, S.R.O. Perth.

²¹⁷ CBH to Under Secretary 17 February 1903. Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418B, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, S.R.O. Perth.

On 24 February, two more case of plague were reported. One was Victor Hague, an employee of the sanitary contractors, Laudehr & Gillespie, who was engaged on night-service in the infected area and diagnosed at his home in Duoro Road, South Fremantle. The *Daily News* reported that the victim was one of the company's employees who had refused to be inoculated (though this was not recorded in the official minutes at any point). The second was James Gardner, a fifty-two year old retired ships steward who lived at 103 Phillimore Street, in the West End. In Gardner's case twenty-eight contacts were also quarantined.²¹⁸ In Victor Hague's case, only his wife and child were quarantined. That week, Dr. Anderson wrote to the Central Board that he had 'performed 1104 public inoculations - this includes contacts and Sandover's employees'.²¹⁹ Victor Hague died on 28 February. Happily, James Gardner survived and was discharged on 24 March along with Rosie Smales.

The place where James Gardner lived in Phillimore Street, with twenty-eight contacts, was typical of the delinquent tenements for which Fremantle was known. The Chief Inspector described the premises as 'three straggling four-roomed cottages' to which fourteen other rooms had been added. Some of the additions were made by enclosing verandahs, some were detached from the main part of the house, and some were 'erected in any convenient part of the back yards of the original cottages' with walls and ceilings 'under six feet in height'. The chief inspector continued that

it is utterly impossible to suggest any practicable method of improving such a wretched congery [*sic*] of hovels, and as every part of the buildings is quite unfit for human habitation, I have no hesitation in respectfully recommending that an order should be made for their immediate demolition.²²⁰

Following this spate of plague cases in one small area, two demolition orders were written and four residences on Phillimore Street were required to destroy their

²¹⁸ *Daily News*, 26 February 1903, p1.

²¹⁹ Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Cons 1003, Item 277, Special Medical Officer's Reports, S.R.O. Perth.

²²⁰ Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418D, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, S.R.O. Perth.

privies and build new ones. Regarding the Phillimore street tenements permitted to stand, the *West Australian* reported that 'it is understood that the whole of the premises will be thoroughly cleansed and fumigated. All the material found to be unburnable will be taken out to sea on a barge and thrown overboard'.²²¹

At this point, the Central Board introduced new plague regulations, deliberately targeting the destruction of rats.²²² The Local Board had charge of ensuring all houses and businesses in Fremantle deposited all refuse into bins and kept them covered and secured so as not to allow rats access to the contents. It also had to destroy rats in sewers, drains, culverts and other places under their control and 'take steps to compel owners and occupiers' to do the same. Owners and occupiers of all houses and buildings had to take responsibility for destroying 'all rats therein', using 'methods as approved by an inspector of the Central Board, or as directed by an inspector of the Central Board'.²²³ The Local Board was also to maintain a free distribution of phosphorous rat poison, provided by the Central Board, to house-holders.²²⁴ Rats in all the buildings under the control of the Railway and Harbour departments had to be destroyed by methods approved by an inspector of the Central Board. The president of the Central Board wrote at this time that 'the Board are considering the advisability of quarantining all blocks of the town at one time. This necessarily would be an extreme measure, but from the present outlook the extreme measures are necessary'.²²⁵ To this end the Central Board sent an enquiry to the Commissioner of Police in February suggesting that, if quarantining of any one block was necessary, thirty-six special constables would need to be engaged (to provide for three shifts of twelve men each).²²⁶ Nothing is recorded in the extent correspondence as to why the constables were considered necessary, but it is reasonable to assume that the Central Board expected some

²²¹ *West Australian*, 25 February 1903, p7.

²²² Gazetted on 7 March 1902, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418D, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, S.R.O. Perth.

²²³ *West Australian*, 4 February 1903, p5.

²²⁴ *West Australian*, 5 February 1903, p4.

²²⁵ Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418B, Outbreak of Bubonic Plague Fremantle, S.R.O. Perth.

²²⁶ Secretary, Central Board of Health, to Commissioner of Police, 23 February 1903, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Cons 1003, Item 272, S.R.O. Perth.

resistance from residents. Nevertheless, when the blocks were indeed quarantined a short time later, no constables were required.

The renewed effort toward paving the back-yards of the West End became a most urgent step in plague prevention in light of the concern that the plague bacillus could have made a home in the soil of Fremantle's most insanitary area. The Central Board was prepared to compel the Fremantle traders to commit to paving their yards. It distributed a public notice in Fremantle in late February advising that yards 'of the business portion of the town' were to be paved 'with impervious material' (meaning tar was required, rather than wood) and whole blocks would be declared infected and placed under quarantine.²²⁷ It added that the very serious *commercial* aspect of such a step should be considered and hoped, as reported in the newspapers, 'that the hearty and cordial co-operations of the public in this direction will render extreme measures unnecessary.'²²⁸ Hearing of this drastic measure, the Fremantle District Traders Association met almost immediately and wrote to the Local Board denouncing the concept of quarantining whole blocks, advising the 'grave injustice that such a course would inflict upon the majority, and perhaps the whole, of the business people in and around High street'.²²⁹ The move was seen among the business community as an imposition on their trade. A sense of the health risk to the community was not the prevalent consideration; the general feeling was that the plague was more of a nuisance and commercial impediment than a thing of terror.

Regrettably for the district traders association, Dr. Hope, Fremantle's long-standing medical authority, agreed that more stringent measures should be taken. Hope advocated that a block at a time should be chosen in the West Ward, where all the premises could be fumigated in order to destroy the rats. At the time of fumigation, a group of men should surround each block, to kill any rats attempting

²²⁷ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1903/08, Bubonic Plague, S.R.O. Perth.

²²⁸ *West Australian*, 21 February 1903, p7.

²²⁹ Fremantle District Traders Association, Rialto Chambers, High St to Sect FLBH 21 February 1903 Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1903/08, Bubonic Plague, S.R.O. Perth.

to escape. Then the onerous job of cleansing the yards could be undertaken.²³⁰ Dr. Hope explained the necessity for the work to the municipal council:

in the central parts of the town many of the backyards were in a highly unsanitary condition. For years waste and filthy water had been thrown into these yards, until the sand had become thoroughly saturated and made ripe beds for breeding disease. It is no use merely cleaning the surface of these yards. The sand should be scraped off for a depth of some inches and carted away, and the yards should be cemented over or concreted.²³¹

This, Dr. Hope recommended, 'should be done block by block until the whole of the West Ward has been subjected to the same treatment'.²³²

The Local Board agreed with Dr. Hope on the necessity for paving the yards of the West End and took upon itself the commitment to pave the yards of entire blocks. Newspaper reports carry much of the dialogue that is not recorded in the minutes of the Local Board's meetings. A report in the *West Australian* on 20 February, following the previous day's meeting, noted that the chairman of the Local Board had told the members 'he hoped they would support him in compelling the owners of property to pave their yards with impervious material'. In an amusing but revealing exchange, the secretary George Bland Humble told the board that it was his understanding that 'if the Central Board does this work they will make the Local Board pay for it', to which the Mayor replied 'they can't get blood out of a stone'. As the meeting continued the board all agreed that it was necessary work, with councillor Laurie declaring that 'the man who would not clean up his yard at a juncture like the present deserved no leniency'. Dr. Hope reminded the board that the question of tar-paving yards had been before them for the last three years but it had always been allowed to lapse, even though the 'soil of the central portion of

²³⁰ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1903/08, Bubonic Plague, S.R.O. Perth.

²³¹ Fremantle Municipal Council files ACC 1377 Series 1342 Minutes Item 59 1886-1902 S.R.O, Perth

²³² Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1903/08, Bubonic Plague, S.R.O. Perth.

Fremantle had been a receptacle for disease germs for the last sixty years'. 'The committee got completely on board', wrote the newspaper.²³³

On 25 March, following the identification of two new cases of plague, a special meeting of the Central Board was held. In what can only be described as a surprising move, considering the cordial relationship between the boards for the past month, it decided to write to the Under Secretary, Walter Kingsmill, advising him that the Fremantle Local Board of Health were not carrying out their duties for the extermination of the plague and that the board wished to make an order on Fremantle 'to enforce the performance of their duties forthwith, failing which the Central Board will step in, and undertake the functions of the Local Board themselves'. It was an aggressive step. The Central Board wanted to ascertain, before the order was given, that the Government would be prepared to provide the necessary funds should action be taken.²³⁴ What it revealed was that the issue of funding was also pivotal to the Central Board, not just the Local Board. The belief that the Fremantle health authorities, put simply, were not doing their job seems to have derived primarily from Dr. Anderson's personal dissatisfaction with their performance. Anderson told the Central Board that he considered the Local Board to be derelict in its duty: 'the rubbish removal, inspection of houses, supervision and registration of common lodging houses and the destruction of rats have all been most inadequately performed', he wrote. It was his suggestion that the Central Board therefore consider taking control over the work of the Local Board. The Under Secretary responded that the government recognised the necessity for firm action in connection with the outbreak of plague and was willing to give the necessary financial assistance. On 4 March, the Order was made on the Fremantle Local Board of Health requiring it to enforce the provisions of the Health Act.²³⁵

Disputation between the two boards was not always financial. When in March 1903 the Local Board had required the Anglican Church to construct

²³³ *West Australian*, 20 February 1903, p5.

²³⁴ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1903/08, Bubonic Plague, S.R.O. Perth.

²³⁵ Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Cons 1003, Item 272, Laxity of the Fremantle Board, S.R.O. Perth.

‘outhouse accommodation’ in the grounds of one of its local churches, the archdeacon had written directly to the Central Board that in the opinion of the church authorities, the ‘accommodation ordered by the Local Board was unnecessary’. Astonishingly given their vehemence elsewhere on such matters, the Central Board wrote to Fremantle that ‘the communication received from the Ven. Archdeacon Watkins was sufficient to show that the accommodation ordered was not required’.²³⁶ The Local Board was understandably furious at this slight to their authority and at its fortnightly meeting there were ‘some strong remarks’ by Mayor Smith and members. The Mayor thought it was scandalous that the Central Board, which had urged the Local Board to adopt measures to improve the sanitary conditions of the town, should practically countermand an order for accommodation that the Local Board deemed to be absolutely necessary. The Mayor said ‘it was impossible to reconcile the attitude of the Central Board in this matter with the policy that body was endeavouring to follow in connection with the improvements to the sanitary condition of the town’. These remarks were endorsed by the members of the board, and finally a resolution was carried that the whole of the correspondence in connection with the matter be submitted to the Colonial Secretary, so that he could see for himself ‘the way in which the Local Board in efforts to improve the sanitary conditions of the town were being hampered by the attitude of the Central Board’.²³⁷

The Local Board, the Council, and obviously the business community of Fremantle appeared to be working towards an improvement of Fremantle’s sanitation and cleanliness. However on 25 May, the *West Australian* reported that ‘the efforts which were being made by the mercantile community of Fremantle to have the stigma of being plague-infected removed from the port have been rendered futile by the discovery yesterday of a fresh case of the disease in the centre of the town’.²³⁸ A woman named Emily Carey, 52 years of age, had been diagnosed with

²³⁶ *Daily News*, 7 March 1903, p7.

²³⁷ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Acc 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

²³⁸ *West Australian*, 25 May 1903, p5.

plague on 24 May. Carey was a nurse who for about ten days had been in attendance on an 'accouchement' case at 25 Essex Street, two doors from the old Port Flour Mill (and exactly twelve months since second plague patient from there had died). Carey's home was described by the inspector as 'five tenements which have only three privies for their use'.²³⁹ Happily, it seems that Emily Carey had recovered by mid-June.

But the disputes over authority, as represented by practical assertions over which party had control over the purse-strings, continued. On 13 July, as reported in the press, 'the Colonial Treasurer succeeded in startling the members of the Town Council of Fremantle by the announcement that out of the subsidy due to the council, the sum of £300 had been deducted to reimburse the government for expenditure incurred in stamping out the plague in the Fremantle'.²⁴⁰ The newspaper suggested that the Mayor sent an emphatic protest writing that plague had been brought to Fremantle by shipping and it was wrong for the government to 'arrogate a right which it did not possess by taking £300 out of money which Parliament had voted to Fremantle'.²⁴¹ Nothing is mentioned in Council minutes as to whether the funds were paid out to the government or to Fremantle, but this incident once again highlights the imperfect financial arrangements for dealing with plague, and Fremantle's vulnerable state in its curtailment.

The plague's last gasp: 1904

From July 1903 for an entire year, Fremantle was plague-free. In July 1904, it struck again. On 4 July, sixteen-year-old Phillip Dubois died of plague, having been in Woodman's Point with the contagion for only three days. That month three other patients were diagnosed, but then discharged as cured. No notes are extant in the files regarding these cases. There is however, a significant amount of paperwork in the records regarding the next case of bubonic plague to strike Fremantle. On 26

²³⁹ 15 June 1903 Secretary, Central Board of Health, to Secretary, Fremantle Local Board of Health, Central Board of Health files, AN 120/4, Cons 1003, Item 1903/0545, Bubonic Plague S.R.O. Perth.

²⁴⁰ *The Daily News*, 14 July 1903, p6.

²⁴¹ *The Daily News*, 14 July 1903, p6.

August two cases of plague were reported from Cliff Street in the heart of the West End. Both lived at the Exchange Dining Rooms on the corner of Cliff and High streets. One was twenty-seven year old John William Perry who worked as a Shop Assistant at 'W. Watsons Dairy Produce Store' on the corner of Mouatt and High streets. The *Daily News* reported that Perry had only arrived in the State by the *S.S. Perth* on 10 August. Nine days later, according to the *Daily News*, 'he thought he had strained himself by rolling a cask. He went to see a chemist for some liniment which he rubbed on the swellings on his groin, but did not feel really ill until the day before yesterday, when he became very feverish'.²⁴² The second victim was Miss M. Currie who ran the Dining Rooms. The owner of both residences was one of Fremantle's most esteemed citizens, Mr. Michael Samson, of Ellen Street.

At a special meeting of the Fremantle Local Board held on 29 August the members considered the report of Dr. Anderson including the portion that dealt with the condemnation of the Exchange Dining rooms. The minutes of the meeting were published in the *Daily News* the following day. At the meeting, Councillor Holmes expressed his opinion that there was too much fuss over the plague business altogether and 'he doubted very much if the man had the plague at all'. Councillor Jones spoke in the same strain, suggesting 'the walls of the house where Perry had lived were just as good as those in the Town Hall yet it was condemned simply because some fellow had a swelling in his groin'. Councillor Jones suggested that before the house was condemned more information should be obtained about the premises; indeed, he argued, it was time the wholesale condemnation of buildings should cease. He pointed to the contradictory nature of the instructions from the Central Board. 'Only a short time ago the Central Board of Health authorities had reported that there was nothing for them to do in Fremantle, and now it was so filthy that additional inspectors were said to be required'.²⁴³ Councillor Lynn asked if the Central Board had power to condemn the buildings without first consulting the local boards, to which the Mayor answered 'certainly'. The Health Inspector said that the new part of the building was in good order but

²⁴² *The Daily News*, 26 August 1904, p3.

²⁴³ *The Daily News*, 30 August 1904, p3.

the old building was generally in a somewhat dilapidated condition and should be condemned. Councillor Jones put forward a motion 'that the board takes no action in the matter' which was passed, as was the question of appointing additional inspectors to which the members resolved to make no appointments 'either temporarily or permanently'.²⁴⁴ Considering that Michael Samson was a favourite son, a member of one of Fremantle's oldest and most prestigious families, it seems very likely that the councillors were reluctant (or perhaps afraid) to enforce such a costly, and possibly humiliating, exercise.

In an ironic reversal of roles from the earlier case affecting the Anglican Church, two days later the secretary of the Local Board received a letter from the Central Board written by the president himself, his cholera obvious, asking for an explanation by return post as to why, after they received notice from Dr. Anderson that Exchange Dining Rooms were unfit for human habitation, that 'your Board had decided to take no steps in the matter'.²⁴⁵ Receiving no response from the Local Board, the Central Board took it upon itself to notify Michael Samson directly that the list of requirements, made by its health inspector, were enforceable under the plague regulations and must be complied with before the Exchange Dining Rooms could be released from quarantine. In addition, the Central Board informed Samson that it was

given to understand that the Local Board have decided not to take any steps in respect to the certificate forwarded to them, by Dr. Anderson our Special Medical Officer, in relation to these premises, and if they persist in abiding by that decision, it is the intention of the Central Board to enforce the performance of the Local Board in this matter.²⁴⁶

On 5 September the Central Board duly served an Order on the Fremantle Local Board of Health to demolish the building within seven days. On 12 September, one week after serving the Order to Demolish, the Central Board's secretary must have

²⁴⁴ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Acc 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

²⁴⁵ Secretary FLBH from CBH 31 August, 1904 Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons 1003, Item 1904/0654, Bubonic Plague S.R.O. Perth.

²⁴⁶ CBH to William and Michael Samson 2 September, 1904 Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons 1003, Item 1904/0654, Bubonic Plague S.R.O. Perth.

been stunned to receive from the acting secretary of the Fremantle Local Board the following statement: 'That this Board refuse to carry out the order served upon it by the Central Board of Health'.²⁴⁷ On 15 September, the Central Board notified the Under Secretary, keeping him abreast of the situation, that they had received a letter from Michael Samson himself, and that he 'had signified his intention of fully complying with the order of the Central Board', making the action of the Local Board 'under the circumstances, the more inexplicable'.²⁴⁸ Not only was the Local Board's stance inexplicable, it was futile. The Central Board simply notified them that it had appointed Mr. Francis Day Lockwood 'as the person to carry out the duties of the Fremantle Local Board of Health, in respect to the default made by them, in relation to the premises of the Exchange Dining Rooms'.²⁴⁹ Lockwood reported on 16 September that the work was being executed and would be complete within seven days. The most obvious reading of the situation is that the Local Board did not have an issue with the work that was required. It had been robust in its inspection of homes and boarding houses and the continuation of tar paving the yards of the West End.²⁵⁰ The Local Board, at long last, simply wanted to stand its ground against the Central Board.

Conclusion: The plague as bringer of conflict and progress

By the end of the last outbreak of bubonic plague in 1904, a total of eleven people had died of the disease in Fremantle. While such deaths were tragic, the most significant impact of the plague was thus not on the mortality of the population, but on two other areas: the living conditions of its residents and the control and management of the waterfront. With one exception, every person who contracted or died of the plague either lived or worked in the West End—and the exception,

²⁴⁷ S. Macmillan, Acting Sec't FLBH to Sec't CBH 12 September, 1904 Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons 1003, Item 1904/0654, Bubonic Plague S.R.O. Perth.

²⁴⁸ CBH to Under Secretary 15 September, 1904 Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons 1003, Item 1904/0654, Bubonic Plague S.R.O. Perth.

²⁴⁹ CBH to FLBH 15 September, 1904 Central Board of Health Files, AN 120/4, Cons 1003, Item 1904/0654, Bubonic Plague S.R.O. Perth.

²⁵⁰ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Acc 1377, Series 1342, Minutes Item 59, 1886-1902, S.R.O. Perth.

Arthur Malet, had contracted the disease almost immediately after landing at the Fremantle harbour. The wealthy elite had long moved their residences away from that part of town, and many of the residents of the West End at the turn of the twentieth century were living in substandard conditions, in old and ailing shacks and houses that were described by the *Fremantle Courier* in 1902 as ‘erected in times gone by which are still used, although modern ideas are altogether opposed to such places being occupied by human beings’.²⁵¹ The coming of the bubonic plague paradoxically provided Fremantle with an opportunity to amend and improve those living conditions that had made the West End so vulnerable to such an outbreak in the first place.

From the time the first case of bubonic plague was discovered at the entry-port of the State, the Central and Local boards of health had a common single concern: to isolate the disease and stop its contagion from spreading. The conflict arose between them over what course to take in ensuring such outcomes, and in whose hands the final decision-making powers rested. Daily missives were sent from the Central Board in Perth to the Local Board in Fremantle, demanding strict procedures for cleansing—not only to the effected dwellings from which plague victims emerged, but on the town’s streets and shoreline. Whilst aware of the potential crisis before them, when the first instructions for prevention of the plague were handed down from above, the Fremantle health authorities were still unclear as to what powers they had to control areas of shipping and quarantine, which were so vital to the prevention of diseases being introduced to Fremantle. The lines of demarcation between the various authorities on the waterfront were a source of confusion and greatly hindered the introduction of safety measures to prohibit the plague. The Local Board was responsible for sanitation, but its jurisdiction extended only to the edge of town; it could do nothing to compel to improvements to sanitation in the harbor and jetties area itself.

Yet this ‘jurisdictional’ conflict determined much of the relationship between the two boards of health. Between 1900 and 1904, the battle over the demarcation

²⁵¹ *Fremantle Courier*, 2 April 1902, p7.

of responsibility for the response to the bubonic plague was fought through the pens of their secretaries. Over the course of these few years, the Local Board continued to resist bearing the responsibility, both fiscal and jurisdictional, of fighting a disease that the Board saw as threatening on a State, and not merely a local, level. The existing health policy, defined in the Health Act of 1895, prohibited increased rates to charge for unforeseen health emergencies. When the bubonic plague came to Fremantle this was one such unforeseen event, leaving the Local Board with no financial means of paying for the resultant necessities, the biggest element of which was increased numbers of staff. The Central Board's reluctance (indeed, it outright refusal in most cases) to fund the requirements for plague precautions inhibited the Fremantle Local Board's ability act.

For four years the two boards battled over jurisdiction, financial responsibilities, and methodologies. The authority of the Central Board ranged between avuncular and despotic, whilst the position of the Local Board varied between objectivity and petulance. Rarely did the two bodies see eye to eye on the prevention or treatment of plague in Fremantle. Local health boards, like road boards, were semi-autonomous bodies with little requirement for central authority. Whilst there had been previous occasions for the Central Board of Health to become involved in Fremantle affairs, such as during occasions for shipping quarantine, Fremantle had for years enjoyed relative independence. Now the plague was forcing them to collaborate, in a situation of crisis, without having in place any common understandings regarding communication, powers of decision, responsibilities or accountabilities. The tensions were there for all to see, in both private correspondence and public meetings.

Yet despite these difficulties, a sweep of improvements to sanitation and housing were the practical outcome of the series of bubonic plague outbreaks that were visited upon Fremantle between 1900 and 1904. These improvements were detailed in the minutes of the Council meeting of 2 April 1902, when the Council proposed a deputation of Council and Members to approach the Premier to request funding for works:

To ask for free water for street flushing;

To ask a Grant of £3000 for Park Improvements;
To request extension of Esplanade from Mouatt Street;
To request a grant of £5000 for Drainage improvements, in addition to
the amount of £2,000 already promised.²⁵²

The Local Board, under the encouragement of Dr. Hope, Fremantle's long-serving (and indeed, long-suffering) medical officer, made its first inquiries into the septic-tank system of sewage treatment in August 1900 following the first plague epidemic. Then in 1901, contractors were hired to install this more efficient and hygienic system, starting at the West End and moving to the outer suburbs.²⁵³

The inadequate drainage system in Fremantle, long a source of despair to the medical authorities, was also improved as a result of the visitation of plague. Taking advantage of the attention which was being given to improving the sanitation of the town, the Town Engineer in 1902 made the point that 'a great many of the obnoxious smells with which Fremantle is credited is due [*sic*] to the saturation of the wooden drains with filth and the renewal of the drains will effect a great sanitary improvement in the town'.²⁵⁴ The same year, the Fremantle Municipal Council obtained from the Government a promise of £7000 for improving the drainage system in Fremantle.²⁵⁵ The main feature of the scheme was the removal of the noxious wooden drains and their replacement by concrete drains, both underground and on the surface. The West End was of course the place in which these improvements began, as they comprised 'the most congested and worst drained parts of the town'.²⁵⁶

In 1902 a rubbish service was instituted in Fremantle, also as a direct result of the plague. It began with an order from the Central Board to 'remove two cubic

²⁵² Central Board of Health Files, AN120/4, Acc No: 1003, Box 31, File No 1, Bubonic Plague – Infected Rats, Instructions, S.R.O. Perth.

²⁵³ Fremantle Local Board of Health files, Cons: 2790, WAS: 1153, Item1902/026, Installation of Double-Pan System, S.R.O. Perth.

²⁵⁴ *Western Mail*, 25 October 1902, p44.

²⁵⁵ Fremantle Municipal Council files, Box 1, Item 1, Fremantle Requirements, 1902, S.R.O. Perth.

²⁵⁶ *Western Mail*, 25 October 1902, p44.

feet of rubbish twice weekly from every tenement in the Town'.²⁵⁷ In 1903 the Local Board brought a daily refuse service into use in the West End. Initially, this service was simply a plague precaution to be carried out until the destruction of rats had sufficiently advanced to justify the discontinuance of the extra service. However, it soon became a regular service and was brought under the auspices of the municipality by 1904. In fact, in 1903 at a Council meeting, the defeat of Councillor Llewellyn's motion for delay in the municipalisation of the rubbish service indicated to a local newspaper how much the Council was 'wedded to that principle'.²⁵⁸

On 21 October 1902, Mayor Alexander, accompanied by the Town Engineer and the Assistant Town Clerk, met with the Minister of Works to discuss the extension of the Esplanade. The Engineer-in-Chief, who was present at the interview, informed them that he was then preparing the contract 'for the extension of the Esplanade as far as South Street, which will include the reclamation of the Bay, drawing an almost direct line from the shore end of the small jetty to the North side of the existing Baths'. He noted that it took 110 men three days to clean up the effluent and the carcasses of dead animals from the Esplanade beach in 1900.²⁵⁹ Following this, the Local Board applied to the State government for a grant to reclaim the Esplanade beach, which was approved and carried out by 1903, to create the popular park still in use today.

During the second half of 1902 the Health Inspector had completed his reports on all buildings in the West End. The inspectors had undertaken a thorough inspection of all working parts in all rooms and yards, ground level, roof, and so on, throughout the West End.²⁶⁰ Due to the visits of the Town Engineer and the Health Inspector to every dwelling and business in the West End during the plague years, some vital improvements were introduced including, most importantly, a building

²⁵⁷ Fremantle Local Board of Health Files, Cons 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1902/080, Victoria Quay – Sanitary Conditions. SRO, Perth.

²⁵⁸ *The Daily News*, 30 July 1903, p3.

²⁵⁹ Fremantle Municipal Council files, Box 1, Item 1, Fremantle Requirements, 1902, S.R.O. Perth.

²⁶⁰ Fremantle Local Board of Health Files, Cons 2790, WAS 1153, Item 1902/034. S.R.O. Perth.

code stipulating that the granting of building licenses be properly enforced. A testimony to the efficaciousness of the new building requirements was an advertisement in 1902 for the rebuilding of the National Hotel on the corner of High and Market streets, which proclaimed that the new hotel, among its other improvements, would have an 'asphalted and well-drained yard' and 'excellent sanitary arrangements'.²⁶¹ In 1903 a register for boarding and common lodging houses was also established.

It was after the third outbreak in 1902, with the continued chaos of authority on the waterfront highlighting the need for a more unified authority at the port, that Fremantle decided to follow the example of the Sydney port authorities. In 1901, in reaction to the plague outbreak and at the instigation of its own Central Board of Health, the State government of New South Wales had initiated a 'Sydney Harbour Trust' in order to take more control of the wharves and harbour activities.²⁶² Likewise, in 1902, following Fremantle's third attack of bubonic plague and much discussion at the tables of the Fremantle town council, the Fremantle Harbour Trust was finally established. Since the first outbreak in 1901, the Fremantle Local Board of Health had been urging the formation of a singular body of authority on the wharves to handle issues of quarantine more efficiently. The Fremantle Harbour Trust was established by an act of parliament in 1902 and took control of the harbour on 1 January 1903. Consisting of five commissioners, it took control over all aspects of the harbour, from the port and its facilities to the hiring of labour and piloting—all formerly controlled by five different authorities.²⁶³ Finally the singular authority of a Harbour Trust was realised, an achievement through adversity. That the harbour remained outside the Local Board's jurisdiction was of no consequence. The board had been striving for a 'sole authority' on the waterfront since the outbreak of plague had focused outside attention on Fremantle. The chaos then existing had made improvements to the wharves next to impossible, with one authority passing off responsibility to another. The new authority, borne of a time of

²⁶¹ *The Daily News*, 15 September 1902, p1.

²⁶² Karskens, *Inside the Rocks*, p197.

²⁶³ Fremantle Harbour Trust Files, Cons: 3466, WAS 86, Item 16/03, Boundaries of the Harbour Trust Jurisdiction showing all amendments, S.R.O. Perth.

crisis was a stabilising body that responded to the time in which it was conceived, improving and maintaining its jetties and facilities.

The plague crisis was obviously an unwelcome, testing time for Fremantle, and particularly for its Local Board of Health. Yet the changes it forced upon the town's sanitation and living conditions were of lasting benefit to the Fremantle community. The conflict between Fremantle and Perth authorities had been severe, but despite all the heat of disagreement, progress had resulted nonetheless. Perhaps the final irony of the conflict—or indeed the sign that progress had triumphed at last—was that in 1909 the indefatigable Dr. James Hope of the Fremantle Local Board was named as the new president of the Central Board of Health.

Chapter Two: Fremantle and the Great War, 1914 to 1919

Introduction

Of the men from Fremantle who fought in the Great War of 1914-18, Andrew Pittaway writes that 'three thousand of the best and brightest Fremantle could offer left these shores to serve in the war and eight-hundred and forty-two sons of Fremantle lost their lives'.²⁶⁴ But what of the men who returned? How did over two thousand men re-settle into a civil life, despite being irrevocably altered by the war they had endured? How did their civil leaders respond to their 'first physical and emotional experience of modern warfare', as Crowley so succinctly described it?²⁶⁵ This chapter will examine the challenges faced by the soldiers as they sought to return to their lives in the port town, looking at the role played by the Fremantle Municipal Council within the wider landscape of administrative and governmental organizations dealing with the task of repatriation (including the WA State government, the Repatriation department, the Department of Defence and the Federal government).

When war was declared in Europe on 6 August 1914 there was an immediate, yet transient, reaction in Fremantle. Reserves were mobilized; there was a rush to enlist; a war relief fund for soldiers and their families was almost immediately established.²⁶⁶ According to J.K. Ewers, the first Municipal Council meeting after the declaration of war, held on 12 August 1914, included a 'formal resolution of support sent to the King, carried with acclamation and the singing of the national anthem'. Writing in 1971, Ewers believed that 'when the nation is engaged in a life and death struggle, local governing bodies must needs halt the natural, evolutionary processes of development'. As a result, he argued that following the declaration of war, in Fremantle 'municipal activity was of secondary consideration'.²⁶⁷ Yet a close examination of the papers of the Fremantle Council

²⁶⁴ A. Pittaway, 'Fremantle Anzacs', *Fremantle Studies: Journal of the Fremantle Historical Society*, Vol. 7 (2012), p30.

²⁶⁵ F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third* (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1960), p156.

²⁶⁶ An article in the *West Australian* written in 1939, in the context of a new war then breaking out in Europe, places the figure of first-day enlistments during August 1914 at 164. See 'Recruiting in 1914', *West Australian*, 22 September 1939, p19.

²⁶⁷ J.K. Ewers, *The Western Gateway: A History of Fremantle* (Nedlands: UWA Press, 1971), p117.

show that this was simply not the case. After the first exhilarating whirlwind of activity, Fremantle rapidly settled back in to the ordinary movement of life and indeed remained relatively undisturbed by the war. This 'war-time naivety', as Deborah Gare so aptly describes it, persisted until 1915 when the first troopship of wounded soldiers arrived in the harbour.²⁶⁸ Then, with unrelenting steadiness, Fremantle began to feel the real effect of war. Wounded soldiers filled the base hospital and rested on specially-built seats around the streets of the town; heartfelt bereavement letters were sent to lamenting families; meanwhile disease, unemployment and uncertainty cast their shadows over all. In the midst of the emotional hardship caused by the war, by 1916 the cost of living had become an additional burden. In March 1917 the *West Australian* reported that some commodities in Western Australia had risen in price as much as sixty or seventy per cent since the outbreak of war and that 'exploiters were putting prices up to such an extent that it was impossible to get the necessaries of life'.²⁶⁹ To make matters worse, as Crowley notes, 'Although the average cost of food and groceries increased by about 70 per cent there was not a corresponding increase in wages'.²⁷⁰ The high cost of living, a burden shared throughout Western Australia, presented its worst features in Fremantle when it contributed to a lumpers' (wharf labourers) strike in 1917.

Worst of all were the maimed men, whose plight caused a broad rethinking of civilian life. From 1916 the repatriation of returning soldiers focused on their re-education and training, with special emphasis on maimed men. The Fremantle Council were aware that just as important as their physical well-being, the returning soldiers needed a means to re-assimilate into society. The Council, along with the returned soldiers associations, believed that the provision of employment would enable this re-settlement most effectively. By 1919, with thousands of returning soldiers to consider, repatriation became focused on ensuring preference was given to returned soldiers in the workplace. This is consistent with the valorization of the

²⁶⁸ D. Gare and M. Lloyd-Jones, *When War Came to Fremantle, 1899-1945* (Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2015), p37.

²⁶⁹ *West Australian*, 23 August 1917, p5.

²⁷⁰ Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, p185.

soldier-hero that weaves a discernible thread among the extant documents. On their departure and during their absence, Fremantle's soldiers, consistent with all Australian soldiers, were seen as brave and dutiful patriots by those they left behind. Writing only a decade after the end of the Great War, J.K. Hitchcock echoes this theme, boasting that 'Fremantle nobly played its part in the great drama'.²⁷¹ Bill Gammage similarly writes that

very few Australians learnt, then or later, what their soldiers did on that stage, and not many ever acquired more than a vague notion of their country's part in the Great War. But what happened was irrelevant. The praise and the success were what mattered, for they made Australia a nation, and a partner to Empire. Australians could walk among men.²⁷²

More than pride, it was a sense of owing a debt of gratitude that formed the vital sentiment driving administrative and civil action on a local, state and federal level during the war and the post-war period. The administrative architecture of civil society responded—in terms of language, policies and practical schemes of assistance—to the return of men they viewed as soldier-heroes. Contrary to Ewers' belief, therefore, the need to respond to such challenges meant that municipal activity was very much at the centre of all of Fremantle's responses to the war overseas.

The first year: August 1914 to June 1915

In the weeks before the declaration of war in 1914, day-to-day life in Fremantle rolled along at its usual pace. On 20 July when Mayor Frederick McLaren presided over an ordinary meeting of Council, it is hardly surprising that there was no mention of the gathering tensions in Europe or the impact they might have upon Britain's empire. Instead, the minutes show that the councillors discussed 'orange peel on footpaths' and other routine issues, primary among which was the macadamising of the roads.²⁷³ Yet within twenty-four hours of the declaration of war, the Citizen Reserves were mobilized and the 86th Infantry was installed on

²⁷¹ Hitchcock, *The History of Fremantle*, p82.

²⁷² B. Gammage, 'Anzac', in D. Gare and D. Ritter, *Making Australian History: Perspectives on the Past since 1788* (South Melbourne: Cengage Learning Australia, 2008), p294.

²⁷³ *West Australian*, 23 July 1914, p8.

Fremantle Park.²⁷⁴ The installation of these soldiers, garrisoned on Fremantle Park, meant that around 250 men within the space of just a few weeks were on duty in and around Fremantle. This sudden profusion of military men caused the *Sunday Times* to comment that, 'with so many soldiers in our midst Fremantle is getting the appearance of a real live garrison town'.²⁷⁵ Indeed, this military presence gave the Council some headaches. In January 1915, the Town Clerk complained to the Officer Commanding Military Forces of 'the wanton destruction of portions of the fence surrounding Fremantle Park. During the recent encampment the fence was torn down by members of the force and used as firewood'.²⁷⁶

On 23 September, 1914, the *West Australian* published, over two large pages, a feature titled 'The Expeditionary Force Personnel of the Western Australian quota'. The newspaper provided a list of the men of 'rank and file' who comprised the first Western Australian quota of the expeditionary force. It included each man's regimental number, his name, his age, whether married or single, his trade or calling, and lastly the town, country or State in which he was born. This list provided very real evidence of the exodus of the town's men and boys into war.²⁷⁷ Despite the fears of many, the socialist parties in Australia (as was the case in Europe) had responded patriotically to the call of national duty when war broke out. This was equally the case in Fremantle—borne out by the speeches made at a large meeting of the Trades Hall Association on 18 August 1914.²⁷⁸ The *Sunday Times* wrote in September 1915 that:

The exact number of men who have answered the Empire's call from the Port is not known, but one gets an idea of the number that have gone from the fact that no fewer than 200 out of a membership of 700 have

²⁷⁴ *Daily News*, 8 August 1914, p5. For a fuller discussion of the various infantry in Fremantle during the Great War, see Andrew Pittaway, *Fremantle Voices of the Great War: A History of Fremantle People who served in the Great War of 1914-1919* (Fremantle: Andrew Pittaway, 2015), pp9-12.

²⁷⁵ *Sunday Times*, 12 September 1915, p15.

²⁷⁶ Fremantle Municipal Council Files 1914 – 1920, Cons 1377, AN 217/3, Box 50, Item 42. SRO, Perth

²⁷⁷ *West Australian*, 23 September 1914, p1. Unfortunately the list does not allow for more thorough analysis for the purposes of this thesis as it provides only the town or country in which a man was born, not his current residence, and therefore cannot tell us how many Fremantle residents were included. It also lists only the rank and file, not the officers. The studies by Andrew Pittaway, in both *Fremantle Voices of the Great War* and 'Fremantle Anzacs', are the best sources on the number of men who left Fremantle for the war.

²⁷⁸ *West Australian*, 19 August 1914, pp7-8.

gone out of the ranks of the Lumpers' Union, and there are a lot of others ready to go.²⁷⁹

For the town, once the men had sailed, the influence of the war overseas became much less direct. Thoughts turned to supporting those at home who were suffering due to changes brought on by the conflict and the absence of family members. In August 1914, also with thoughts of domestic unemployment in mind, the Colonial Secretary had introduced a Special War Levy throughout Western Australia to which employees and independent citizens could contribute. A Patriotic Fund already existed, but that was limited to granting relief to 'members of the Expeditionary Force, reservists and their dependents'. The State government also recognized that a second fund should be established 'to provide for unemployment and distress arising out of the present war'.²⁸⁰ The same necessity was recognized in Fremantle by the leading funding bodies in the town. The Fremantle Municipal Council traditionally maintained a 'Fremantle Municipal Unemployment and Distress Fund' and the Fremantle Trades Hall had its own 'Distress Fund' for members. Put together these two organisations, the civic authority and the trades hall, effectively embodied the leadership of the town. In October 1914, comprehending that the War Levy would probably not be sufficient for alleviating 'prospective local distress', the two bodies were unwilling to surrender the care of their own unemployed to a fund managed from the capital city. Significantly, it was the opinion of both the secretary of the Trades Hall, R. McCutcheon, and the secretary of the Fremantle Municipal Council, James Shepherd, that once the money collected in the Fremantle district reached Perth, there was 'very little chance of any of it being returned to Fremantle' to relieve local cases of distress.²⁸¹ Thus the two bodies decided to amalgamate their respective relief funds. Shepherd wrote of the merger to the secretary of the Harbour Trust, during November 1914, urging the employees there to consider the claims of the newly-formed, combined local fund as

²⁷⁹ *Sunday Times*, 12 September 1915, p15.

²⁸⁰ Premiers Department files, [undated note], AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 303, War provision for unemployment, SRO, Perth.

²⁸¹ Letter from Secretary, Trades Hall Association, to Secretary, Harbour Trust Commissioners, 20 October 1914, Fremantle Harbour Trust files, Cons: 3466, Was 86, Item 127/14, SRO, Perth.

against the Perth central fund (the 'War and Unemployment Distress Relief Fund'). He enclosed a copy of a letter received from the Perth fund's secretary, Mr A.O. Neville, which, he noted dryly, 'speaks for itself'.²⁸² Neville's letter did indeed convey a clear-enough message:

The Central Committee is empowered to distribute relief throughout the State and naturally Fremantle district will receive consideration with others. This is, of course, on the assumption that your committee intend to work in conjunction with the Central Committee, and forward any collections made in your district to the Fund. Should your committee decide to distribute the funds collected without co-operating with the Central Committee it is probable that my committee would not continue to afford relief to cases within your district. I may add that I have just received a letter from Mr. E. Whittome, Wright St, South Fremantle asking for help from the fund. This will be afforded pending the decision of your committee referred to in the foregoing.²⁸³

Despite the intimidating tactics of the Perth committee, McCutcheon and the Municipal Council were determined to have Fremantle distress relief entirely in the hands of their own residents.²⁸⁴ The Fremantle Harbour Trust agreed and decided to give their money to the local fund in order to better provide relief to local families in need. The proceedings of the staff meeting were reported in a memorandum in which the members 'strongly objected to Perth having anything to say to Fremantle collection'.²⁸⁵ The Council and the Trades Hall had reason to be protective of their own unemployed. Already in January 1915, Frank Rowe, secretary of the lumpers' union, declared that unemployment in Fremantle was on the increase. 'It does not come very quickly to the surface', he told a local newspaper, 'people are prone to hide their poverty. But we know from the books. And we know this now, that unless some effective measures are taken very shortly, hundreds of families in Fremantle will be reduced to the verge of starvation, or the acceptance of charity'.²⁸⁶

²⁸² Letter of 12 November 1914, Fremantle Harbour Trust files, Cons: 3466, Was 86, Item 127/14, SRO, Perth.

²⁸³ A.O. Neville, Organising Secretary of the War and Unemployment Distress Relief Fund, Barrack Street, Perth, to Secretary, Fremantle Distress Fund, Town Hall, Fremantle, 3 November 1914, Fremantle Harbour Trust files, Cons: 3466, Was 86, Item 127/14, SRO, Perth.

²⁸⁴ *West Australian*, 25 January 1915, p7.

²⁸⁵ Memorandum for Staff, 18 November 1914, Fremantle Harbour Trust files, Cons: 3466, Was 86, Item 127/14, SRO, Perth.

²⁸⁶ *Fremantle Herald*, 29 January 1915, p2.

Fortunately, the Fremantle Council was proactive enough that the prospect of unemployment was more a threat than a reality in the first year of the war. In June 1914 the Council had secured a £40,000 loan from the Federal government for street improvements.²⁸⁷ The increase in expenditure, spent on sewerage and road-works, provided a useful boost to employment during the first year of war. The extant Council documents do not indicate precisely who and how many were employed by the Council via this loan; however the mayor subsequently credited the loan money with providing important assistance during these months. He told a local paper that 'this large amount of money in the town has helped to tide our work-people over a difficult time when without it the unemployed trouble would have been accentuated'.²⁸⁸

Certainly, the number of families requiring assistance from the fund in the first year of war was not alarming (although it would increase in later years). In October 1914 the Fremantle fund provided assistance to just 8 families; by November that number had jumped to 18. By April 1915, sixty local families were receiving assistance from the combined fund, the highest figure for the year. The number of families needing assistance then dropped down to forty-nine in July 1915.²⁸⁹

Municipal life in Fremantle, although now undeniably shadowed by war, continued in its traditional routine. The function of the town, the condition of its streets and houses, the health of its inhabitants, the employment of its workers—all the essentials of the town's life had to be met. This was borne out in the mayor's annual report in November 1915, in which the war played no more than a passing role. Instead, the mayor announced that 'during the past year the Council has revived a policy of tree planting and with the interest and assistance of residents the work will be comparatively easy and the streets made beautiful'. He also noted that, during the year, 'South Beach – this favorite health resort has received much

²⁸⁷ Fremantle Municipal Council Files, Cons 1377, AN 217/3, Box 51, Item 50, SRO, Perth.

²⁸⁸ *Daily News*, 24 November 1915, p2. It was also stated, in a later report, that a fire which burnt down a number of Fremantle warehouses had provided considerable employment via their rebuilding. *West Australian*, 7 February 1916, p3.

²⁸⁹ *West Australian*, 23 August 1915, p9.

attention and with fair treatment ... there will be no more beautiful and popular promenade in the metropolitan area'. And in the matter of the budget, he was able to report that the finances of Fremantle were actually in much better shape than they had expected at the start of the war: 'A year ago we had some misgivings as to how the war and general depression which threatened would affect our municipal finances, but whatever fears prevailed they were groundless.'²⁹⁰ The war seemed far away. At the end of his term as Mayor in 1918, William Wray would reflect back on these months and recall that in that first year of war, 'its effect was little felt by us, living in comparative security and feeling quite sure that we had no cause for alarm'.²⁹¹

The war comes home: July to December 1915

Deborah Gare and Madison Lloyd-Jones, in their study *When War Came to Fremantle*, write of the conceived notion among West Australians of the 'imperial adventure' being played out overseas, arguing that this 'wartime naivety quickly died however, with the arrival in Fremantle of the first of Gallipoli's wounded'.²⁹² This is precisely what Fremantle and its Municipal Council encountered. The first of the ships carrying wounded soldiers arrived less than a year after the first troopship departed for war. Almost five hundred men were returned to Australia on the hospital ship *Kyarra* in July 1915. Most of the wounded passengers remained on board, ultimately to be returned to their homes in the eastern states. But not all: 'Quietly the crowd observed thirty-one "sick, shell-shorn and bullet pierced" western Australians disembark to meet the governor'.²⁹³

In this first wave of wounded soldiers, the mayor did everything in his power to ensure the returned servicemen were properly welcomed by his Council, organizing the councillors to be 'present on the wharf on Saturday morning at 8.30am to meet returning wounded soldiers'. The mayor also wrote to Military Headquarters in Perth, asking permission for the councillors to be present within

²⁹⁰ *Daily News*, 24 November 1915, p2.

²⁹¹ Address by Mayor William Wray, 17 November 1918, Fremantle Municipal Council Files, Cons 1377, AN 217/3, Box 57, Item 4, SRO, Perth.

²⁹² Gare and Lloyd-Jones, *When War Came to Fremantle*, p37.

²⁹³ Gare and Lloyd-Jones, *When War Came to Fremantle*, pp37-38.

the private official enclosure on the wharf—though strangely this request was denied.²⁹⁴ Yet with each troopship, the mayor renewed his efforts to welcome the soldiers to Fremantle. Later in September, the Town Clerk, Henry Haynes, wrote to the secretary of the State Implements Works Brass Band, ‘to ask whether you will be good enough to arrange with as many members of your band as can be spared to assist in the welcome to the wounded soldiers coming by troopship expected to arrive on Thursday around 10am’. The Town Clerk was able to assure the secretary that the mayor himself had ‘been in communication with Mr. Shaw, the Acting Manager, and has obtained his consent for leave of absence for the members of the band’. The mayor also went to the trouble of writing to Major Ralph at the Military Headquarters asking him to pay the account from the State Implement Works Brass Band, ‘so that members of the band will not be inconvenienced by short wages on Friday’.²⁹⁵

His attention to returning soldiers, especially the care of the sick and wounded, was a matter of pride for William Wray, who considered it his ‘duty as Mayor of Fremantle to devote a large amount of time to work in connection with the Red Cross movement’.²⁹⁶ In his annual report in November 1915 he mentioned the importance of having ‘the No. 8 Australian Base Hospital located in our town’ which, he believed, placed the work of landing and caring for the sick and wounded soldiers into his hands:

And although it is to be fervently hoped that the end of this terrible world-struggle of war may be speedily in sight, there will be work to be done in the interests of our wounded heroes for a considerable time, even after the blessing of peace has been declared.²⁹⁷

Whilst Wray actively promoted the welfare of the returned soldiers, it was also the sad duty of the Council to write to the local families whose sons, husbands and

²⁹⁴ Fremantle Municipal Council Files, 1914–1920, Cons 1377, AN 217/3, Box 50, Item 40, SRO, Perth.

²⁹⁵ Letter from Town Clerk on behalf of Mayor to F.E. Riebeling, Secretary, State Implement Works Brass Band, 21 September 1915, Fremantle Municipal Council Files, 1914–1920, Cons 1377, AN 217/3, Box 50, Item 40. SRO, Perth

²⁹⁶ *Daily News*, 24 November 1915, p2. Ewers writes that Wray had only agreed to accept re-nomination for the position of Mayor in 1914 in the hope that he would one day ‘be able to hoist the Allied flags at the top of the town hall’. Ewers, *Western Gateway*, p118. Gare and Lloyd-Jones discuss the base hospital and the role of the Red Cross in *When War Came to Fremantle*, pp40-41.

²⁹⁷ *Daily News* 24 November, 1915 p2

fathers were not to come home. The first of these was written by the Town Clerk, Henry Haynes, to the parents of Lieutenant K.L Anderson, killed in action at the Dardanelles on May 9th, 1915:

Mention was made at the last meeting of the council that your son, Lieutenant K.L. Anderson had been killed in action. I am writing by unanimous vote of Council to convey its deep and sincere sympathy. Your son was well-known to several members of the Council by whom he was highly esteemed, and in the midst of all the sorrow we cannot help feeling glad that our Australia has produced so many young men of such noble and heroic character that they are willing to sacrifice all for the sake of the Empire; at the same time we deeply sympathise with you in your personal loss.²⁹⁸

Within a day after writing to the Anderson family, Henry Haynes had to send out two more letters of bereavement to Fremantle families for the death of their sons. Once again, reflecting the small size of Fremantle and the closeness of the community, in both these cases the son was well known to several members of the Council 'by whom he was highly esteemed'. These letters were sent to the parents of Lance Corporal Elgar Hale and to the Curlewis family, who had lost their son, Lieut. G.L. Curlewis.²⁹⁹ Mr. Curlewis, although he must have been grieving deeply, took the time to reply in thanks, whilst letting the Council know the family had, within the space of just ten days, suffered another such tragedy:

He was indeed a son any parents should be proud of, a perfect son, brother, husband and friend. Since receiving your kind letter you will no doubt have heard or read that our second dear son Corp. S.L. Curlewis was killed in action and our 3rd kind son Sec. Lieutenant G.C. Curlewis, wounded. They were all equally as dear to us and as good and noble as our eldest. We all feel the loss of our brave and good sons terribly, the mother almost heartbroken, but we cannot help feeling proud of their noble and heroic deaths.³⁰⁰

Aside from the obvious misery embedded in such letters, the salient notion expressed is the valorization of the soldier-hero. The letter written by the father of

²⁹⁸ Letter from the Town Clerk, Henry Haynes, 10 June 1915, Fremantle Municipal Council files, 1914–1920, ACC 1377, AN 217/3, Item 109. SRO, Perth

²⁹⁹ Both Lt. Anderson and Lt. Curlewis featured in the list of 'western Australian officers who have given their lives in the cause of freedom' published in the *Western Mail* souvenir Christmas edition in 1915.

³⁰⁰ Mr. Curlewis to Henry Haynes, 10 June 1915, Fremantle Municipal Council Files, 1914–1920, ACC 1377, AN 217/3, Item 109, SRO, Perth.

Lieut. Curlewis supports the notion that ‘anxiety, bereavement and questioning were personal experiences that both challenged and confirmed commitment’ to the war. Grieving family members, in the majority, relied on the notion of the heroism of their loved ones and the worthiness of the cause in which they died for their comfort and consolation.³⁰¹ Whilst emotional reactions are by no means universal, the most common response thus evoked the dead as soldier-heroes—their meaningless deaths would have been intolerable.³⁰² On this subject, Walter Murdoch published an intelligent and moving article in the *Western Mail*’s Christmas edition in 1915 which must have given some comfort to the families just as their absence and the reality of the war was beginning to be felt in earnest. ‘In the presence of real things, of suffering and loss and sorrow’, the only consolation, he suggested, was the justness of their cause. ‘From the essential greatness of the cause for which we are fighting, we must endeavor to draw sustainment for our efforts and consolations for our losses’.³⁰³

The cost of living: Lumpers and strikers

Amidst the strain and grief of loss, those who remained and continued the ordinary undertakings of life did so under conditions made worse by the general economy. The increased cost of living was a heavy burden. Jean Beadle, one of Western Australia’s most tireless advocates for women and families’ interests, reported that ‘bed clothes had gone up and she knew of many poor families that could not buy blankets owing to their increased price’ and that many children had to go without boots.³⁰⁴ The secretary of the Education department likewise reported that ‘owing to the economic stress prevailing at the present time the numbers of pupils in the 8th

³⁰¹ In later years, Gare and Lloyd-Jones write, ‘War widows became society’s respectable needy, dependent on state welfare for their livelihoods and future security’. Gare and Lloyd-Jones, *When War Came to Fremantle*, p30.

³⁰² On this issue across European wartime populations more generally, see Heather Jones, ‘As the centenary approaches: The regeneration of First World War historiography’, *Historical Journal*, vol. 56 (2013), pp857-78.

³⁰³ *Western Mail*, War Souvenir Christmas Edition, 1915, p1.

³⁰⁴ *West Australian*, 19 October, 1917

classes is diminishing from day to day'.³⁰⁵ E.L Driver, whose job it was to investigate the cost of living for a royal commission in 1917-1918 declared that families were living under lower standards than 'convicts in the Fremantle gaol'.³⁰⁶

In Fremantle, the strain came to a head in the strike of May 1917, when Fremantle lumpers refused to load flour for export to the Dutch East Indies on the grounds that they were not satisfied that the flour was going to its nominal destination. The lumpers ostensibly feared that the flour was being diverted into the hands of the enemy; the more meaningful basis of their complaint, however, was that this was apparently happening 'whilst their boys in the trenches were going short of food and whilst in Australia, living was excessively costly'. The lumpers consequently went on strike to appeal to the State government 'to take whatever action was necessary to regulate the price of foodstuffs and bring them within reasonable reach of the working man'.³⁰⁷

Yet while the strike of 1917 was something that without doubt must have been discussed among the Councilors and the mayor, it is a subject that is almost entirely absent from the Council files. Apart from the mayor's informal meeting with the union secretary, there was no business with the Council ensuing from the strike, and thus no place for it in the minutes or correspondence. In this way, the opinion, reactions and thoughts of the Council are completely silent on such a critical moment in Fremantle's social and cultural life.

In stark contrast, the local papers were full of invective against the lumpers, who were seen as anti-patriotic for going on strike in a time of war. One contributor wrote that 'Patience ceases to be a virtue when these lawless lumpers go on strike against the Empire in its dire necessity. Inaction is criminal when this pampered and arrogant union holds up wheat ships which stand between the British people and

³⁰⁵ Department of Education to Chief Inspector of Schools, 21 September 1915, Education department files: WAS 24, Cons 1497, Item 1915/3233. SRO, Perth

³⁰⁶ Premier's Department files, AN 2/2, Acc 1496, Item 173/17, Cost of living – newspaper clippings, SRO, Perth *The Royal commission of inquiry into the costs of the necessaries of life*. Was published in various stages during 1918.

³⁰⁷ *West Australian*, 23 August 1917, p5.

starvation – for the Mother Country is short of food'.³⁰⁸ In the same vein, the *Daily News* printed a letter to the editor signed 'another soldier's wife': 'the bare idea of ships being held up at a time like this ought to be enough to make the heads of affairs ashamed to walk the streets. Are our men at the front to be short of food because our politicians have not sufficient courage to deal with a few unreasoning men?'³⁰⁹ The secretary of the lumpers' union rebuffed these attacks on the workers, saying that although the loyalty of the lumpers had been called into question, 'there was no section of the community more patriotic than the unions. The soldiers had come from the working classes and there were hundreds of lumpers and lumpers' sons fighting in the trenches that very day'.³¹⁰ The charge of disloyalty was one which struck hard at the lumpers who took pride in their commitment to the war effort and their patriotism. Frank Rowe, secretary of the Lumpers' Union, reminded the public in early 1918 that 'about 275 have enlisted, another 113 have been rejected as being unfit for service, 53 have returned, while 23 have made the supreme sacrifice, which is not a bad record for an organization composed of about 800 men'.³¹¹

The strike continued until August 1917. In that month, a delegation in defence of the lumpers, consisting of representatives from the other major Fremantle harbourside unions, visited the Premier.³¹² The delegation insisted that 'it was the duty of the government to so see that the working classes were not exploited in the way they were being at the present time'. The Premier was asked by the delegation to regulate prices and bring them 'within reasonable distance of working men'. They also noted their desire 'to avoid anything in this State in the nature of a general cessation of work'. A general strike, the subject of considerable

³⁰⁸ *Sunday Times*, 6 May 1917, p1.

³⁰⁹ *Daily News*, 1 May 1917.

³¹⁰ *West Australian*, 23 August 1917, p5.

³¹¹ *Sunday Times*, 1 December 1918, p2.

³¹² Present in the delegation were: Mr Backshall, Secretary, W.A. Loco union; Mr Henton, President, Fremantle lumpers union; Mr Burgess, Shop Assistants union; Mr Rowe, Secretary, Fremantle lumpers union; and Mr Baglin, Secretary, A.L.F. Fremantle. See: Premier's Department files, AN 2/2, Acc 1496, Item 173/17, Cost of living, SRO, Perth.

historical attention, was indeed happening in the eastern states at the same time.³¹³ The Fremantle lumpers were being drawn into the spiraling political vortex that labour unionism was undergoing during these war years and after. While the political nature of the strike is not within the scope of this thesis, the effect of the strike on the Fremantle lumpers and their families requires some consideration. This is not only because the resulting unemployment of so many local men directly affected the municipality—in the non-payment of rates and in the living conditions of its rate payers—but also because of how striking was the contrast between the perception of the situation experienced by the lumpers and that of the returned soldiers.

Ultimately, the issues concerning the destination of the flour, and the cost of living, fell by the wayside in the court of public opinion. The most significant difficulty for the Fremantle lumpers was the public perception of their connection to the massive wharf strike simultaneously occurring in Victoria and NSW. Certainly they were judged to be doing so by the local newspapers. On 22 August, the *West Australian* suggested that the Fremantle lumpers were waiting advice or instructions, 'from their comrades in the Eastern States'.³¹⁴ Regardless of the disparagement of the press, or perhaps because of it, the lumpers themselves displayed their community-mindedness by allowing the Horse Drivers' Union to load cargo which had been removed from the ships' holds to the sheds before the strike commenced, on to their lorries for removal to stores. This work, usually performed by the lumpers, enabled the local merchants to get in stocks of much needed produce. However, whilst enabling the cargo to be made available for their local community, the lumpers continued to refuse to move into the shed sidings the train loads of wheat and flour which were on rails before the strike took place and

³¹³ For further reading on the 1917 strike, see: B. Ziino, 'Great War, Total War' in Gare and Ritter, *Making Australian History*, pp341-344; P.M. Brown, P.M., 'The life of a maritime community: a social history of Fremantle 1900 - 1939', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Western Australia, 1997), chapters 3 and 11; and Robert Bollard, 'Fremantle in slow motion: Winning back the Melbourne waterfront, 1919', *Labour History*, no. 97 (Nov 2009), pp123-136. See also I. Turner, '1914-1919', in F. Crowley, *A New History of Australia* (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1974), pp341-344; B. Oliver, 'Disputes, Diggers and disillusionment: Social and industrial unrest in Perth and Kalgoorlie, 1918-24', *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. XI (1990).

³¹⁴ *West Australian*, 22 August 1917, p8.

that which was still coming into the harbour on a daily basis. As a result the Fremantle Harbour Trust had to advertise for thirty men to carry out this very urgent work to keep the grain out of the weather. The obvious waste symbolized by this wheat pile, plus the considered link to the crippling Victorian strike in a time when public emotion was so attuned to the war, created an anxious environment for the Fremantle community and the state government.

Premier Lefroy stated firmly that the interference with shipping 'must directly and indirectly interfere with the performance of our Imperial duties and our obligations to our Australian soldiers' adding that the strike 'cannot be permitted to continue'.³¹⁵ Proclaiming that 'no other section of the community has contributed more patriotically to our fighting forces', the Premier appealed to the workers to resume their duties, 'the continued suspension of which must mean loss and discomfort to many and dishonor to all'.³¹⁶

State politicians meanwhile were quite prepared to take control of the situation by way of instituting a volunteer group that would take the lumpers' place on the wharves and get the harbour operational again. The import of this for the lumpers and their families was that, in order to defeat the strike, the government appealed to country workers to come to Fremantle and act as strike-breakers. By early September the volunteers were established on the wharves doing the lumpers' work; the *Sunday Times* reported that there were 3009 members of a newly formed National Waterside Workers' Federation registered for work on the wharves.³¹⁷ By the end of November, 'after a hundred days' idleness' as the local press termed it, the Fremantle lumpers attempted to return to work.³¹⁸ The consequence of the strike now made its way into the municipal record, where letters to the Council reveal that despite the theoretical return to work, many lumpers remained unemployed as employers gave their favour to non-union labour on the wharves. The repercussions were that many of them were forced to leave Fremantle for

³¹⁵ *West Australian*, 22 August 1917, p8.

³¹⁶ *West Australian*, 23 August 1917, p5.

³¹⁷ *Sunday Times*, 9 September 1917, p1.

³¹⁸ *The Advertiser*, 27 November 1917, p5

country areas to find work.³¹⁹ Alex McCallum, popular and long-standing Labour member for South Fremantle as well as the general secretary of the A.L.F., railed against the discrimination of the State government, telling the *West Australian*:

it is a glorious policy that brings the country workers to the Port to defeat a union, and then practically allows the wives and children of those unionists to starve by refusing them relief unless they go into the country. If the country districts are in need of workers let the Government send the strike-breakers back and allow the lumpers to resume their old places on the wharves.³²⁰

This new unemployment situation directly affected the Council by way of unpaid rates. The mayor indicated in his annual report in November that 86 per cent of the 319 ratepayers whose rates were unpaid on 31 October 1917 were waterside workers. Wray also acknowledged that the amount of rates outstanding was about double the amount of the previous year.

One of the resulting consequences of the unemployment brought about by the recent and regrettable industrial upheaval, was that many of our citizens, in addition to their own personal privations, were unable to pay their contribution to the general revenue of the town, in addition to which, it may be mentioned, the many complaints of a considerable diminution in general business, so that the suffering and loss has been very widely distributed and borne by many who were in no way productive of the cause.³²¹

The harsh reality of the strike in Fremantle was unemployment and loss of income. Fremantle lumpers and their families paid the price of the highly unionized nature of their work. Many of their families did not recover economically even a year or more after the strike had ended.³²² The distress fund formed two years earlier for

³¹⁹ *West Australian*, 19 October 1917, p8.

³²⁰ *West Australian*, 19 October 1917, p8. See also: *Western Argus*, 13 November 1917, p6.

³²¹ The mayor did not actually name the lumpers in his statement but said the amount of the rates outstanding indicated 'quite clearly the class of people who suffered most'. W.E. Wray, Mayor, Report for 27 November 1917, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, Acc: 1377, AN 217/3, Box 57, Item 4. SRO, Perth

³²² 13 September 1918 James Treloar, off South Street, to Town Clerk, , and Mrs. McAlpine, Wood St, to the Town Clerk, Fremantle Municipal Council Finance Committee minutes, Acc: 1377 AN 217/3 Box 55, Item 4, SRO, Perth. By 1919, enrolment and attendance in primary school had increasingly been affected by the war-time cost of living. The Minister for Education confirmed in his annual report for 1919 that 'the great increase in the cost of living in the latter half of the year had a marked effect upon the numbers of children remaining after they had reached the limit of the compulsory age'. Parents withdrew many children who, under normal conditions would have remained at school at least until the end of the year. Enrolments for the first years of education also dropped

unemployment relief became a source of support as lumpers moved in and out of employment over the next two years. Yet the Fremantle Council, whilst doing what they could to relieve the burden of the lumpers, had its returning soldiers to consider and on these they felt compelled by a debt of gratitude to focus their assistance.

Repatriation and employment: The need for training

From 1916 the question of employment for returning servicemen became a high priority, in Fremantle and the rest of Australia. To promote this task, the federal government established War Councils in each state.³²³ The Western Australian government's 'War Council' put in succinct form the key difficulty facing the former soldiers: 'that many of the men in question are physically unfit for hard work'.³²⁴ In consequence, it was recognized also that there would be a significant amount of re-training required in order for them to return to work. The War Council identified the importance of the issue in a memorandum to the Premier, noting that re-education and training of maimed men 'will probably turn out to be the most important function devolving upon the authorities' in the repatriation of returning soldiers.³²⁵ It was a second challenge, and one which was steadily growing. In February 1917, the secretary of the War Council informed the Premier that since November 1916 the approximate number of men who had returned to Western Australia and been discharged was 1,450. Of that number, 847 had applied through the War Council for employment or training and, of those, 710 had been found

significantly in 1919 and was accounted for, according to the Minister, 'not by any diminution in the numbers of children wishing to attend school but by the restrictions imposed, from motives of economy, upon the enrolment of children under the age of six'. *Annual Report of the Minister of Education 1919*, Education Department, WAS 24, Cons 1497, 1920/0046, SRO, Perth.

³²³ Ernest Scott writes that 'the Federal Parliament's War Committee, which had so far chiefly watched over recruiting and the welfare of camps, now recognised that some organisation must be established to deal with the issues raised by returned soldiers. It accordingly formed "State War Councils", which in turn formed "War Service Committees" in each local government area. For nearly two years, from August 1915 to August 1917, these bodies remained chiefly responsible for the actual work of repatriating invalided men, and caring for their dependents'. Ernest Scott, *Official History of the War of 1914-1918. Volume XI: Australia During the War* (7th edition, 1941), ID no: RCDIG1069950 Digitised Collection, Australian War Memorial, Canberra p829.

³²⁴ Memorandum to chairman, State War Council [unsigned, undated], Premier's Department files, AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 106, 1916, Repatriation Fund, formation of, SRO, Perth.

³²⁵ Memorandum for Premier from Secretary, State War Council, 21 October 1916, Premier's Department files, AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 106, 1916, Repatriation Fund, formation of. SRO, Perth

employment. Already the most significant difficulty was seen to be that 'practically the whole of the men discharged are unfit for hard work, and a percentage of these, by reason of disablement through loss of limbs or otherwise, will be unable, even when their general health has returned, to follow their former employment'.³²⁶ This was particularly the case for those men whose previous jobs had involved hard physical labour.

The precise numbers of men involved is a subject of some uncertainty. Andrew Pittaway writes that 3000 men from Fremantle went to war, of whom 842 were killed.³²⁷ Crowley, by contrast, puts the figures of all returning injured Western Australians by 1919 at 'twelve thousand wounded'.³²⁸ Turner meanwhile writes that, 'of the 270,000 men returning home to Western Australia, about a third of them [i.e. 90,000] were wounded or incapacitated'.³²⁹ Alternatively, in August 1919 Dr. James Hope included the following returns in his correspondence with the Premier, James Mitchell: 'The state of return of the men from abroad on 31 July 1919 was

Total enrolments 32,244
Killed or died 6,007
Returned 17,571
Yet to return 8,671.³³⁰

Whilst exact figures for Fremantle and indeed for the state as a whole are thus difficult to pin down, what is clear from all is that the numbers were substantial and the resultant challenges were large. These twin problems of employment and training would come to dominate the policies of local and State government policies for the employment for returning soldiers.

For returned soldiers from rural districts, it was the intention of the State government to send them back, as far as possible, to the areas from which they had originally enlisted. A number of country towns had 'the matter well in hand' and

³²⁶ Memorandum for Premier from Secretary, State War Council, 28 February 1917, Premier's Department files, AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 106, 1916, Repatriation Fund, formation of. SRO, Perth

³²⁷ Pittaway, 'Fremantle Anzacs', p30.

³²⁸ Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, p191.

³²⁹ Turner, '1914-1919', p353.

³³⁰ Dr. Hope to Mr. Mitchell, 7 August 1919, AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 112, 1919, Fremantle wharf - quarantine and dimboola. SRO, Perth

were looking after their own men to the fullest possible extent. However in many cases the government was having great difficulty in persuading applicants to return to the country, as most had 'a strong preference for town employment which is gradually becoming scarcer'. It made perfect sense that the injured country soldiers were reluctant to return to rural districts, where the work was so physical in its nature. Possibly the soldiers felt their presence would place a burden on their community, and indeed be an embarrassment to themselves. The War Council thus recognized that probably the most suitable employment for these men would be 'light work' in the towns, but as employment was already in a problematic state due to the war, it became increasingly difficult to find a place for returned men in the metropolitan area. Still, through 1916 at least, the need to place men was limited as less than half the number of discharged soldiers had actually applied for assistance, but it was already recognised that 'the difficulties so far experienced will be very much accentuated when larger numbers of men return'.³³¹

Arrangements were made meanwhile to give each man free medical care, if suffering from wounds or illness contracted whilst on service or from the results of his service.³³² The soldiers were allowed, within the repatriation scheme, to be given medical treatment at home but the Department of Repatriation expressed its preference for soldiers to go into a military hospital, which was 'equipped with all the latest surgical and medical requirements'. The department also established convalescent homes for those 'where there is little hope of the patient regaining ability to earn his living'.³³³ Whilst these men were at home or at the military hospitals recuperating, they were given a sustenance wage. This sustenance then continued during whatever training they were able to take up to move them towards employment.

Efforts at training schemes began right away. The War Council advocated that one hundred limbless soldiers should be selected for training at the Lord

³³¹ Memorandum to chairman of the state war council [unsigned, undated], Premier's Department files, AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 106, 1916, Repatriation Fund, formation of, SRO, Perth.

³³² Medical care of this sort was intended to be made available to the returned soldier for his lifetime. Memorandum for Premier from Secretary, State War Council, 28 February 1917, Premier's Department files, AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 106, 1916, Repatriation Fund, formation of, SRO, Perth.

³³³ *Geraldton Guardian*, 16 May 1918, p2.

Roberts Memorial workshops in England, with the object of ultimately utilizing the services of these men as instructors on their return to Australia. The Council's strongest argument was that 'until effective action is taken to put the re-education and training of maimed men upon a scientific footing, the national obligation to our returned soldiers will fall lamentably short at its most vital point'.³³⁴ At this early stage of the scheme for re-training, the War Council had two officers solely employed on the work of looking after returned soldiers, both of whom were themselves returned A.I.F. non-commissioned officers. The role of these men was to get in touch with employers, visit hospitals and bring to the attention of the returned men the facilities offered for tuition and for finding employment. To fund its commitment to the training program, the War Council attempted to 'influence the majority of the public appeals' to be made in favour of the repatriation fund. Classes in 'educational subjects and book-keeping' were also established at the Fremantle technical school situated near the Base Hospital on South Terrace—though the Council lamented that 'the men show some enthusiasm at first but soon drop off'—while additional provision had been made with the Blind Asylum to train blinded soldiers, 'but fortunately, we have not had to make use of this institution yet'.³³⁵

In dealing with re-employment of returned soldiers, the Fremantle authorities had to consider both issues of responsibility and cost: who was to set the policy for employment of former soldiers, and who was to foot the bill? In early 1919 a report of the Fremantle Works Committee revealed that 'twenty returned soldiers have been employed for short periods in order that the work may be distributed as far as possible'.³³⁶ The expense had thus far been covered by municipal funds, but when the town council applied to the State for reimbursement,

³³⁴ The secretary of the War Council suggested that there were sixteen trades in which instruction could be given to maimed soldiers, but did not name the specific trades in his correspondence. Memorandum for Premier from Secretary, State War Council, 21 October 1916, Premier's

department files, AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 106, 1916, Repatriation Fund, formation of. SRO, Perth
³³⁵ Sadly, the secretary of the War Council also noted that it was becoming more difficult to make successful appeals to the public due to the number of 'scams' being run by 'unscrupulous canvassers'. Memorandum for Premier from Secretary, State War Council, 28 February 1917, Premier's

department files, AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 106, 1916, Repatriation Fund, formation of. SRO, Perth
³³⁶ Fremantle Municipal Council files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Box 53, Item 1: Council Meetings, Meeting of 4 July 1919, Report of works parks and oval committee – repatriation. SRO, Perth

the War Council replied that it was unable to do so as it had not yet received its own funds money from the Commonwealth. The Works Committee, which had employed the men, recommended nonetheless that 'in the interests of the returned soldiers the employment be continued and the Council will settle with the department later'.³³⁷ In practice, therefore, the Fremantle Council was prepared to incur a debt in order to provide work for their local returning men.

Many men of course did not wish to fall back on the government for direct assistance; instead, they sought to find their own opportunities for work and only asked for aid in smoothing out the necessary permissions. The first example of the intentions, and plight, of such soldiers was contained in a letter received by the Fremantle Council in December 1916, in which two returned soldiers described their situation:

We the undersigned returned soldiers, late of the Tenth Light Horse A.I.F., respectfully apply for permission to have a stall for the purpose of selling fruit, outside the entrance of the Fremantle Railway station. We have received injuries on Active Service in Gallipoli which render us incapable of doing any hard work. Any guarantees or references you may require we will be pleased to supply.³³⁸

A note beneath, signed by the Officer in Charge, Light Horse Reinforcement, assured the Council that both of the men 'have excellent character and clean discharges, and are in every way respectable reputable citizens'.³³⁹ The quandry of these two soldiers, the earliest in the records of Council, would be repeated many times over during the coming months and years. The *West Australian Worker* in May 1918 declared that 'for some weeks we have been silent regarding the growing scandal of discharged soldiers' unemployment. Here in western Australia, the State War Council is vainly trying to find 250 employers for 250 returned men'.³⁴⁰ The stop-gap reliance on local welfare was all-too-clearly an insufficient program for handling

³³⁷ Fremantle Municipal Council files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Box 53, Item 1: Council Meetings, Meeting of 4 July 1919, Report of works parks and oval committee – repatriation. SRO, Perth

³³⁸ 11 December 1916 from Cnr Keane and Lockee Streets, Cottesloe Beach to the Town Clerk Fremantle Municipal Council, Cons 1377, AN 217/3, 1915, Box 39, Item 30. SRO, Perth

³³⁹ 11 December 1916 Fremantle Municipal Council, Cons 1377, AN 217/3, 1915, Box 39, Item 30. SRO, Perth

³⁴⁰ *West Australian Worker*, 24 May 1918, p14.

the expanding numbers of cases; a more formalized approach, from a level of authority higher than the municipality, was required.

Early in 1918, the federal government stepped into the role of providing of work for returning soldiers, much to the relief of Fremantle and no doubt municipal authorities throughout the nation. In April 1918 a 'Department of Repatriation' was established by the Commonwealth government specifically for the purpose of repatriating Australian soldiers. Two of its central responsibilities were placing returning men into suitable employment and the payment of a sustenance allowance to the soldiers, their wives and families whilst they awaited employment.³⁴¹ The scheme as set out by the Federal government covered every person who had enlisted in the imperial forces in any part of the empire, as long as the person was a resident of Australia and had seen service abroad. It also provided for nurses and those who had 'taken positions of value outside of the combatant class'.³⁴² The structure of the federal board consisted of a central executive in each state which was responsible to the Minister for Repatriation. The aim of the board was that each central executive would be aided by local councils, of which one would be created in every district. Perth and Fremantle were the first two such bodies in Western Australia to be appointed.

The department very quickly attempted to devolve some of its administrative and funding responsibilities onto the smaller local governments it had nominated through its scheme. In its first month of existence the Commonwealth government arranged for repatriation projects to be both subsidised and administered in local areas. The comptroller of the Department of Repatriation announced that it was 'essential that the department should have the assistance and co-operation of all sections of the community in its endeavor to re-establish the returned men in civil life'. The federal government clearly intended to rely heavily on the local committees.³⁴³ The department acknowledged that the question of financing the

³⁴¹ From Department of Repatriation to Minister for Repatriation, 4 July 1918, Education Department files, WAS 24, Cons 1497, 1919/2007, Repatriation. SRO, Perth

³⁴² *Geraldton Guardian*, 16 May 1918, p2.

³⁴³ Letter from Comptroller, Department of Repatriation, to Director of Education, Perth, 29 April 1918, Education Department files, WAS 24, Cons 1497, 1919/2007, Repatriation. SRO, Perth

scheme was significant, and undertook that the Federal government would be the main financial support, but conceded the department 'looked on all sections of the community to help and this would be one of the duties of the local committees'.³⁴⁴ In practice, the repatriation committees, in a structure that would be echoed later during the Depression years, were almost immediately required to oversee both the funding and the administration of local employment schemes and the provision of any charitable assistance that was required for the returning soldiers. It took almost a year for a comprehensive scheme for the employment of all returned soldiers to be introduced and, as discussed further below, in the end it was the State government that initiated a formal repatriation policy for employment.

By mid-1918, training for returned soldiers was administered by the newly-formed Department of Repatriation, working with the assistance of the Department of Education. Under a formalised 'repatriation scheme' the policy was 'to re-educate those soldiers whose injuries are such as to prevent them from following their usual occupations'.³⁴⁵ At this time a vocational training committee was formed in order to superintend arrangements for training returned soldiers. The Chairman was the Director of Technical Education and the classes were under the general superintendence and control of the Education department. All returned soldiers who were under 20 years of age at the time of enrolment were eligible. Classes were started at the technical school in Perth as well as in Fremantle; the men were drafted into the classes after consideration of their disabilities and also of their previous careers and their personal wishes. Certain classes (e.g. boot-repairing) were reserved for those who were seriously disabled and were incapacitated for more strenuous forms of work.³⁴⁶ In March 1919, following some enquiries by returned soldiers who wished to further their prospects, the possibility of returned men already in employment being given the opportunity to attend evening classes was considered. The secretary of the Department of Repatriation, keeping in mind

³⁴⁴ *Geraldton Guardian*, 16 May 1918, p2.

³⁴⁵ Letter from Deputy Comptroller, Department of Repatriation, to Director of Education, Perth, 9 May 1918, Education Department files, WAS 24, Cons 1497, 1919/2007, Repatriation. SRO, Perth

³⁴⁶ *Annual Report of the Minister of Education 1919*, Education Department files, WAS 24 Cons 1497 1920/0046. SRO, Perth

the commitment of the government to do all in its power to further the interests of soldiers, wrote to the Education department that his own department was certainly agreeable to the concept. 'A ruling from headquarters on this subject', he wrote, is 'that where an applicant desires to increase his efficiency in his present calling or to qualify for another, a State Board may pay such fee and expenses as will enable him to complete the necessary course of training'. The two subjects most generally requested were, interestingly, clerical training to enable students to pass the Commonwealth and State Public Service Examinations and 'accountancy in all its stages'. If these courses could be arranged, he indicated, there were already sixty returned soldiers, thirty for each, eager to take them up.³⁴⁷ By mid-1919, over 270 returned soldiers were studying bookkeeping and accountancy while nearly ninety more were preparing for clerical work or teaching. An additional thirty were taking science and professional courses. Further, the trades classes contained nearly 600 men, 'the largest class being that for motor mechanics'. Other classes were training men as saddlers, harness makers, woodworking machinists, cabinet makers, French polishers, upholsterers, house painters, carpenters, coopers, blacksmiths, bricklayers, plasterers, plumbers, fitters and turners, electricians, body builders, trimmers and painters, watch repairers and wool classers.³⁴⁸

The Minister for Education, Hal Colebatch, noted in his annual report that the majority of the students entered into their class work 'in a most exemplary spirit. They have shown themselves eager to make full use of the opportunities afforded and generally speaking they have made good progress'.³⁴⁹ Yet despite the eagerness of the returning soldiers for this training, the system itself was fraught with particular difficulties. The director of the Education department wrote in March 1919 that the soldier students were 'extremely sensitive' and could become disheartened and drop out. That month he had admitted two students who could

³⁴⁷ Memorandum from Department of Repatriation to Director of Education, Perth, 24 March 1919, Education Department files, WAS 24, Cons 1497, 1918/1787, Returned soldiers. SRO, Perth

³⁴⁸ *Annual Report of the Minister of Education 1919*, Education Department files, WAS 24 Cons 1497 1920/0046. The number of useful trades and courses available had obviously exceeded the original sixteen contemplated in October 1916. SRO, Perth

³⁴⁹ *Annual Report of the Minister of Education 1919*, Education Department files, WAS 24 Cons 1497 1920/0046. SRO, Perth

neither read nor write. Indeed, in almost all cases, the students had poor literacy: 'it is the exception to find one who has read fairly'.³⁵⁰ These returned soldiers, with their associated physical, mental and emotional difficulties, often needed extensive sick leave from their studies. Some of them were clearly distinctly unqualified for the studies they wished to undertake, as the director indicated in October 1919: 'of the eleven candidates for the October examination nearly all left school at about the age of 14 and have done very little since in the way of study'. There were many successes, however; as the director himself noted, 'many of them then go on to the teacher's college to work as school teachers'.³⁵¹ An article in the *West Australian* at this time lauded the 'employment of teachers who have lost an arm or a leg in war service', declaring that 'the day is past when the teacher carried out his duties comfortably ensconced in his chair'.³⁵² The training program in Fremantle was enthusiastically supported by the local community. At the end of 1919 there were 549 returned soldiers in attendance at the Fremantle technical school as well as a number of returned soldiers in evening classes in clerical subjects and wool-classing in Fremantle.³⁵³

Yet the difficulty of the training program was the lack of positions available in which to place the trained men. It was considered that students after a nine- or twelve-months' course of training 'during which they would have reached a forty per cent efficiency', would be placed out as trainees with private firms, which would both enable further training and ease the financial burden on the State. This would also open up positions for the newly returned soldiers. In the eastern states 'where the many secondary industries are able to absorb the men', this system worked well,

³⁵⁰ Director, Education Department, to Department of Repatriation, [undated], Education Department files, WAS 24, Cons 1497, 1918/1787, Returned soldiers. SRO, Perth

³⁵¹ Director of Education to J.O. McNamara, 3 October 1919, Education Department files, WAS 24, Cons 1497, 1918/1787, Returned soldiers. SRO, Perth The director suggested that 'Men of this kind should be very carefully tested to make sure that it is worth their while to go on with the course, as unless they are very exceptional cases I think that they would generally need at least a year's work before entering the College'.

³⁵² *West Australian*, 14 October 1919, 'Soldier Teacher'.

³⁵³ *Annual Report of the Minister of Education 1919*, Education Department files, WAS 24 Cons 1497 1920/0046: SRO, Perth. Out of a 'total of 3347 students at eleven technical schools'. See also: Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Box 53, Item 1: Council Meetings, Meeting of 6 October 1919. SRO, Perth.

but in Western Australia where the factories and workshops were comparatively few, 'the students cannot be drafted into private establishments as rapidly as is the case in the eastern states'.³⁵⁴ Examining this period, Crowley writes that 'the four years of war did not increase the number of factories, as the goods most in demand were wheat, wool and fruit'. The consequence, he notes, was that 'there was a decline in industrial employment from 1914 until 1918'.³⁵⁵ For the re-trained soldiers, this decline had a material disadvantage. It was found necessary to retain some of the returned soldiers in the classes for longer periods and bring them up to higher rates of efficiency before they could be placed into positions in industry. The minister reported that 'the expectation that on the completion of the war and the return of the soldiers there would be a revival in trade leading to an increased attendance of trade students was not realized'. To improve the effectiveness of the training program, the department decided that 'day instruction in trade subjects is required at Fremantle to improve the status of those engaged in industry and it is proposed to make an endeavor to induce employers to allow their employees to attend classes on one or two afternoons each week'.³⁵⁶

Yet despite the good intentions of both State and Federal government, the legacy of injured servicemen on the community was widespread and lasting. Despite the edict that 'if a man suffers disadvantage due to his war work, it is right that the public should recognize that to the extent of finding him suitable work, wherever possible', training schemes and good intentions could not of themselves create enough employment for the number of injured returned men.³⁵⁷ Gare and Lloyd-Jones write that, Australia-wide, in 1920 some 90,000 Great War veterans received a commonwealth disability pension.³⁵⁸ In Fremantle in 1921 the Council gave work to a number of 'wingies and stumpies' as gate keepers at the local football

³⁵⁴ *Annual Report of the Minister of Education 1919*, Education Department files, WAS 24 Cons 1497 1920/0046. SRO, Perth.

³⁵⁵ Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, pp182-83.

³⁵⁶ *Annual Report of the Minister of Education 1919*, Education Department files, WAS 24 Cons 1497 1920/0046. SRO, Perth

³⁵⁷ Circular signed by L.E. Shapcott, Secretary, Premier's Department, 30 September 1919, Premiers Department files, AN 2/9, Acc 1703, Item 649/22, Returned maimed & limbless men's association. SRO, Perth

³⁵⁸ Gare and Lloyd-Jones, *When War Came to Fremantle*, p41.

matches.³⁵⁹ A deputation which visited the Premier on 17 August 1922 was still urging for preference in the workplace for injured returned soldiers, stating 'there were 70 wingies and stumpies', the most injured of all the injured soldiers, who were out of work in the Perth area.³⁶⁰ In 1926, eight years after the end of the war, the Western Australian 'returned maimed & limbless men's association' still had a membership of 480, which included 270 amputees.³⁶¹

Repatriation and employment: State and local policy

In September 1919 the Premier of Western Australia sent a circular to all government departments. The circular defined the State government's new policy for the employment of returned soldiers. This was, in its essence, that 'if a man suffers disadvantage due to his war work, it is right that the public should recognize that to the extent of finding him suitable work, wherever possible'. The corollary of this was a dedicated policy of providing government work to returned soldiers, but in particular, to injured returned soldiers: 'no matter how efficient a man with one leg may be, he may not get outside employment as readily as a sound man'.³⁶²

The circular sent by the Premier had three key aspects. First, the State Cabinet had decided that in making appointments to the public service, 'active military service must be the first consideration', though efficiency was not to be disregarded in making a selection from among the soldiers themselves. If employers were in doubt, they were encouraged to give the soldier a trial. Returned soldiers asked simply for opportunity; after that, they 'must deserve continuous employment by honest effort'. Yet the policy also recognized that it would be impossible in some instances to find soldiers to fill professional positions or those needing special training and experience. The Premier's answer to this was that 'the soldier is also a citizen and as such, is as much concerned as anyone else in the good Government of

³⁵⁹ Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 53, Item 1. SRO, Perth 'Wingies and stumpies' was a term used by the injured soldiers themselves to denote those who had lost arms or legs in the war.

³⁶⁰ Deputation to Premier 17 August 1922. AN 2/9 Acc 1703 Item 649/22 Returned maimed & limbless men's association SRO, Perth

³⁶¹ *Daily News*, 2 March 1926, p2.

³⁶² Circular signed by L.E. Shapcott, Secretary, Premier's Department, 30 September 1919, Premier's Department files, AN 2/9, Acc 1703, Item 649/22, Returned maimed & limbless men's association. SRO, Perth

the State'. In other words, the soldier's own sense of civic duty would be the determining factor when considering whether he was capable of taking on a particular position.³⁶³

The second aspect to the circular was the Premier's edict that, knowing there were thousands of soldiers still to be repatriated, 'appointments must be temporary. No permanent appointments should be made until all the soldiers return'. The policy dictated that returned soldiers who were employed in the Government service prior to the war must on their return be provided with positions at least equal to those they filled before enlistment. However, even these soldiers could not be employed on a permanent basis until all soldiers returned.³⁶⁴ On the return of each soldier formerly employed in the public service, a letter was sent from the Department of Repatriation to the relevant government office requesting that they inform the department

at the earliest possible moment, whether you are prepared to reinstate him in the position he vacated on his enlistment. Should it happen that his physical condition on discharge prevents him from resuming his previous employment, would you be good enough to say whether you can employ him in any other capacity, and if so, what terms? It is unnecessary, I feel sure, to stress the obligation which rests upon all employers to co-operate with the Government in re-establishing in civil life, on the best terms possible, the men who have risked so much, at the call of their country.³⁶⁵

The third aspect of the Premier's policy could potentially have created particular hardship among the civilian population. It stated that those men hired into the public service in the time since the outbreak of war in August 1914 were to be 'put off' (that is, let go) when necessary to make room for returned soldiers who had enlisted from the public service.³⁶⁶ The Premier attempted to reduce the

³⁶³ Circular signed by L.E. Shapcott, Secretary, Premier's Department, 30 September 1919, Premiers Department files, AN 2/9, Acc 1703, Item 649/22, Returned maimed & limbless men's association. SRO, Perth

³⁶⁴ Circular signed by L.E. Shapcott, Secretary, Premier's Department, 30 September 1919, Premiers Department files, AN 2/9, Acc 1703, Item 649/22, Returned maimed & limbless men's association. SRO, Perth

³⁶⁵ Letter from Deputy Comptroller, Department of Repatriation, to Town Clerk, 26 June 1919, Fremantle Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, An 217/3, Box 57, Item 10. SRO, Perth

³⁶⁶ A comprehensive list was compiled by the public service commissioner who wrote 'My last annual report contained a list of them up to 4 August 1915 and the next report will contain the names of those who have been given a similar undertaking since that date. Being aware of the

‘inconvenience’ of those thereby lost their job by offering transfers ‘should positions be available in any department which cannot be filled by returned soldiers’.³⁶⁷

Considering the considerable upheaval and social and financial difficulty this could potentially have given a number of civilian employees, there are no records of complaints against this policy in the files of the Fremantle Municipal Council or appearing in the local newspapers at the time. No record of employees being put off is extant, whilst the record for those Council employees returning from the war confirms that they were returned indeed to their former positions.³⁶⁸

Whilst the Commonwealth and state governments were evolving their policies for repatriation from 1918 to 1919, the Fremantle Council attempted to create local employment where it could. It approached the Commonwealth Government in March 1919 for a loan of £10,000, ‘to be expended in road and street improvement and in the further development of South Beach’.³⁶⁹ The Prime Minister’s office queried the application with the State Premier’s office, writing that ‘an intimation was recently conveyed to the various state governments that the commonwealth government was prepared to make advances by way of a loan to enable local government bodies to carry out necessary public works upon which returned soldiers would be employed’.³⁷⁰ The Fremantle council took up the federal government’s ‘intimation’ with alacrity and made the application on the understanding ‘that the only persons employed in the execution of the works be returned soldiers who, on the date of their enlistment, were bona fide residents

difficulties which arose in connection with alleged promises made during the Boer War, I am taking pains to avoid similar trouble after the present war is ended’. From public service commissioner to premier, 1 January 1916 Premier’s Department files: AN 2/1 Acc 1496 Item 34 1916 Government employees enlisting.

³⁶⁷ Circular signed by L.E. Shapcott, Secretary, Premier’s Department, 30 September 1919, Premiers Department files, AN 2/9, Acc 1703, Item 649/22, Returned maimed & limbless men’s association. SRO, Perth

³⁶⁸ Cases of former Council employees who were reinstated in former jobs included Mr. D.T. Harrison, re-employed as a street sweeper, and Mr. S.M. Simpson, re-employed as a cleaner at the Fish Market. See Fremantle Municipal Council correspondence files, Acc 1377, AN 217/2, Box 53, 1917-1919, Item 2 Minutes of Council from 17 January 1917 to 27 January 1919. SRO, Perth

³⁶⁹ Fremantle Municipal Council Finance Committee, Minutes, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 53, Item 1. SRO, Perth

³⁷⁰ Letter from Prime Minister’s office, undated and unaddressed, Premiers Department files, AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 165, 1919 – repatriation, Fremantle Council and loan £10,000. SRO, Perth

within the Municipality of Fremantle'.³⁷¹ When the prospect of this loan was announced in the local papers, it provoked mixed feelings and a revealing response. A letter from one of Fremantle's residents showed that the returned soldiers were not all perceived as standing on an equal footing in terms of need. It was wrong, the author insisted, not to give preference to returned soldiers who were married men with families to support:

I notice that it is the intention of the Fremantle Council to raise a loan of £10,000, understanding that the money so raised is to be expended for the employment of returned soldiers exclusively. If that means married soldiers there would be no objection to giving them preference over others, but when it comes to giving preference to single men unless they have dependents on them it would be most unfair. [Recently] at Elder Smith & Co, married men who had large families depending on them were put off work and single soldiers put in their places. I am sure our brave returned boys have no wish to make women and children suffer hunger and want...³⁷²

The Town Clerk responded to the author, Mr. Mitchell, writing that 'I quite agree with you that preference should be given to married men who have families depending upon them, also to single men who have Mothers or young relatives who are depending on them, and you may be quite sure that every care will be taken to see that no injustice is done.'³⁷³

By May 1919, having heard nothing regarding the loan application, the issue of employment for returned soldiers had become a still greater concern for the Fremantle Council. This was reflected in a letter from the Town Clerk to the Commonwealth government's Minister for Repatriation asking for an early decision in the matter, 'because unemployment in this part is becoming somewhat acute and there is a very great feeling of unrest developing'.³⁷⁴ In the meantime, while waiting on the loan, funding was found elsewhere for minor, stop-gap jobs. For example, in

³⁷¹ Fremantle Municipal Council Finance Committee, Minutes, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 53, Item 1. SRO, Perth

³⁷² William Mitchell, Trafford St., to the mayor and Councillors, 7 March 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, An 217/3, Box 57, Item 10. SRO, Perth

³⁷³ Town Clerk to W. Mitchell, Trafford St., 20 March 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, An 217/3, Box 57, Item 10. SRO, Perth

³⁷⁴ Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, An 217/3, Box 57, Item 10. SRO, Perth

March the Council made an application to the Repatriation department (and through it, the Department of Works and Trading Concerns) for £220 for work for the unemployed, to be 'commenced and finished within six months from the 31st March'.³⁷⁵ This amount was granted, following which the Council wrote to the Railway department that the Council proposed 'to spend the money, as far as it will go, in clearing away the heap of sand on the South Fremantle Recreation Reserve'. Highlighting the motivation for undertaking the work, the Town Clerk pointed out that the removal of the sand 'is first of all to provide a means of employment for Returned Soldiers' and only secondly was 'to remove the nuisance of drift'.³⁷⁶ The Works Department, while willing to provide the loan, also kept a tight rein on the money. The department's undersecretary wrote to the Council at the cessation of the work that of the £220 required by the Council, £200 was to pay wages to returned soldiers and £20 was for the hire of rails and trucks. He pointed out that 'any money granted by the Commonwealth Government must be spent solely in employment of and the payment of wages of returned soldiers'. Consequently he recommended that the Repatriation Board grant the sum of £200 only; the municipality was left to find the remaining £20 from its own coffers.³⁷⁷

In June the Council prepared a schedule of public works on which returned soldiers could be employed in anticipation of the federal loan.³⁷⁸ The Premier meanwhile supported the Fremantle authorities by writing to the Prime Minister on the subject of the larger loan for £10,000. He confirmed the money would be spent 'to a proportion of about 60% on wages, the Council having their own materials, and it is proposed to restrict employment practically to returned soldiers only'. Due to the nature of the work, the Premier asked the Prime Minister to consider the Council request that a low rate of interest be fixed: 'owing to the wounds and other

³⁷⁵ Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, An 217/3, Box 57, Item 10. SRO, Perth

³⁷⁶ Town Clerk to District Engineer for Railways, 7 June 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, An 217/3, Box 57, Item 10. SRO, Perth

³⁷⁷ Undersecretary, Department of Works and Trading Concerns, to Town Clerk, 26 May 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, An 217/3, Box 57, Item 10. SRO, Perth.

³⁷⁸ Haynes to Premier, 5 August 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, An 217/3, Box 57, Item 10. SRO, Perth.

disabilities of the soldiers the Council anticipate that the work would cost more than it otherwise would as men are not very strong yet'.³⁷⁹ As their approach supported the policy set out by both the federal and state governments the previous year in their repatriation schemes, the town council clearly felt justified asking for the loan to be made on favourable terms. Finally, after seven months of waiting, the loan was granted in July 1919. Yet it was nonetheless offered on terms the Fremantle Council could not accept, with an interest rate set at 5¼ per cent over thirty years. In frustration, the Town Clerk, Henry Haynes, wrote to Senator Reginald Burchell, Fremantle's Member of Parliament, that 'in view of the high rate of interest and taking into consideration the fact that the primary object of the loan was to provide work for returned soldiers the Council regrets that it is unable to proceed further with the matter'. Haynes indignantly pointed out that the 'Melville Road Board obtained a loan quite recently through the Commonwealth Bank on considerably better terms'.³⁸⁰ Showing the extent of his frustration, Haynes also wrote to the Premier, reiterating the Council's position that the interest rate was 'much in excess of what they were led to believe it would be'. Having been Town Clerk for the past eight years, Haynes obviously felt comfortable expressing his own opinion to such a senior figure:

Personally I think it is a great pity, seeing the large number of unemployed there are about the Fremantle district who are willing and anxious to work and the fact that the proposal of the Council would greatly assist the repatriation movement and the money advanced would ultimately be returned to the Federal Government, that the Council's offer has not been availed of.³⁸¹

There was another issue raised in Haynes letter to the Premier, invoking a sentiment that would reappear over a decade later when the Depression came to Fremantle. Haynes explained that it had come to the knowledge of the Fremantle Council 'that a considerable number of returned soldiers in Fremantle had a decided

³⁷⁹ Premier to the Prime Minister, 21 June 1919, Premiers Department files, AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 165, 1919 – repatriation, Fremantle Council and loan £10,000. SRO, Perth.

³⁸⁰ Town Clerk to Senator Burchell, 14 July 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, An 217/3, Box 57, Item 10. SRO, Perth

³⁸¹ Haynes to Premier, 5 August 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, An 217/3, Box 57, Item 10. SRO, Perth

objection to taking sustenance money which appeared to be purely charitable and would much prefer to earn their living by working'.³⁸² It was crucial, therefore, that the Council provide genuine work that would relieve the soldiers from any sense of having to accept the burden of charity. Yet their capacity to offer the traditional type of long-term employment to which many returning soldiers had been accustomed before the war, was now much more limited.³⁸³ With restricted funds in an economy naturally subdued by war, and in a port reliant on shipping which had been substantially decreased due to the war, the Council's limitations for providing employment were considerable.

With minimal funds to create its own employment schemes for returned soldiers, the Council was aware that it must seek ways for local men to be self-sustaining. One avenue was through offering these men the opportunity to run street-barrows. Barrows and stalls operated in Fremantle, as they did throughout Australia, as a means, more often than not, for new immigrants to earn a living, predominantly selling fruit, vegetables or fish. With the return of injured soldiers, the role of these carts and stalls expanded in the port town. In reply to an enquiry from the secretary of the State War Council in Perth as to what his town council was doing for the returned servicemen, Haynes noted in this regard that 'preference is always given to returned soldiers in the matter of fruit stall licenses'.³⁸⁴ With the new licenses being granted to soldiers, the stalls and barrows offered coffee, books and nuts as well as the traditional fare. For example, one returned soldier, A.H. Keaton, was given a license to sell his 'patent razor sharpener, after being injured in AIF' in 1918. Similarly, Mrs. E. Cookson, whose husband was 'doing his little bit in the old country' and who was 'trying to keep things going in his absence', was

³⁸² Haynes to Premier, 5 August 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, AN 217/3, Box 57, Item 10. See also: Minutes, meeting of 2 October 1919, Works and Lighting Committee, 1918-20, Fremantle Municipal Council Files, ACC 1377, AN 217/2. SRO, Perth

³⁸³ A list of Council employees, provided to the Council's insurers in 1917, exemplifies what would have been considered the norm before 1918. Of the municipal council's thirteen employees, apart from a new typist who had been with them only a year, there were four employees who had been with the Council between 7 and 10 years, and nine employees who had been with the Council between 11 and 19 years. Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 56, Item 1. SRO, Perth

³⁸⁴ Letter of 22 January 1918, Fremantle Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, AN 217/3, Box 57, Item 10. SRO, Perth

granted a license to run a railway bookstall, near the overhead bridge and wharf in May 1918.³⁸⁵ Another 'discharged soldier having enlisted from Fremantle and served 2 years, 27 days active service', applied to have the stand at the corner of Market and Leake streets as a 'pie and coffee' stall. Yet another returned soldier wrote to the Council asking to run a portable coffee stall outside the Railway Station:

I am a returned Soldier carrying a good discharge and have a wife and family to support, and I am seeking employment. I can supply you with references as to my integrity and character and if you, Gentlemen, will favourably consider this application, you will be doing good to one who has served his Country and is anxious to earn an honest livelihood.³⁸⁶

In the few years immediately following the war the streets of the West End became populated with these barrows. The Council also offered the returned soldiers a reduced rate on their fees. Most barrow licenses were 25 shillings per month, whilst the returned soldiers, for the most part, had only to pay 10 shillings. In an effort to reduce competition between the barrow-men and the existing shopkeepers, a clear source of potential tension in town, the Council carefully mapped out the areas in which the barrows could operate. In 1919 it 'granted the right to vend fruit from "move-on" barrows in the streets lying to the south of Essex street and Henderson street or north of Queen street and point street'. However the Council 'could not allow them in the principal business streets'.³⁸⁷

Other approaches were also sought to make local returned servicemen self-sustaining: one such initiative in late 1916 was a scheme to settle soldiers on rural land where they could restart their lives. It seemed to be an idea whose time had come. Geoff Bolton writes that 'from the parliamentary back benches Mitchell scolded the Lefroy government for failing to press forward with plans for soldier

³⁸⁵ Fremantle Municipal Council correspondence files, Acc 1377, AN 217/2, Box 55, Item 2. SRO, Perth

³⁸⁶ Joseph Hart, 29 Point St., to Fremantle Municipal Council, 6 November 1918, Fremantle Municipal Council General Papers, Cons 1377, AN 217/3, Box 55, Item 31/1917-19 – Street Barrows, Stands, etc. SRO, Perth

³⁸⁷ Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 55, Item 2. SRO, Perth. A map is contained in the archive with the prohibited areas coloured yellow: By Resolution of the Council, 6 September 1915, Fremantle Municipal Council, Cons 1377, AN 217/3, Box 39, Item 31. SRO, Perth The precautions against competition between retailers and street vendors had initially been resolved to manage the positions original fruit vendors, usually recent immigrants to western Australia. See Appendix D, map showing the permitted zone for street barrows.

settlement'.³⁸⁸ In December, meanwhile, the Secretary of the Western Australia AIF RSA wrote to Mayor Wray, demanding progress on local repatriation schemes, and complaining that while much had been said, little had been done: 'the men are beginning to think that the promises that were made in the early stages of the war, were of the pie-crust order'.³⁸⁹ The basis of the plan was for the State government to supply the land and the Federal government to supply the funds, through loans to the State from the agricultural bank. A board appointed by the State government would select suitable applicants from among the returned soldiers, while interest on the soldiers' loans would be kept to a minimum. The returned soldiers were also to be allowed to make private purchase of properties and, if they required assistance to work the property, it could be valued and approved by government-appointed valuers.³⁹⁰

A few weeks later, in January 1917, the *Western Mail* reported that a delegation including the mayor and Fremantle councilors, Governor Sir Harry Barron and M.J. Mitchell, the Minister for Industries, had paid an inspection visit to a parcel of some 250 acres of endowment land belonging to the town of Fremantle 'in the vicinity of Bibra Lake'. It reported that 'it is the intention of the Council should the repatriation committee deem the land suitable, to cut it up into 10 acre lots for the purpose of poultry farming'. Pig farming as well as the cultivation of orchard and vineyards, were also considered suitable for the designated land.³⁹¹ In May 1917, the Council made the formal offer of the land near Bibra Lake to the State's War Council 'for the purpose of settlement of returned soldiers'. It noted that the land 'is capable of growing grapes, raisins, figs, apricots, peaches, nectarines, almonds, mulberries, loquarts, rhubarb, cape gooseberries, onions and peas successfully'.³⁹² Whilst urging the acceptance of this land, the Council provided a list of conditions

³⁸⁸ Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage*, p105.

³⁸⁹ Fremantle Municipal Council Files, ACC 1377, AN 217/3, Box 54, Item 7, Mayors Correspondence. SRO, Perth

³⁹⁰ Premiers Department files, AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 106, 1916, Repatriation Fund, formation of. SRO, Perth

³⁹¹ *Western Mail*, 19 January 1917, p2.

³⁹² Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 58, Item 1. SRO, Perth

regarding the leases on it. The Council intended that the land could be leased only to bona fide returned soldiers having a good character discharge, could not be sold or passed on to anyone other than another returned soldier, and that the land had to be put into use or the lease would lapse.

The extreme value of the endowment lands to the Citizens of Fremantle in years to come is also recognised, and it is desired to protect these interests against land speculation, while at the same time giving the greatest possible facility to the utilisation of the land by returned soldiers.³⁹³

However the Land Settlement Committee of the War Council, with the Under-Secretary for Lands, turned down the offer. They were influenced by a report from the District Surveyor that 'water could not probably be secured at a less depth than 100 to 130 feet, and that the land could not otherwise be profitably utilized except by the drainage of Bibra Lake'.³⁹⁴ The Council was disheartened by the rejection of what was considered a positive scheme for the repatriation of its local men. The Town Clerk, on the Council's behalf, then wrote to the Minister for Lands suggesting he approach the Agricultural Bank, on behalf of whom the Minister responded:

I would not like myself to start growing grapes, raisins, figs, apricots etc on leasehold land, and having that view I cannot advise another man to do so. A further difficulty is that while the Agricultural Bank may make advances on Crown Leases, it cannot do so on leases from private individuals or Companies. The Fremantle Council, of course, may start a scheme of its own, but they cannot expect an advance from the Agricultural Bank.³⁹⁵

The land offer was never taken up by any of the repatriation or returned soldiers' groups. The matter was finally seen to be put to rest in November 1918, as seen in an article published by the *West Australian*:

it has been fully proved that the great majority of returned men are physically unfitted to pioneer virgin country, and the present Government has, perforce, been compelled to review the policy laid down by its predecessors. A big proportion of the applicants were more or less

³⁹³ Lands & Surveys Department Records, AN 211, Cons: 1657, Item 1917/00757, Mayor of Fremantle: Land for Returned Soldiers. SRO, Perth

³⁹⁴ Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 53, Item 1. SRO, Perth

³⁹⁵ Lands & Surveys Department Records, AN 211, Cons: 1657, Item 1917/00757, Mayor of Fremantle: Land for Returned Soldiers. SRO, Perth

incapacitated from doing hard work and in almost all cases the demand has been for improved farms. Unimproved blocks of must be of a certain standard and must be within nine miles of a railway station.³⁹⁶

In June 1919, the Premier was informed that the Commonwealth Government had decided not to support the State government in a state-federal cooperation arrangement for soldier's housing.³⁹⁷ While the great efforts made ultimately came to nothing, the initiative was an excellent example of the efforts being made to accommodate and support the returning servicemen in practical and sustainable ways.

Despite the efforts of the town Council, the number of soldiers who were in 1919 unable to resume their former positions or to obtain new ones was significant. This is clear from the volume of newspaper articles and advertisements aimed at locating employment for returned men. In June 1919, the deputy comptroller of repatriation placed an advertisement in the *West Australian* showing a schedule of the professions and trades of returned soldiers who were seeking employment through the Repatriation department. The news was not good: 'At present it will be noted that 702 men comprising amongst them branches of almost every trade are available and urgently awaiting positions'.³⁹⁸ Scott writes that across Australia by the end of 1919, '74,343 soldiers applied for training and efficiency courses and 27,696 completed their training' but that the greatest problem was to find a sufficient number of 'light labour positions to serve as an introduction to more strenuous labour later on'.³⁹⁹ This monumental task reflected the key goal of the administration at this time, on a national, state and local level, which was 'to reinstate in civil life all those who are capable of such reinstatement'.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ *West Australian*, 29 November 1918, p7.

³⁹⁷ Telegram from Premier Mitchell to Senator Millen, Melbourne, 28 June 1919, Premiers Department files, AN 2/1, Acc 1496, Item 119, 1919, Commonwealth housing scheme. SRO, Perth

³⁹⁸ *West Australian*, 5 June 1919, p5.

³⁹⁹ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p837.

⁴⁰⁰ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p833.

The threat of moral panic: Venereal disease and influenza, 1918-1919

In the midst of this struggle to find employment for former soldiers came another set of concerns for their health and recovery: the insidious shadow of disease. The men returning from abroad brought with them venereal disease, mostly in the forms of gonorrhoea and syphilis. In early 1918 the Commissioner of Public Health, Dr. Everitt Atkinson, published his concerns about the threat posed by venereal disease. He insisted that 'there is no doubt whatever that the prevalence of venereal disease is such as to cause grave alarm and to constitute a serious menace to the life of the state'.⁴⁰¹ Atkinson was using the first available war-time statistical returns from December 1916 to support his views. These showed that for the period 9 June to 31 December 1916, no fewer than 1,183 cases of venereal disease had been notified by medical practitioners in Western Australia.⁴⁰² By 1918 without having the exact figures available, it was simply a matter of venereal disease *existing*, even in its limited form, that provoked concern. Specimen booklets were issued by the Department of Public Health on the subject of Venereal Diseases. Commissioner Atkinson took it upon himself to write to the Town Clerk at Fremantle, asking him to 'distribute these as widely as possible. Not only should these booklets be kept on the public counter at the Town Hall, but they should be made available at any other public place or at frequented private premises'. (By 'frequented private premises', the commissioner was clearly referring to the hotels, brothels and working men's clubs which were such a large feature of life in the port town.) The Commissioner continued; 'I am sending a further circular to all local authorities, but thought it well to address this letter to your Council because of the importance of your district'.⁴⁰³

The importance of Fremantle in the fight against venereal disease was not only its aforementioned character, but (just as had been the case with the arrival into Western Australia of the bubonic plague) that it was also the first site of

⁴⁰¹ Commissioner for Public Health report, quoted in *Daily News*, 8 February 1918, p1.

⁴⁰² Commissioner for Public Health report, quoted in *Daily News*, 8 February 1918, p1.

⁴⁰³ Commissioner of Public Health to Town Clerk, 14 May 1918, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2 Box 58 Item 6. If they wished to be more informed on the subject, Fremantle residents could attend a 'Syllabus of Special Lectures' from the 'W.A. Council for Combating Venereal Disease' at the Fremantle Town Hall. In September 1919, there were 'five lectures to be given on successive Mondays, the first two of which are illustrated!'

disembarkation for the returning soldiers as well as housing a military base camp and auxiliary hospital. The returning soldiers, more than ever sailors had been in the past, were now seen as the biggest threat in the introduction of venereal disease. This was enough of a threat to spread alarm throughout the populace and the legislature, although the presence of venereal disease was certainly not new in the state. Garrick and Jeffery write that 'there was probably no time when the colony had not had sufferers of gonorrhoea and syphilis'.⁴⁰⁴ In March 1918 the Legislative Council drew up a bill to amend the existing Health Act of 1915. The amendment addressed the concern that bearers of venereal disease could avoid coming forward and would need to be compelled to do so. The existing bill, passed in 1915, provided that the public health commission might compel a person suspected of being infected with venereal disease to undergo medical examination only on a sworn statement by the informant. Dr. Atkinson, the commissioner of the Public Health department, and the authors of the amendment bill, wanted to remove this restriction. The concerns of Dr. Atkinson were based on his assessment of the 1916 figures. As he explained, 'of the 747 cases of gonorrhoea recorded, 685 occurred in males and 62 in females, a proportion of almost 11 to 1. It is very difficult to believe that this proportion represents the true state of affairs, so that one is forced to the further conclusion that there are probably a very large number of females not under treatment by medical practitioners'.⁴⁰⁵ The amendment, prompted by Atkinson's advice, intended to give the Public Health department the power to proceed on the unsigned statement of an informant who could remain anonymous. This step, argued the bill's opponents, 'opens the door to the gravest of grave abuses'.⁴⁰⁶ On its first reading in the Assembly on 13 March, according to the press, 'the formal motion that the Bill should be read a first time was received with cries of "NO" from the opposition benches. When the second reading was made an order of the day for

⁴⁰⁴ Garrick and Jeffery, *Fremantle Hospital*, p176.

⁴⁰⁵ Commissioner for Public Health report, quoted in *Daily News*, 8 February 1918, p1.

⁴⁰⁶ *Western Mail*, 8 March 1918, p20. It went on to complain that such powers as were being 'exist in no other British community or English-speaking country'.

the next sitting, the leader of the opposition interjected: "That is as far as you will get with it".⁴⁰⁷

In Fremantle, the opposition to the Health Act Amending Bill was just as strong. In April a public meeting opposing the amendment was 'largely attended' but more significantly was presided over by the mayor, 'who expressed himself as being heartily in accord with the promoters of the meeting'. At the meeting one of the Fremantle Labour representatives on the Legislative Council, W.C. Angwin, informed the group that 'from June 1916 no fewer than 2400 cases had been reported by notification'. His argument was that the figures showed clearly that the 1915 Act was working and that sufficient provision was made in the existing legislation to ensure people suffering from venereal disease were receiving medical treatment. Angwin denounced the implications of acting on secret testimony, saying that 'any person maliciously inclined' could lay the charge against an innocent person. The Rev. Corly Butler of the Methodist church in Fremantle moved that the meeting register 'its indignant protest' against the government proposals to allow the Commissioner of Public Health to take action on 'secret evidence'. It was indeed the secrecy and protection of the informant that most bothered those in opposition to the act. Bessie Rischbieth, also at the meeting understood the significance of this type of clandestine testimony on the women it would target. If it became law, Rischbieth told the meeting, 'the large circle of women who were opposing it would hold every member of the government responsible for whatever happened under it'.⁴⁰⁸ This was no idle fear. Phyl Garrick and Chris Jeffery write on the experience of women who were compelled to undergo treatment: 'Women endured washouts and swabbings and the painting and cauterizing of their cervix'.⁴⁰⁹ The amendment did not pass, although the alarm surrounding the threat of venereal disease continued.

Ultimately, and with the historian's gift of informed hindsight, it is clear that the presence of venereal disease in the state did not justify the alarm which surrounded it. The actual statistics, unavailable to Dr. Atkinson at the time, were a

⁴⁰⁷ *Daily News*, 14 March 1918, p6. The Labour party then in opposition was heartily opposed to the Amendment Bill.

⁴⁰⁸ *West Australian*, 10 April 1918, p8.

⁴⁰⁹ Garrick and Jeffery, *Fremantle Hospital*, p177.

lot less frightening than claimed. The total number of men returned to Australia by 31 July 1918 was 72,264, out of which the total number of men returned owing to venereal disease was 1,433. In Western Australia the total number of returned soldiers who were examined by their district medical officer was 5850, and of that number only 53 had gonorrhoea and 38 syphilis. Closer to home, the figures for Fremantle showed that, of the 250 returned soldiers who were examined, only 15 had gonorrhoea and 10 had syphilis. Still, of all the districts which submitted returns to the Commonwealth Medical Officer, Fremantle had the highest figures on the list. Kalgoorlie followed with 15 gonorrhoea and 6 syphilis cases; even Perth, with 675 examined, only had 6 gonorrhoea and 5 syphilis cases. Of the twenty-seven other centres in which soldiers were examined, the number of cases of venereal disease was minimal or non-existent.⁴¹⁰

Similarly, at the 'Rockingham Military Camp Hospital (V.D)' near Fremantle, figures reveal that the incidence of venereal disease was not as large as the public imaginings. The number of patients in camp on 30 June 1917 was 57—of whom 51 were suffering from gonorrhoea, 3 from gonorrhoea and syphilis, and 3 from syphilis alone. The number remaining on 1 June 1918 was 12—of whom 6 were suffering from gonorrhoea, 1 from gonorrhoea and syphilis, and 5 from syphilis alone. The Principal Medical Officer's annual report did, however, note that 17.39% of the admissions were married men.⁴¹¹ The concern here was an obvious one: that the wives of these men would soon be among the sufferers.

Table: Admission and discharge figures for Rockingham Camp, 1917-18⁴¹²

| Date | Number admitted | Number discharged |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1917 | | |
| July | 21 | 32 |
| August | 18 | 16 |

⁴¹⁰ Principal Medical Officer, Commonwealth Military Forces, 5th Military district, to District Headquarters, 13 September 1918 – statistics for venereal disease. Department of Defence files MP 367/1 Item 527/21/113 V.D camps and incidents NAA, Canberra

⁴¹¹ Principal Medical Officer's Annual Report, 5th Military District, for year ending 30 June 1918, Department of Defence files, MP367/1, Item 500/10/22, Isolation Hospital Rockingham Camp. NAA, Canberra

⁴¹² Principal Medical Officer's Annual Report, 5th Military District, for year ending 30 June 1918, Department of Defence files, NAA, Canberra MP367/1, Item 500/10/22, Isolation Hospital Rockingham Camp. NAA, Canberra

| | | |
|-------------|----|----|
| September | 15 | 22 |
| October | 24 | 21 |
| November | 15 | 27 |
| December | 14 | 23 |
| 1918 | | |
| January | 16 | 15 |
| February | 9 | 6 |
| March | 13 | 19 |
| April | 8 | 14 |
| May | 8 | 12 |

The records of the military authorities showed that the total number of men in venereal camps Australia-wide on 31 August 1918 was only 383 and the total number of cases admitted to venereal camps in Australia in the four years since outbreak of war was 13,038.⁴¹³

In October 1918, however, the sentiments were still those of moral panic. Amidst all the dire warnings, posters and protests, the *Daily News* reported that the Venereal Diseases camp at Rockingham was to be abolished and that the patients were to be allowed their freedom on the condition that they wear a blue arm band (!) and gave their word of honour to take precautions against the spreading of the disease.⁴¹⁴ The Fremantle Council naturally had feelings on the matter and wrote to the Department of Defence to ascertain the facts.⁴¹⁵ The reply on stated that ‘while the V.D. Camp may be removed from Rockingham it is not proposed to dispense with a camp of this nature and no alterations are proposed in the method of dealing with the patients’.⁴¹⁶ In other words, it was not to be left to the returned soldiers to give their ‘word of honour’ not to spread this disease.

Nonetheless, once the war was over, the military authorities absolved themselves of any further responsibility for the infected men. As early as December 1918 the Deputy Director-General of the Department of Defence wrote to the Prime

⁴¹³ Department of Defence minute paper, 3 October 1918 MP 367/1, Item 527/21/113, V.D. statistics. NAA, Canberra

⁴¹⁴ *Daily News*, 16 September 1918, cited by the Town Clerk in letter to Fremantle Council, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 54, Item 1. SRO, Perth

⁴¹⁵ Town Clerk to Senator R. Buscott, House of Representatives, Melbourne, with Department of Defence, 1 October, 1918, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 54, Item 1. SRO, Perth

⁴¹⁶ Letter of 23 October 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 54, Item 1. SRO, Perth

Minister that, 'with reference to the venereal diseases camps which have been maintained by the Defence department, I am directed to inform you that the need for these camps has now almost completely passed as the patients will not again be required for service'. Responsibility for these particular soldiers was now to be placed squarely in the hands of the civil authorities: 'as the men have become infected through their own default, this department has no responsibility except such as is assumed for the protection of the general public'.⁴¹⁷ The disease had heretofore been treated in the military forces solely 'in order to render those infected fit for service again'. As this was no longer requisite, it was not justifiable to impose enforced segregation or treatment upon men who had voluntarily enlisted and were now essentially civilians.⁴¹⁸

As far as the military was concerned, the various state and local health departments could now take over that role. With Billy Hughes in Europe for the Paris peace conference, the acting prime minister, William Watt, having discussed the issue with the Minister for Defence, then wrote to all State premiers that 'the question of the continued maintenance of camps set apart in Australia for the treatment of cases of venereal disease amongst the troops is now receiving attention'. Watt suggested the states might wish to make use of these camps for general public health purposes.⁴¹⁹ The Western Australian government for its part did not choose to take over the running of the camps. Night clinics were established at Perth, Fremantle and Kalgoorlie; '12 male and 12 female beds provided at the Perth Public Hospital for cases requiring isolation or intern treatment'; and a 'room at the Fremantle Hospital was set up as a "V.D. Clinique"'.⁴²⁰ The perceived threat of an epidemic of venereal disease was essentially at an end. However something far more threatening in real terms to Fremantle and Western Australia was on the

⁴¹⁷ Deputy Director-General, Department of Defence, to Prime Minister's Office, 19 December 1918. Department of Defence files MP 367/1 Item 527/21/113 V.D camps and incidents NAA, Canberra

⁴¹⁸ Memorandum from Secretary, Department of Defence, to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 10 December 1918. Department of Defence files MP 367/1 Item 527/21/113 V.D camps and incidents NAA, Canberra

⁴¹⁹ Circular from Acting Prime Minister to all Premiers, 18 January 1919, Defence Department files, MP 367/1, Item 527/21/113, V.D. camps and incidents. NAA, Canberra

⁴²⁰ Garrick and Jeffery, *Fremantle Hospital: A Social History*, p176.

horizon: influenza.

On 9 December 1918, Fremantle's new Mayor, William Montgomery, sent an urgent letter to South Fremantle's representative on the Legislative Assembly, Samuel Rocke, alerting him to the probability that in the next day or so a troopship would arrive carrying more than 200 people suffering from 'Pneumonic Influenza'. The thought of the virulent 'Spanish flu', already causing wide-spread devastation in Europe, coming into the port of Fremantle was as worrying to the mayor and population of Fremantle as the imminent threat of plague had been eighteen years earlier. The mayor's concern was 'the fact that it seems utterly impossible to maintain a strict quarantine at Woodman's Point', which meant the landing of men there would create 'great danger to the general public'.⁴²¹ The concern was spawned by a recent incident in which 'soldiers returning on a hospital ship did break away from the ship at Fremantle and evade quarantine regulations'.⁴²² Mayor Montgomery asked Rocke to treat the matter as urgent, and to press upon the Premier the advisability of taking steps to prohibit the landing on the mainland of any patients suffering from influenza 'until freedom from the disease is assured'.⁴²³ Rocke responded by immediately meeting with the Premier on the subject, who assured him that the government was doing all in its power 'to meet with the wishes of the people of Fremantle'. He asked Rocke to assure the mayor 'that no contact able to break quarantine will be landed at Woodman's Point'.⁴²⁴ Unconvinced, on 10 December the Council wired their federal representative in Melbourne, Senator Buzacott, to request 'the Federal Government to isolate at Rottneest all infected cases

⁴²¹ Haynes to S.M. Rocke, Parliament House, Perth, 9 December 1918, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 58, Item 3 Department of Public Health; Infectious Diseases, Pneumonic Influenza; Infectious Diseases. SRO, Perth

⁴²² Memorandum from Secretary, Department of Defence to Secretary, Prime Minister's department. 12 December 1918 Department of Defence files Item no: A.527/21/363 NAA, Canberra

⁴²³ Haynes to S.M. Rocke, Parliament House, Perth, 9 December 1918, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 58, Item 3 Department of Public Health; Infectious Diseases, Pneumonic Influenza; Infectious Diseases. SRO, Perth

⁴²⁴ S.M. Rocke to Mayor, 10 December 1918, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 57, Item 3 Department of Public Health; Infectious Diseases, Pneumonic Influenza; Infectious Diseases. SRO, Perth. In his letter, Rocke also pointed out that he had already 'brought under notice of the Government ... the unsatisfactory conditions existing at Woodman's Point'.

of influenza and contacts expected to arrive at Fremantle'. With no hesitation in emphasizing that the State was in jeopardy, not just Fremantle, the wire concluded: 'Prompt action is absolutely necessary in the interests of the lives of the people of Western Australia'.⁴²⁵

At the same time, in an effort to keep the quarantine zone at Rottnest rather than Woodman's Point, the mayor held a special meeting of the Council on 10 December 1918, addressed by the Medical Officer in Fremantle. The Town Clerk then sent the Medical Officer's remarks directly to the Commissioner of Public Health. The Medical Officer was firm in his opinion on the subject of quarantine:

I have had experience of soldiers in quarantine at Woodman's Point and I know of the difficulty of maintaining efficient quarantine. The thing is so ludicrous as to verge on the region of comic opera. Rottnest can be made efficient, thoroughly efficient and I do not think either patients or contacts would suffer by being treated there. The contacts would be perfectly happy and comfortable and the patients would certainly be as well and probably better treated by open-air methods than they would be in houses.⁴²⁶

All this activity had happened within the space of two days. On the third day, 12 December, however, the federal Director of Quarantine informed the Fremantle Council that 'isolation of the quarantined persons arriving from South Africa at Rottnest Island is impracticable, and that adequate precautions against the spread of infection from the Quarantine Station have been taken'.⁴²⁷

The incoming ship which had started the wave of anxious activity did indeed arrive in dock with influenza victims aboard. But its handling on arrival was unexpected and, as far as the Fremantle public was concerned, unforgivable. On 16 December, another wire was sent to Senator Buzacott, from Mayor Montgomery:

⁴²⁵ Town clerk by wire to Senator Buzacott, Federal Parliament, Melbourne, 10 December 1918, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 57, Item 1. SRO, Perth. In the interests of the safety of its local populace, the Council also immediately opened a public inoculation depot at the Town Hall, from '3.30-4.30 daily'.

⁴²⁶ 10 December, 1918 Town Clerk to Commissioner of Public Health. Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 57, Item 3 Department of Public Health; Infectious Diseases, Pneumonic Influenza; Infectious Diseases. SRO, Perth

⁴²⁷ 12 December 1918 Dr Cumpston, Director of Quarantine, Federal Quarantine Bureau, Melbourne, to Senator R. Buzacott, Melbourne, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 57 Item 3 SRO, Perth Department of Public Health; Infectious Diseases, Pneumonic Influenza; SRO, Perth. See also: Ewers, *The Western Gateway*, p120.

Indignation meeting called Tuesday night by citizens of Fremantle to protest against treatment meted out to influenza soldier contacts by their detention on infected ship stop Please ascertain and advise me policy of Government with regard to disposal of contacts on each ship as it arrives stop⁴²⁸

What had raised the fury of the Fremantle populace was not their own personal safety but the confinement of hundreds of healthy returning soldiers on the troopship *SS Boonah*. All passengers were forced to remain on board, the healthy with the sick, in danger of their lives from influenza. Having survived the war, their homecoming could literally kill them. The Fremantle citizens were horrified by this treatment of their heroes. The protest meeting, the mayor reported, resolved to

demand the Federal Government take immediate steps to establish a quarantine station on Garden Island with all possible speed in order to be ready to receive plague-stricken or infected troops that may be expected to arrive in future and in order to avoid any repetition of the dreary wretchedness and frightful suspense to which the troops on the infected troopship 'Boonah' have been subject during the past week.⁴²⁹

As for the safety of the locals, the Commissioner of Public Health sent the Council 'a number of posters regarding Influenza with a request that they be posted about the town and placed in the trams'.⁴³⁰

For a good six months the disease was kept at bay. Initially the cases were slow to develop—two here, three there. By June 1919, the number of cases began to increase, rising to figures of nine and thirteen at a time. Initially, the old military camp at Blackboy Hill was used as a hospital for influenza patients, and part of Fremantle Hospital was also put aside. But the disease had clearly now taken hold on the mainland. On 13 June, the Premier received notification from the Prime Minister that 'action will now be taken under Quarantine Act to declare State of

⁴²⁸ wire from Mayor Montgomery to Senator R Buzacott, 16 December, 1918, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 57, Item 3 Department of Public Health; Infectious Diseases, Pneumonic Influenza; SRO, Perth

⁴²⁹ Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 57 Item 3 Department of Public Health; Infectious Diseases, Pneumonic Influenza; Infectious Diseases. SRO, Perth

⁴³⁰ This was the entirety of the communication from the commissioner on the subject; sadly no poster is extant to reveal the information and warnings it conveyed. Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files 1917-1919 Acc: 1377 AN 217/2 Box 57 Item 3 Department of Public Health; Infectious Diseases, Pneumonic Influenza; Infectious Diseases. SRO, Perth.

Western Australia infected with influenza'.⁴³¹ On 30 July, the Health Inspector's report shows an alarming jump in the number of cases: 'During the past fortnight 48 cases have been reported. 36 houses have been quarantined and the majority of these premises have been visited twice daily'.⁴³² By 2 August the situation had become grave enough that a special meeting of Council was called by the mayor 'to consider and deal with the problem of the large increase in the number of cases suffering from influenza in Fremantle'. At the conclusion of the meeting it was resolved to create a fund for the relief of necessitous cases and for voluntary workers to do domestic work.⁴³³ By 18 August, 75 cases of pneumonic influenza had been reported in Fremantle; '63 new premises quarantined, 253 patients in 50 premises have been supplied with food. Cases have been removed in the ambulances from Rockingham, North Fremantle, Cottesloe, and Cottesloe Beach to the Fremantle Hospital and Blackboy Hill'.⁴³⁴ As the burden on Fremantle Hospital already exceeded its capacity, and for the safety of the patients there, the Alma St School in the heart of town was established as a Pneumonic Influenza Hospital.⁴³⁵ Fortunately for the Fremantle Council there would be no concern over funding, as 'the whole cost of the carrying on of the hospital was defrayed by the Public Health Department'.⁴³⁶ On 1 September 1919, the Health Inspector revealed that 'The disease has now been raging for 11 weeks and during that period 223 cases have been reported'. Birmingham also reported that there had been 58 cases reported during the previous fortnight and 14 deaths, and that 'Alma St. hospital is now full'.⁴³⁷

⁴³¹ Telegram, Prime Minister to Premier, 13 June 1919, Prime Minister's Department files, CP 103/11, Item 421, Influenza, W.A. Declaration of Infected Area. NAA, Canberra.

⁴³² Health Inspector's Report, 30 July 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 53, Item 1. SRO, Perth

⁴³³ Special meeting of Health, Markets and South Beach committee, 2 August 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Box 53. SRO, Perth

⁴³⁴ Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 53, Item 1. SRO, Perth

⁴³⁵ Health Inspector's Report, 18 August 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 53, Item 1. SRO, Perth

⁴³⁶ Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 53, Item 1. SRO, Perth

⁴³⁷ Health Inspector's Report, 1 September 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 53, Item 1. SRO, Perth

Fremantle had been through the worst of it, however, and by 24 September the Alma Street hospital had closed down.⁴³⁸ Ewers writes that 'the epidemic had been savage while it lasted, but the precautionary measures taken by the board of health under the guidance and personal supervision of Dr. Birmingham greatly lessened its incidence in Fremantle'.⁴³⁹ The next extant report, dated 29 October, showed how the epidemic had subsided: simply a note in the report to Council that the health inspectors would no longer receive their special allowance of 10 shillings per week.⁴⁴⁰ The mayor's report for November 1919 summarised the toll in Fremantle: a total of 274 cases since 11 June, resulting in 60 deaths.⁴⁴¹

Conclusion: Fremantle post-war and recovery

Prime Minister William Hughes announced to the nation in mid-1918 that

we owe it to those who have borne the brunt of battle more than the nation can ever adequately repay. But we can at least make certain that the maimed are not left to struggle on unaided. There must be no room for criticism in the future. The commonwealth government undertakes the full responsibility for the welfare of the returned soldiers.⁴⁴²

This guided so much of the response across the country as a whole, including in Fremantle. The country owed their soldiers a debt; this had to be repaid in terms of safeguarding their return to employment and to health. That thousands of men returned was something to be celebrated. The description of their home-coming in the words of the mayor, William Wray, who had stayed in office only until he could hoist the flags of victory from the town hall, are worth repeating:

I feel, fellow citizens, at the close of this dreadful war and as I lay down my robe of office, that this is a peculiarly fitting time to urge upon ourselves the wisdom of a broad and courageous outlook – that given a fair chance, Australia will become the home of millions of desirable people who feel cramped in other lands and who long for the freedom which we have always enjoyed. With the coming of these people the

⁴³⁸ Meeting of 6 October 1919, Report of Health, Markets and South Beach committee, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Box 53. SRO, Perth

⁴³⁹ Ewers, *The Western Gateway*, p121.

⁴⁴⁰ Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files 1917-1919 Acc: 1377 AN 217/2 Box 53 Item 1. SRO, Perth

⁴⁴¹ Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files 1917-1919 Acc: 1377 AN 217/2 Box 57 Item 4. SRO, Perth

⁴⁴² Premiers Department files, AN 2/2, Acc 1496, Item 133/17, Repatriation, SRO, Perth – including copy of *West Australian Worker*, 24 May 1918, p14.

untold hidden wealth of our country will be developed, and with that development will come an added security and an increased personal comfort to every steady and industrious person.⁴⁴³

Wray's words acknowledged that it was only with the return of the wounded that the knowledge of war was really experienced in Fremantle. The dead, for their part, remained overseas where they fell.⁴⁴⁴

That the people of Fremantle belied that the war was now behind them can be seen in the record of a town meeting, hosted by the newly inaugurated Mayor Montgomery, held on 9 December 1918, 'for the purpose of considering what steps could be taken to bring about the opening of the wharves, to the free access of the public'.⁴⁴⁵ The Returned Soldier's Association rallied to the cause, and the meeting of returned soldiers and citizens emphatically protested 'against the continuation of the blockade on the Fremantle Wharf and called on the Government to have it removed without delay'.⁴⁴⁶ The Council approached Senator Buzacott on the matter, reporting that 'the public meeting was a very full and representative one and it is considered a hardship that freedom is not given to the wharves in Fremantle and it is difficult for local people to understand why any effort should be made to retain the restrictions on their use'.⁴⁴⁷ Being a port town, and having had the wharf closed to them for four years under the War Precautions Act, the reopening of the wharves would provide both the most symbolic and equally most tangible signal of the end of war. Certainly, the people of Fremantle would have appreciated the symbolism at this stage. Having felt the joy of armistice and victory, there remained grave reminders of the experience of war in Fremantle, as in the rest of Australia. In December 1919, in the Perth metropolitan area there were 850 returned soldiers drawing sustenance; men of 'almost every trade and calling' looking for

⁴⁴³ Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, Acc: 1377, An 217/3, Box 57, Item 4, SRO, Perth.

⁴⁴⁴ An additional element to the grief of Australian families, discussed by Andrew Pittaway, was the fact that the government policy had determined that the bodies of those killed should not be returned home. 'Only a few were able to make the long journey to Europe to visit the graves [or memorials] of the fallen'. Pittaway, *Fremantle Anzacs*, p28.

⁴⁴⁵ *West Australian*, 10 December 1918, p4.

⁴⁴⁶ *West Australian*, 23 December 1918, p7.

⁴⁴⁷ Town Clerk to Senator Buzacott, 11 December 1918, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files 1917-1919 Box 57 Item 3. SRO, Perth

employment.⁴⁴⁸ In Fremantle in 1920 the list sent out to the Council from the Returned Maimed and Limbless Men's Association included seven Fremantle men who had lost a limb and were seeking employment in the town.⁴⁴⁹ In addition, the high cost of living continued. Snooks writes that 'the main period of price increase was during and immediately following the First World War, with annual increases reaching double figures in 1918/19 and 1919/20'.⁴⁵⁰ In addition to this, the activity at the harbour remained depressed. Tull reports that 'by 1917-1918 shipping tonnage and cargo throughput had plummeted by about sixty percent'.⁴⁵¹

The mayor's reports at the close of the war and beyond are perhaps the best means of assessing how these external factors affected Fremantle during this time. In November 1917 the mayor, William Wray had declared in his end of year address that 'it is needless for me to remind you that however optimistic a people may be naturally, the stressful times and national anxiety in which we are all experienced, must have a depressing effect even upon municipal administration'.⁴⁵² Coming from a man whose reports and speeches were usually glowingly optimistic, these words reflect the sobering effect of the year 1917 on the town of Fremantle. The financial effect on the administration was that rates outstanding for 1917 were double what they were in the previous year. Two years later, that the town was still struggling to recover financially is reflected in the mayor's annual report for 1919. Mayor Montgomery told his ratepayers that he had 'made every effort to get in a larger percentage of rates, and even went so far as to have distress warrants prepared, but I am glad to say I did not consider it in the best interests of the town to have them executed'. In fact, rather than harass its ratepayers for unpaid rates, the Council stepped in with financial assistance for its overburdened people. 'In order to assist

⁴⁴⁸ *Daily News*, 6 December 1919, p2.

⁴⁴⁹ Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 114, SRO, Perth.

⁴⁵⁰ G.D. Snooks, 'Development in adversity, 1913-1946', in Stannage, T. (ed) *A New History of Western Australia* (Nedlands: UWA Press, 1981) pp 246-247

⁴⁵¹ M. Tull, *A Community Enterprise: The History of the Port of Fremantle 1897 to 1997* (International Maritime Economic History Association, Maritime Studies Research Unit: St John's, Newfoundland, 1997), p160.

⁴⁵² W.E Wray, Mayor Annual Report for 1917, 27 November 1917, Fremantle Municipal Council Files 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 57, Item 4, Mayors Reports, SRO, Perth.

the outside employees and the lower paid officials to meet the demands made upon them by the high cost of living, the Council agreed to grant all those whose weekly wage was £4.10.0 and less, a bonus of 6shillings per week up to January 31st 1920'. However, despite the committed assistance the mayor provided his ratepayers, he was also prepared to scold them at this time. His report mentioned that during the past year the head gardener had 'planted in various streets 251 trees besides 200 in the various reserves' which was intended to add to the beauty of the streets. However, Montgomery complained that the 'general public does not seem to take very much interest in the Council's attempts to beautify the town. Stock is allowed to wander in the streets at night time and on Sundays, when the Council's officers are off duty, and much injury is done thereby'. Within the space of another year, we can see by the mayor's report for 1920 that the town was in much better financial shape. In Frank Gibson's first year as Mayor, he was able to reveal that of the 'total amount of rates levied for the year 99.13% has been received, so that this year a record has been established, not only for this municipality but probably for the State'.⁴⁵³

Recovery, at least in the short term, looked imminent by 1920. As Reece and Pascoe write, Fremantle in postwar years, 'was a community which still looked to the harbour; from any direction the superstructure of ships peeped between buildings and over rooflines'.⁴⁵⁴ No doubt the great majority of people in this harbourside community hoped for a return to conditions as they had known them before the war. But the seeds of instability, both financial and social, sown during those four years could not be easily set aside.

⁴⁵³ Mayor's Annual Report for 1919, W. Montgomery, 25 November 1919, Fremantle Municipal Council Files 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 57, Item 4, Mayors Reports, SRO, Perth.

⁴⁵⁴ Reece, R. and Pascoe R. *A Place of Consequence: A Pictorial History of Fremantle* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1983), p90.

Chapter Three: The Depression Era in Fremantle, 1927 to 1932

Introduction

The Depression era in Fremantle, as in the rest of Western Australia, began in 1927 and then followed 'its unbroken rise to the peak of 1932'.⁴⁵⁵ It was during the period from 1929 to 1932 that the Fremantle City Council experienced the worst of Depression conditions. During the crisis the mayor, Frank Gibson, proved an active civil leader in promoting the welfare of the unemployed. He led public meetings to promote fund raising and spearheaded a committee to involve private citizens in the creation of employment for local men and women. He designed extensive plans for relief works, organized collaboration with other local governments to get them on board, and urged the State government to establish comprehensive plans to assist the unemployed. Gibson's Council was no less vigorous. Apart from the personal commitment to the welfare of the unemployed demonstrated by their service on relief committees, men like Joseph Sleeman and other councillors voted time and again to extend the Council's budget beyond ordinary limits in order to create work for the unemployed.⁴⁵⁶ Relief projects such as those offered in Fremantle and by other local governments gave unemployed workers the opportunity to avoid having to accept charity, whilst waiting for a State Government scheme to aid them in their hour of need.

Hard data regarding the scale of the crisis during the Depression years are difficult to pin down. In Council records, only those being given work were 'counted' so until the 1933 census there is no exact figure for the number of the local unemployed. Nonetheless between the Council records and the Premiers' department records we can obtain a fairly reliable, though never exact, set of numbers for unemployment. Newspapers represent a further source for data on the scale of the crisis. Relief committees published their reports but even these did not

⁴⁵⁵ J.R. Robertson, '1930-39', in F. Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia* (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1974), p416.

⁴⁵⁶ Both Sleeman and Gibson were in the early years of what would become lengthy and historic years of service in their respective positions. In 1929 Sleeman was at the start of what would become thirty-five years as MLA. Gibson was in his fifth year of what would become almost twenty-nine years as Mayor.

take into account the people who, in any particular week or month, had not taken relief for one reason or another: whether because they had found a day's work or simply because they were reluctant to come forward. In 1931, a member of a 'relief committee' established by the Council to assist those in need, reported that '628 orders for urgent relief in the shape of food, meat, etc has [*sic*] been issued to people who stood off until they were in dire want before seeking aid'.⁴⁵⁷ That families did not come forward until they were in absolute need is indisputable; state politicians, trade union representatives and local councillors all regularly commented on this in their correspondence and to the press.

From 1929 to 1931 the State Government essentially left the 'unemployment problem' in the hands of local governments. The best authority on the Depression years in Western Australia, Geoffrey Bolton, writes that conventional thinking on the matter was that 'the State government should involve itself only when it was clear that the task was too great for private charitable organisations and municipal councils'.⁴⁵⁸ Similarly, Graeme Snooks writes that in the early days of the Depression 'the State government preferred to take as small a part in unemployment relief as possible. It was felt that unemployed men should be given work by local authorities on relief works'.⁴⁵⁹ That this was the case is true, but it seems a lenient perspective. The State, struggling with financial difficulty, may have been under reasonable constraints which caused it to defer its involvement in the provision of relief for the unemployed, but on a local level, the practical repercussions of this meant that deprivation was magnified in Fremantle and other local government areas.⁴⁶⁰ Similarly, apart from an initial grant for roadworks in 1929, the Federal government

⁴⁵⁷ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 7 January 1932, p1.

⁴⁵⁸ Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1972), p98.

⁴⁵⁹ G.D. Snooks, *Depression and Recovery in Western Australia 1928/29 – 1938/39* (Perth: U.W.A Press, 1974), p100.

⁴⁶⁰ This thesis does not attempt a detailed examination of the economy of the Depression across Western Australia, except at the point where it touches specifically on Fremantle. For a thorough examination of Depression conditions across the state, see G.D. Snooks, both *Depression and Recovery*, and 'Development in Adversity 1913 to 1946', in C.T. Stannage, (ed.) *A New History of Western Australia* (Nedlands: UWA Press, 1981).

also delayed facing its responsibilities. On the Federal government's slowness to act, Robertson writes that 'though it had obvious political and moral responsibilities, the Commonwealth government had no clear constitutional obligation to participate in unemployment relief'.⁴⁶¹ Taking this point a step further, Fred Alexander accurately describes the position, that due to the Commonwealth government's lack of intervention, 'two whole years were virtually wasted by Australian governments while the hardships caused by the deepening depression were being felt increasingly'.⁴⁶² In Fremantle, as in the rest of the state, the rapid upward trajectory of unemployment from 1929 caused almost immediate crisis in the community, with destitute families who could not provide their children with food, milk or shoes. That both the State and Commonwealth governments should absent themselves at such a time is not a development that can be dismissed lightly.

In Fremantle, the impact of unemployment was particularly felt, partly because the port 'had more than its fair share of unemployed, partly because of hard times among seamen and wharf labourers, but also because it attracted out of work migrants, who tended to drift back to their first port of call, apparently with the vague notion of picking up a ship sometime'.⁴⁶³ Fremantle was also affected in another sense. Alexander writes than in understanding Depression conditions, 'it is important to stress that hardship came first to, and continued to be experience most sharply by, those who had no "fat" upon which to live while times were hard'.⁴⁶⁴ As we have seen in the previous chapters, and as Malcolm Tull also notes, Fremantle as a port town, with its 'general reliance on a large labour force', had a working-class population of casual labourers with very little 'fat' among them.⁴⁶⁵

By 1932, the entire country, 'the so-called 'working man's paradise', as Robertson calls it, was experiencing mass destitution. The states had no other

⁴⁶¹ Robertson, '1930-39', p 418.

⁴⁶² F. Alexander, *Australia since Federation*, 4th edition (West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1980), p90.

⁴⁶³ Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, p108.

⁴⁶⁴ Alexander, *Australia since Federation*, p88.

⁴⁶⁵ Malcolm Tull, 'Blood on the cargo: Cargo-handling and working conditions on the waterfront at Fremantle, 1900-1939', *Labour History*, 52 (1987), p15.

option but to 'devise emergency measures'.⁴⁶⁶ This chapter examines how the Fremantle local government managed the administrative, financial and social crisis created during the Depression era.

Prologue to Depression: 1927-1929

Fremantle in the 1920s considered itself the 'Brighton of western Australia'.⁴⁶⁷ The description had some truth to it. The town was still a distant place from Perth both notionally and geographically. Although linked by the train line, the highway to Fremantle from the city remained little more than an unimproved, gravel country road. As road transport between the two cities was upgraded during the Twenties, however, Fremantle's isolation from Perth slowly but steadily dissolved. 'Special trains and trams brought day trippers in thousands at holiday time, many of them from country areas', writes Reece and Pascoe. With a population in 1928 of 22,340, 'Fremantle was still of the size which made it possible to know just about everyone who was local'.⁴⁶⁸

The 1920s were something of a hey-day. The trauma of the Great War was fading into the past and a sense of optimism dominated West Australian life, particularly in Fremantle where the port was again active after the decline in shipping over the four years of war. A thriving agricultural and wool industry in country Western Australia meant that there was plenty of work on the wharves, to handle 'the dramatic increase in exports of primary products from the south-west and the wheatbelt and the building of the woolstores'.⁴⁶⁹ However, trouble lay just over the horizon. As Bolton writes, 'it was in 1927 that the downswing in the main sections of the Australian economy began'.⁴⁷⁰ By 1928-29, the decade of post-war

⁴⁶⁶ Robertson, '1930-39', p418.

⁴⁶⁷ A phrase used by the Fremantle Businessmen's Association to attract visitors to Fremantle following the Great War: *Fremantle Today*, 14 January 1919.

⁴⁶⁸ Reece and Pascoe, *A Place of Consequence: A Pictorial History of Fremantle* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1983), p97. The figure for population in 1928 is from Ewers, p130.

⁴⁶⁹ Reece and Pascoe, *A Place of Consequence*, p101.

⁴⁷⁰ Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, p55. For further discussion of the financial and employment situation in Western Australia during 1927-28, see Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, and Snooks, *Depression and Recovery in Western Australia*.

contentment had begun to erode in the face of rising unemployment caused by a burgeoning world-wide economic depression.

One of the earliest signs that crisis was already upon the town came in July 1928, when a group of religious leaders, from all the main church groups of the metropolitan area, wrote to the Premier, Phillip Collier, concerned about the 'acute distress that prevails at the present time owing to the unusual amount of unemployment'.⁴⁷¹ The representatives of the religious bodies had met with each other a day earlier and had decided to form a committee to take up the troubling issue. The committee then invited members of the business community, the returned soldiers association, the trades hall and a number of metropolitan municipalities to a meeting at which they could discuss ways to relieve the distress of the unemployed. Recognising that the problem was an economic one, Archbishop Riley of the Church of England told the meeting that 'the utmost that they could achieve would be merely palliative, as it was essentially a matter for the business community'.⁴⁷² However, Riley and his fellow clergy also realised the urgent necessity of providing relief for the unemployed. During the Depression era in Western Australia, this ecumenical approach continued as churches of all beliefs joined with civic bodies to serve the needs of those in distress.

Another warning of the impending crisis, captured in the records, came in September 1928 when Fremantle's Town Clerk, James Shepherd, received a circular letter from the State Government Statistician. The statistician, prompted by the recent decline in employment rates, wrote that 'the question of unemployment is of great importance in Australia at the present time'. He asked Shepherd for the

⁴⁷¹ Preliminary committee to Premier, 26 July 1928, Premier's Department Files, Cons 1496, Item 1928/0709, Conference of representative citizens to discuss unemployment. SRO, Perth. The letter was signed by a number of church leaders, including Anglican Archbishop C.O. Riley and Rabbi D.I. Freedman, whose 'long periods of service to church and community' Crowley mentions in *Australia's Western Third*, (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1960) p237.

⁴⁷² Preliminary committee to Premier, 26 July 1928, Premier's Department Files, Cons 1496, Item 1928/0709, Conference of representative citizens to discuss unemployment. SRO, Perth On the original committee were leaders of the Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Hebrew, Congregational, Churches of Christ and Presbyterian churches, as well as the Salvation Army.

seasonal periods in which 'exceptional temporary employment is experienced in Fremantle' and for the main occupations of that employment.⁴⁷³ Shepherd's reply was consistent with Fremantle's defining role, unchanged for almost a century remained defined, as a harbour town: during the period when wheat and wool were being shipped, employment was fairly plentiful, but as at any port it remained 'subject to fluctuations, and is dependent almost entirely on the amount of shipping which is going on'. As work at the port was managed outside of municipal jurisdiction, Shepherd pointed out that opportunities for 'gauging accurately the questions of both employment and unemployment were limited'.⁴⁷⁴ As Tull explains: 'Lumpers were required on a casual basis, by the hour or by the day. This system of hiring evolved to cope with the wide fluctuations in trade flows which meant that there were days when the demand for labour was high and days when it was low.'⁴⁷⁵ It was hard under such conditions to make firm plans for future spending on unemployment relief and social welfare.

Aside from such statistical enquiries, there were, late in 1928, other indicators in the Council record that the 'fluctuations' in employment were having a detrimental effect on Fremantle's working population. Letters sent by rate-payers to the Council reveal not only many individuals' inability to pay their rates, but point to the wider issue of the unavailability of work which was leading directly their state of duress. The first such letters were sent in July 1928 from workers asking to pay their rates debt in small amounts over time because, as one of them described it, 'things are very slack just at present'.⁴⁷⁶

That unemployment was heading towards a crisis point was undeniable. Western Australia's traditionally strong timber, pearling and pastoral industries all suffered from the international economic decline. This in turn directly affected the

⁴⁷³ Government Statistician to Town Clerk, Fremantle, 10 September 1928, F.M.C. Correspondence, ACC 1377, AN 217/2, Box 75, 1926-1929. SRO, Perth

⁴⁷⁴ Town Clerk, Fremantle, to Government Statistician, 12 September 1928, F.M.C. Correspondence, ACC 1377, AN 217/2, Box 75, 1926-1929. SRO, Perth

⁴⁷⁵ Tull, 'Blood on the cargo', p16.

⁴⁷⁶ W. Book, 75 Stephens St, to Town Clerk, Fremantle, 6 July 1928, Municipal Council Correspondence, ACC 1377, AN 217/2, Box 78, 1926-1929. SRO, Perth

export trade: 'the value of Australia's merchandise exports ... almost halved from 1928-29 to 1931-32'. Wool accounted for nearly one-half and wheat for nearly one-quarter of these exports.⁴⁷⁷ These conditions directly affected port employment rates in Fremantle. Indeed, the entire state was feeling the decline and there were few places to look for employment either in or out of the metropolitan area. By this time, as Alexander aptly notes, 'the writing was on the wall'.⁴⁷⁸

In January 1929 a report tabled by the Health Inspector clearly signalled the significance of Fremantle's unemployment problems. The report was on the derelict state of a tenement 'occupied by the unemployed' in Norfolk Street in Fremantle's West End. The Inspector reported there were from twenty-six to thirty men temporarily sleeping at the tenement. The Inspector had to send a cart to clean up the rubbish from the yards and around the house as there were no bins and the occupants were not able to buy any. Identifying the prevailing social conditions as stemming from the economic downturn, he wrote that 'the whole position is most unsatisfactory, and it seems likely to go on for an indefinite period. Something will have to be done for as long as this state of affairs lasts'. The Council had been aware of the tenement and its residents since the winter of 1928 but had allowed the unemployed men to remain in the premises with the understanding that when the fine weather came some other arrangement was to be made for their accommodation. In January when the Inspector made his report, summer had arrived yet there was still no satisfactory place to ask these thirty men to go. Indicating that the councillors were aware of the scale of the growing problem, Councillor Kerr recommended 'that a deputation from this Council wait upon the Premier with the view to placing before him the acute position with regard to the unemployment in this town'.⁴⁷⁹ It was confirmation of the Council's recognition that unemployment had reached a potentially critical stage.

⁴⁷⁷ Robertson, '1930-39', pp416-417

⁴⁷⁸ Alexander, *Australia since Federation*, p72.

⁴⁷⁹ Council meeting, 14 January 1929, Fremantle Municipal Council, Minute Books 1928-29, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 29, Condemned Houses, Norfolk Street. SRO, Perth

The Depression begins to bite: 1929-1930

According to Geoffrey Bolton, it was in 1927 that men 'started greeting their acquaintances with the query "are you in work?"; by 1930, he notes, 'the question became unnecessary, if not tactless'.⁴⁸⁰ In Fremantle, the town's social organisations testified to the changing conditions. At South Fremantle Football Club many of the players were employed on the wharves; they had, in the past, given up shifts in order to take part in football matches for which the football club fully compensated them. However, now that many had 'joined the ranks of the unemployed', not only were the players reluctant to surrender shifts they desperately needed, the general economy meant that the club was also no longer in a position to offer them compensation.⁴⁸¹ In close proximity to the football club, the Soldiers' Institute on South Terrace had grave concerns about its own members. The secretary of the institute wrote to inform the Town Clerk, James Shepherd, that owing to the number of returned soldiers out of work in Fremantle, it had decided to open an employment bureau at its own offices. The secretary did not hesitate to remind Shepherd of the Council's obligation to returned soldiers and asked, in the case of any municipal projects being planned, that the Council give 'distinct preference' to returned soldiers and their dependents. He further reminded Shepherd that although the Great War had finished in 1918 the Returned Soldiers League still found it necessary 'to continually remind the public "lest they forget" of the extravagant promises made between the years 1914-18'.⁴⁸² A full decade after the war's end, the moral aspects attached to repatriation (as discussed in the previous chapter) were still a sensitive issue. In response, given the Fremantle Council's expressions of a continuing commitment to its local returned soldiers, Shepherd

⁴⁸⁰ Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, p51.

⁴⁸¹ *Daily News*, 2 March 1929, p4.

⁴⁸² G.S. Jane, Secretary, Soldiers Institute, to Town clerk, 18 March 1929, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, ACC 1377, AN 217/2, Item 6, General file 1926-1929. SRO, Perth

replied that the Council would of course give such preference to returned soldiers and their dependents whenever work was available.⁴⁸³

Unfortunately, work was not available. Local papers were peppered with comment on the unemployment situation and its social costs. In June 1929 a contributor wrote to the *Fremantle Advertiser* that 'only those who come directly in contact with the workers realize how acute is the unemployment question'.⁴⁸⁴ Yet the tone of the commentary on the swelling number of unemployed was, at this time, critical and derogatory. The economic depression's first victims were usually perceived as lazy, flawed or morally deficient in some way. In the words of Bolton, 'the conventional thinking of the time was that unemployment over long periods was usually the fault of the unemployed. Nobody need go long out of work, provided he were prepared to accept lower wages in harder times'.⁴⁸⁵ This lack of understanding could be seen, for example, in the comments of the mayor of Albany, Charles Wittenoom. Upset by the number of unemployed in his region coming in from group settlements, who were 'ill-nourished and in general distress', he suggested 'this may be their own fault'.⁴⁸⁶ The *Fremantle Advocate*, published by Fremantle's trading and mercantile community, condemned the number of unemployed 'roaming the streets of Fremantle', adding 'there are more bums or professional beggars in Fremantle today than ever before'. The newspaper urged the police to take immediate action to 'suppress these wastrels, who would be better doing a stretch in Fremantle gaol'.⁴⁸⁷

The town enjoyed a small respite in June when Fremantle was officially invested as a City. On a blustery day on 3 June 1929, the Lieutenant Governor 'sheltered under an umbrella' to make the official proclamation in front of a large crowd. Following the proclamation, the new City Council held its first meeting in a

⁴⁸³ Town Clerk to Secretary, RSL Fremantle District Sub-Branch, 16 April 1929, Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence files, ACC 1377, AN 217/2, Item 6, General file 1926-1929. SRO, Perth

⁴⁸⁴ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 14 June 1929.

⁴⁸⁵ Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, p98.

⁴⁸⁶ Cited in Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, p60.

⁴⁸⁷ *Fremantle Advocate*, 13 June 1929, p1.

festive atmosphere, with the councillors' wives and the lieutenant governor present.⁴⁸⁸ Yet the good feelings engendered by the occasion lasted only two weeks. On 17 June the newly-made Fremantle City Council received its first application from representatives of the local unemployed for financial assistance. In that same week a soup kitchen opened at the Wesley Church to supply one meal per day to twenty-five local unemployed single men who could not get assistance from the State government. The mayor formally announced the opening of the soup kitchen to his councillors, letting them know that the organising committee was made up of most of the leaders from the numerous churches in town, as well as many of the leading business people.⁴⁸⁹

Newspapers were now describing the unemployment situation in Fremantle as 'acute', putting the number of unemployed at over 700.⁴⁹⁰ Residents quickly became used to the sight of lines of men waiting outside the soup kitchen every morning queuing for their meal tickets. The increase in their numbers was noticeable: twenty-three meals were served on the first day, increasing to forty-seven the next day, and then to fifty on the third. Within a fortnight there were 537 meals being served per week (about 77 per day, on average) to 166 unemployed single men at Wesley Hall.⁴⁹¹ By September, in just a six-month period, the number of men being offered food weekly had more than doubled to well over 300.⁴⁹² In order to receive their meal, these unemployed single men were required to produce their State Labour Bureau ticket, which showed that they were registered at the Bureau for work and hence officially unemployed. Only single men were able to receive this meal because they were precluded from receiving the government assistance provided to married men; married men could claim sustenance from the State government and could also receive benefits, such as food parcels, from the

⁴⁸⁸ Ewers, *The Western Gateway*, p130.

⁴⁸⁹ Meeting of 17 June 1929, Fremantle City Council files, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 30, Minute Books 1929. SRO, Perth

⁴⁹⁰ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 14 June 1929, p1, and *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 11 May 1929, p5.

⁴⁹¹ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 21 June 1929, p1.

⁴⁹² *West Australian*, 10 September 1929, p15.

local unemployment fund.⁴⁹³ For the single men, with no money from sustenance to tide them over, the provisions provided by the soup kitchen at least freed them from being reduced to begging for food. The meal tickets were distributed between 10.15am and 11am daily by Fremantle's Member of the Legislative Assembly, Joseph Sleeman, alongside the leader of the Methodist church, Reverend Eric. O Nye. The meals were served at 'twelve-noon by ladies of the various churches'.⁴⁹⁴

Whilst having to take in hand the feeding of the local men—at this early stage it was predominantly men, a marked rise in the unemployment of girls and women would not start until the following year—the Council also had to address the unemployed's request for financial assistance. As the seriousness and scope of the Depression had not yet hit home, there were two types of opinion on the moral, social and fiscal nature of 'charity'. The provision of 'sustenance' for the unemployed was seen as charity, pure and simple, but indicated a detached handout from an unaffected elite. 'Relief' was something earned, given from an understanding that the unemployed had not brought this condition upon themselves and were entitled to assistance from a socially responsible government and community. Yet ultimately, beyond these philosophical differences, the question was a financial one: where was the money for either to come from?

Initially, money and donations were found from the local businesses and charity groups, but these still had to be collected, organised and disbursed. Traditionally, charities such as the Salvation Army or the Ugly Men's Association would step in to help in cases of dire need. Although the Ugly Men's Association was set up in 1917 to provide assistance for war widows and ex-servicemen, during the Depression it extended its aid to general welfare in Fremantle. Like other

⁴⁹³ Bolton writes that the State government regarded its prime responsibility to the unemployed as providing 'sustenance' or 'a dole' for their temporary relief. *A Fine Country to Starve In*, pp98-9.

⁴⁹⁴ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 21 June 1929, p1. Both of these men were highly active in pursuing relief for the unemployed in Fremantle. Nye was on the first church committee of 1928 which was formed to relieve the distress of the unemployed, while a local paper proclaimed that 'no possible avenue for the relief of the serious unemployed problem at the port is being left unexplored by Mr J.B. Sleeman, MLA'. *Westralian Worker* 1 March 1929, p6.

municipalities, local events were held to bring in money and donations: concerts, jumble sales, contests, morning teas, and suchlike. To provide but one example, on 15 July the Coastal, Dock, River and Harbour Works Union gave 'a grand benefit concert in aid of distressed members'.⁴⁹⁵ Personal charity also played a role. One kindly donor was mentioned in the August 1929 Council minutes, when the Town Clerk reported that he had found an anonymous gift of £2 at the door of his office 'as a donation towards the Unemployed Relief Fund'.⁴⁹⁶ However, such public donations and fundraising could never raise sufficient financial resources needed to meet the growing demands of Depression conditions. Clothes, shelter and food had to be provided every week to what was quickly becoming hundreds of unemployed, many of whom had been rendered homeless by their inability to pay rent.

To administer the increasing numbers of residents in distress, the Council made a room available in the Town Hall for the purpose of creating a register of those who were unemployed in Fremantle. Significantly, the register was only open for a fixed period. The limited time 'was to prevent an influx of people from outside, who, knowing there was a little effort to relieve them in Fremantle, would probably come in'.⁴⁹⁷ It starkly revealed the dilemma faced by local authorities in providing relief in a context where no state-wide assistance program existed. Each locality had to fend for itself, and naturally each wished to devote their limited resources to the aid of their own residents. Indeed, it was reported that the Minister for the Unemployed [Jack Scaddan] had suggested to the mayor that 'each district should look after its own unemployed, and that if non-residents arrived in Fremantle needing assistance, they should be sent back to where they last resided'.⁴⁹⁸ The conditions under which single men were approved for relief in Fremantle were strict, though as a sea-port they also allowed for visiting seamen. Applicants were

⁴⁹⁵ *Fremantle Advocate*, 4 July 1929, p4.

⁴⁹⁶ Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 44-45, 1930. SRO, Perth

⁴⁹⁷ Council meeting, 7 April 1930, Fremantle Municipal Council, Minute Books 1928-29, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 29. Unfortunately the original register itself no longer exists within the Council archives. SRO, Perth

⁴⁹⁸ *Daily News*, 1 July 1930.

required to be 'bona fide residents of Fremantle, certified to by a ratepayer of good standing in the community, or by a union secretary as bona fide resident and unemployed and without parents to support him; seamen with satisfactory discharges from last ship or approved by the Marine Superintendents office, Fremantle'.⁴⁹⁹ All other applicants were referred to Perth for relief. This was reflected in the distribution of recipients. Data from August 1930 show that of the single men who were registered, 104 were residents of the Fremantle district, 75 were non-Fremantle unemployed (immigrants and others who were at Fremantle when relief work was started), and 40 were seamen of various nationalities.⁵⁰⁰

The greater issue, however, remained that of allocating responsibility for tackling the crisis as whole. Councillor Farrell noted in July 1929 that several local governing bodies were 'making application to the Government to subsidise them in creating work for the unemployed', and asked: 'is this Council?'⁵⁰¹ The mayor indeed approached the State government for its assistance but the following month received the reply that the 'Premier regrets that the Government is not in a position to subsidise local government bodies for providing work for the unemployed'.⁵⁰² The State was not intending to take up a task, and the associated costs, which it felt rested at the local level.

Without government assistance to provide work, and therefore payment, for the local unemployed, the Council was forced to provide what stop-gap measures it could manage. The first step, taken the week following the opening of the soup kitchen, was to form two committees: one for single unemployed men, the other for married. The purpose of these committees was simple: to garner public support to provide meals, clothing and sleeping accommodation for the unemployed. As the *Advertiser* reported, 'feeding the unemployed has been the question that has absorbed our philanthropic-minded citizens during the past weeks. Now an equally

⁴⁹⁹ *Fremantle Advertiser* 28 January, 1932 p5

⁵⁰⁰ *West Australian*, 16 August 1930, p6.

⁵⁰¹ Meeting of 17 July 1929, Fremantle Municipal Council, Minute Books 1929, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 30. SRO, Perth

⁵⁰² Letter from the Secretary, Premier's Department, 5 August 1929, Fremantle Municipal Council, Minute Books 1929, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 30. SRO, Perth

urgent consideration is that of housing them during the rough weather'.⁵⁰³ In the winter month of July, it would have been inhumane not to find shelter for rapidly growing numbers of destitute residents. Prominent town citizens responded quickly to the committee's influence. H.W. Bland offered sleeping accommodation for forty men in his wool shed off Croke-lane in the West End, whilst 'Messrs C. and H. Locke made a gift of stretchers, materials also being donated from Millars and Gadsens'.⁵⁰⁴ The Immigration Department also supplied 80 blankets and private citizens donated coats and rugs.

That the plight of the unemployed had become increasingly serious was reflected in the press reportage, which revealed a shift in general perception of the character of the Fremantle jobless. The moral compass shifted away from the seeming faults of the unemployed; instead attention was now focused on the responsibility incumbent upon those who *had* to give to those who *had not*. No longer prepared to view their homeless citizens simply as wastrels, the sentiment popularly expressed in local newspapers was the need for generosity to the unfortunate. As one writer put it, 'we who are housed and fed, should be prepared to make some sacrifice to help our less fortunate fellow men'.⁵⁰⁵ Another author, describing the situation of the unemployed as 'pitiable in the extreme', wrote:

They have no place of abode and must suffer the agonies of hell during the bitterly cold nights when force of circumstances makes them endeavour to rest themselves throughout the night under the canopy of heaven. Everyone should give five minutes' thought to this question when comfortably 'bedded down' for the night, and then, surely, something would be done speedily to help better the lot of those who are living under worse conditions than dogs.⁵⁰⁶

Yet despite the drive for public support and the good feelings encouraged by the newspapers, the depression economy meant that there was increasingly little scope for people to give, even among those still in employment. Due to a lack of funds, the mayor was obliged to announce in September that the provision of meals at Wesley

⁵⁰³ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 5 July 1929, p1.

⁵⁰⁴ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 12 July 1929, p5. Later, single men were given sleeping accommodation in the old tramways buildings on Cliff Street.

⁵⁰⁵ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 28 June 1929, p1.

⁵⁰⁶ *Fremantle Advocate*, 4 July 1929, p 4.

Hall would have to close down.⁵⁰⁷ In the few months it had been operational, the committee had provided about 8000 meals and 3000 nights' worth of accommodation, with most of the money found by private subscription. With the closing of the local unemployed fund the Council had now, as a matter of some urgency, to create a more permanent relief system for its many unemployed.

In December 1929, with the level of national unemployment rising rapidly, the Federal government announced a plan for assistance. This did not mean it was yet willing to accept responsibility for guiding the country out of the economic crisis; rather, it was limited to finding some additional funds for the states to use locally to provide extra work. Following a meeting of the state ministries in Canberra to discuss plans for relieving the unemployment crisis, the newly-elected Labor Prime Minister Jack Scullin proposed 'to make available to the states £1,000,000 from the federal aid road fund for the current year'.⁵⁰⁸ The only conditions attached to the grant were that the money must be spent without delay and that it must be spent upon road works.⁵⁰⁹ Western Australia's share of this federal grant was £192,000.⁵¹⁰ Of this, Fremantle was allocated £5,045.⁵¹¹ While it might be conceded that some assistance was better than none, the limited vision and restricted nature of the Federal government's attempt at a solution in fact created an adverse effect in Fremantle. Road-work had traditionally been undertaken by

⁵⁰⁷ Council meeting, 27 September 1929, Fremantle Municipal Council, Minute Books 1928-29, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 29. SRO, Perth

⁵⁰⁸ Robertson wrote of Scullin, who was Prime Minister during the worst years of the Depression, that his 'hair turned white and his face became deeply lined during two years of grappling with a series of crises which would have baffled any man'. Robertson, '1930-1939', p421.

⁵⁰⁹ *Western Mail*, 12 December 1929, p31. The Federal government had since 1924 provided a 'statutory grant of £2,000,000' under the Federal aid road scheme, an arrangement between the states 'to provide good roads for Australia on an ordered plan'. *West Australian*, 30 November 1929, p23.

⁵¹⁰ *West Australian* 20 December 1929 p24

⁵¹¹ Premier's Department Files, Cons 1496, Item 1928/0709, Conference of representative citizens to discuss unemployment. SRO, Perth This approach to tackling unemployment had also been proposed in Fremantle. The mayor in June 1929 had planned to raise a loan of £20,000 from the State government for reconstructing Fremantle's roads. Most of the town's existing roads had been made in the years following the plague a quarter of a century earlier. They had 'served the purpose with fairly reasonable results', the Council agreed, but they hoped now to improve them substantially, changing them from limestone to bitumen. However the inability to muster support for the loan meant the scheme had been shelved. *Fremantle Advocate*, 6 June 1929, p2.

Council employees, as is the case today. By requiring the Council to direct the work on the roads funded by this emergency aid strictly to the unemployed, the Council's existing staff came under threat. The Council was put in a position in which it had to create alternative works for twenty permanent staff of road workers or let them go.⁵¹² A report of the Works Committee was revealing of both the financial dilemma and the commitment to continuing the employment of its staff:

it would be more economical for the Council to retrench approximately half the present number of employees until such time as the making of roads and footpaths in ordinary bitumen is possible next summer, but in view of the urgency of the question of unemployment in Fremantle, [the committee] believe that they can with reasonable economy find work for the present staff (all of whom are married men and residents of the Municipality) during the incoming winter months. The Committee understands that this action will mean the creating of an overdraft but they think such an action would be justified under the circumstances. The Committee further begs to recommend that in view of all the circumstances, this Council could best serve the ratepayers' interests by making the necessary arrangements to continue the services of all men who are at present employed by the Council.⁵¹³

This represented a wider problem, felt across the state. The loss of government jobs occurred not only at the municipal level but, as Crowley writes, 'ordinary government employment also fell, a serious predicament for the State, as the government usually provided work for about one-fifth of the total working population'.⁵¹⁴

The small amount of money allocated by the Federal government in 1929 unsurprisingly proved completely inadequate. With responsibility in practice thus still resting at the local level, Mayor Gibson sought avenues for the relief of his unemployed residents of a more permanent and sustainable nature. In January 1930 the Council established a residence for homeless unemployed single men at the Immigrant's Home on South Terrace. In March 1930 Gibson called a public meeting for the purpose of discussing possible solutions, at which he suggested that the

⁵¹² Town Clerk to Queensland Insurance Co., March 1931, Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 45. SRO, Perth

⁵¹³ Report of Works and Lighting Committee, 7 April 1930, Fremantle City Council files, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 29, Minute Books. SRO, Perth

⁵¹⁴ Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, pp265-266.

Premier be asked to summon a conference of the local governing bodies in the metropolitan area, at which they could discuss the problem of unemployment.⁵¹⁵ Gibson's notion was that local councils might be able to propose a program of works and ask the State government to subsidise them. Fremantle was not alone in putting pressure on the government to provide some sort of scheme of relief. In Perth, throughout March, demonstrations were held with hundreds attending, urging the government to improve their situation. Unfortunately, 'the only responsibility that the State government was prepared to take was the payment of sustenance rates to the unemployed'.⁵¹⁶ This did nothing to expand the pool of work, to reduce the rate of joblessness, or to tackle the broader pressures (such as homelessness or inability to support families) that were placing increasing numbers of people under enormous social stress.

As a result, both the mayor of Fremantle and the Lord Mayor of Perth, along with other municipal leaders, were compelled to establish their own funds, committees and plans for relief works. The Lord Mayor of Perth, in response to the needs of the unemployed in his own city, established a 'citizens relief committee' on 18 March 1930.⁵¹⁷ Likewise the Fremantle City Council formed its own 'Unemployment Relief Committee' in early April, made up of members of the business community, the church community and councillors.⁵¹⁸ This committee worked in combination with the already established single men's and married men's committees. In addition a 'special committee', consisting of one member from each

⁵¹⁵ Council meeting, 17 March 1930, Fremantle Municipal Council, Minute Books 1928-29, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 29. SRO, Perth

⁵¹⁶ Snooks, *Depression and Recovery*, p100.

⁵¹⁷ Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, p76. For a fuller discussion on the unemployment problem in Perth, see pp114-217, and also Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, pp199-240.

⁵¹⁸ The Fremantle Citizens Unemployment Relief Committee contained a 'who's who' of Fremantle's elite. The chief officers were W.H. Kitson, MLC (Honorary Secretary), J.F. Allen (Chairman), and C.J. Locke (Treasurer). The Executive Committee was composed of J.W. Bateman, H. Oxbrow, C. Doig, A. Turton, Dr. Dunkley, A. Chate, and A.J. Lea Holt. The Married Men sub-committee was composed of E.H. Gray MLC, Rev. A.E. Brice, S. Evans, R. Rennie, and Leo Smith. The Single Men sub-committee was composed of Rev. E.H.O. Nye, C.J. Locke, F. Hollis, R. Thornett, and J.B. Sleeman MLA. The Unemployed Girls and Women sub-committee was composed of Rev. F.T. Bowen, Mesdames Kirby and Laidlaw, and Miss Jeffrey.

of the Council's Works, Finance and Ovals committees was formed by the Council 'for the purpose of assisting to relieve the distress in the town caused by unemployment'. The committee was to act in conjunction with the mayor and Town Clerk in promulgating any work or works that would be of benefit to the town, 'such as tree planting, drains and footpaths, etc'.⁵¹⁹ Work created by the Council in this way provided men with cash, rather than a ration ticket. The chance of receiving cash was preferable to most of the unemployed as the money gave them some autonomy in making provision for their family.

As a port town, Fremantle was particularly affected by the decline in trade and shipping, and therefore in employment at the docks. In February 1930 the *Sunday Times* proclaimed that 'one of the pitiful sights at the port just now is the muster of men twice daily at the pick-up station from which hundreds return with no luck'.⁵²⁰ By July a return was submitted showing that '186 men were receiving sustenance plus 96 lumpers'.⁵²¹ To local residents, it was obvious that the increased number of lumpers out of work indicated that the situation on the harbour 'was worse than the usual seasonal unemployment trouble'.⁵²² The precarious nature of work clearly produced substantial emotional stress. One paper reported how 'everybody began to sit up and take notice on Monday when all the lumpers on the wharf were engaged, and scouts were out to pick up additional labour. However, the jubilation was short-lived, as the rush only lasted for about twenty-four hours, and by mid-week, things were as usual'. The newspaper contributor, expressing the hope that work might soon again become plentiful, noted that sympathy with the lumpers was not entirely unselfish; 'everybody knows that they are good spenders in their own town, and when things are slack with them, the effect is felt throughout all business circles'.⁵²³

⁵¹⁹ Fremantle City Council, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 29, Minute Books. SRO, Perth

⁵²⁰ *Sunday Times*, 16 February 1930, p1.

⁵²¹ Fremantle Municipal council files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 44-45, 1930. SRO, Perth

⁵²² *West Australian*, 1 July 1930, p10.

⁵²³ This sentiment was expressed in the *Fremantle Advertiser*, 30 August 1929, p2, but it remained true throughout the Depression era, as it was both before and after.

The longer the State government delayed the establishment of a program of work for the unemployed, the more local families and their civic leaders had to rely on the munificence of their own community. Fortunately at this stage, in mid-1930, this was still being offered with 'very excellent feeling'. Councillor Hollis referred to the charity being offered as a 'Citizens movement', in which councillors, members of parliament and 'the most prominent people of the town' all contributed, plus 'over one thousand employees from Fremantle businesses' who helped by giving weekly subscriptions'. The mayor also praised the great assistance that was being given from the Fremantle people in general and the generosity of two in particular: 'Mr Warner, who has sent round twenty-five gallons of hot soup each morning, which is distributed to the married unemployed, and Messrs Baker Bros who give one hundred pounds of mutton and sausages each week'.⁵²⁴ Yet despite the generosity of its citizens, the simple task of ensuring that the unfortunate in Fremantle had food and shelter was growing too onerous for the limited means of the community. All the private goodwill that existed could not provide sufficient food and accommodation for the number of unemployed in Fremantle. The city needed a wider funding plan.

The frustration of the unemployed themselves was captured in a petition signed by 130 men on 12 September. The petition made reference to the 'low condition' under which they existed, in which the sustenance they were given was only 'just enough for food and in some cases not enough'. Intimating that the higher powers did not understand their plight, the petitioners wrote that 'we find now that it is only the man that is empty that knows what it is to be empty'. They did not want charity or handouts, the men emphasized, but simply to 'that they be given sufficient work to enable them to buy food and pay their rent'.⁵²⁵ The desire to work, to contribute to their own upkeep and that of their families, was a defining sentiment during the years of the Depression. To exemplify this further, in August 1930, despite their

⁵²⁴ Council meeting, 3 June 1930, Fremantle City Council, Minute Books 1928-29, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 29. SRO, Perth

⁵²⁵ Petition from 'the Unemployed', presented to Chairman of the Finance committee, Councillor Shepherd, 12 September 1930, Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 44-45, 1930. SRO, Perth

being 454 single men registered with the committee for food relief, the average attendance at the midday meals was 162. The *West Australian* reported that the 'reason for the comparatively low daily average is that 50 or 60 men each day absent themselves, following a day's work'.⁵²⁶ Once having money in their pocket, they refused to suffer the perceived indignity of a public demonstration of their inability to feed themselves.

The crisis deepens: May-December 1930

In May 1930, a newly-elected Nationalist-Country party coalition State government took the reins with James Mitchell at its head. Despite, the fact that 'by the winter of 1930 Australia now obviously faced a financial depression without parallel in the thirty years' life of the Commonwealth', Mitchell's policy on coming into office was without imagination or perspicacity.⁵²⁷ Apart from the provision of sustenance, he proposed to rely solely on the workings of the Labour Bureau as a solution to the mass of unemployment. Unemployed men were required to register at their local Labour Bureau and were then obliged to take whatever work was offered to them or relinquish their right to sustenance. Unfortunately, the figures that were published in contemporary newspapers reveal that, at this stage, the Labour Bureau was only able to find work for about a quarter of those registering.⁵²⁸ According to Bolton, in March 1930, there were 2,939 unemployed registered in the metropolitan area and 410 in the country. During the next three months the number grew at an increasing rate. Soon 'the number claiming relief strained the resources of the existing machinery'. By June, the total number of unemployed stood at 8,040, of whom 6,580 were in the metropolitan area. The total figure of men, women and children

⁵²⁶ *West Australian*, 20 August 1930, p6.

⁵²⁷ Robertson, '1930-39', p 423.

⁵²⁸ Official Labour Bureau figures for the period are no longer extant in the records, but were published with some frequency during the Depression years in the newspapers. The figure of 'about a quarter' derives from my own review of the published data. Greater precision is not possible, but this represents a reasonable approximate calculation.

dependent on sustenance payments was estimated at around 10,000, about 'five per cent of the entire population of Perth'.⁵²⁹

In Fremantle, single men in distressed circumstances continued to receive one meal a day supplied by the single mens' committee and whilst endeavours were being made to ensure adequate sleeping accommodation, the system remained insufficient to their needs. As a result, men were sleeping rough in both Esplanade parks (in Perth and in Fremantle). These many cases of destitution troubled an anxious population, such as a woman who wrote to the newly elected Premier in the cold, wet month of May 1930:

Fancy a wet night like tonight sleeping there with nothing to lie on, and nothing to cover, it won't bear thinking about. If they were your sons, or my sons, we would be heartbroken at them being brought to that degree of misery, and they are somebody's sons, each one. So please try and get shelter and a meal for them until able to work for it themselves.⁵³⁰

In order to promote their own advancement, the unemployed men of Fremantle formed themselves into a committee. A deputation from this group, supported by their representative and member of the Legislative Assembly, Joseph Sleeman, alongside Fremantle's representative on the Legislative Council, Gilbert Fraser, organized a meeting in May with the new state Minister for Works, John Lindsay, hoping to have more success with him than they had with the previous government. The main aim was to persuade the minister to end the policy of relying upon local charity and stop-gap, locally-funded relief works and instead to create and finance a comprehensive plan for the unemployed. However, the deputation also wanted to represent to the minister the general plight of the jobless. Sleeman told the Minister that there were a large number of people in Fremantle in a very bad way. One of the contributing factors to the general impoverishment was the unemployment bureau's policy of limiting sustenance to a fixed maximum. Financial assistance was only given for up to five children, so that a man with six or more children, as many men had, received no more than the man with five. Several married men had been

⁵²⁹ Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, p99.

⁵³⁰ Premier's Department Files, AN 2/9, Acc 1703, Item 232/30, Alleviation of distress and unemployment. SRO, Perth

turned out of their homes, and a great number more were threatened with eviction, owing to their inability to pay rent. If the government would assist with financing, Fraser and Sleeman argued, the Fremantle Council was eager to create practical and positive solutions to the social emergency they had on their hands. Some of the unemployed were skilled workmen, who would be quite capable of carrying out formation work on roads by contract. The Council also had in mind projects for sewerage extensions and the reconditioning of the harbor. Fraser insisted that would such projects 'absorb the whole of the unemployed in Fremantle, if only the money could be made available'.⁵³¹ Gibson suggested that if the Council were able to use their share of the federal traffic fees, it could provide work for the unemployed. He told the minister 'it was imperative that the council should be able to access as large a proportion of the traffic fees as we are entitled to' to spend locally on roads, 'not only to relieve the unemployed but to provide our ratepayers with good highways'.⁵³²

Frank Gibson's notion that 'unemployment and road-making at the present moment seem almost inseparable' had merit.⁵³³ Yet his attempts to find funding from either federal or state governments came to no avail. To make matters worse, the city treasurer told the Council on 3 June that, owing to their policy of 'maintaining in employment a number of men who in the ordinary course would have been retrenched upon their completion of the council's programme of works', the Council was now in an extremely difficult financial position. Without mincing words, he stated bluntly that 'the whole of the money provided by loan and rates for the current year was exhausted at the end of April'. He regretfully advised that 'it will be impossible for the Council to continue in employment the number of men who are at present employed without providing further finances, either by way of

⁵³¹ Deputation from the Fremantle unemployed to Mr. Lindsay, Minister for Works, 13 May 1930, Premier's Department Files, AN 2/9, Acc 1703, Item 232/30, Alleviation of distress and unemployment. SRO, Perth Present: Mr Sleeman MLA, Mr Frazer MLC, Mr Gollan, Mr Jenkins, Mr Hampton and Mr Boneham.

⁵³² Fremantle City Council Minute Books 1928-29 Acc: 1377 AN 217/2 Item 29 SRO, Perth

⁵³³ Fremantle City Council Minute Books 1928-29 Acc: 1377 AN 217/2 Item 29 SRO, Perth

loans or anticipating an increase in the rates next year'.⁵³⁴ The Fremantle Council was both unable and unwilling to take either of these financial steps. But the dilemma was excruciating. Loans from both State and Federal governments were unavailable and the notion of putting up rates in such difficult times was untenable to the mayor. Yet neither could the Council countenance letting go so many of their own employees into certain unemployment and distress.

Following the meeting, and having received no assurances from Lindsay as Minister of Works, Gibson took his ideas to the next available option, detailing his scheme in a letter to the Minister for the Unemployed, John Scaddan. In his letter, Gibson identified the need for the 'uninterrupted employment' of the men currently receiving sustenance payments in his area and beyond. He identified, much earlier than the State government, the need for a plan that incorporated a vision for the future occupation of the unemployed. Gibson's suggestion was to increase 'the existing sustenance to the unemployed individual by twenty-five or thirty-three and a third per cent, on the condition that they perform work for the local authority equal to such amount at the ruling rate of wage'. In regard to the financial burden on the State government, he suggested a condition could be made on each municipal authority 'that it will refund to the Government the increased difference between the Department's sustenance and the increased subsidy'. In essence, Gibson's scheme outlined a way for local authorities to provide their local unemployed with better living conditions, whilst at the same time allowing the municipality to benefit from the improvements carried out.

Gibson pointed out that Scaddan's department was at that time expending approximately £3,000 per week on sustenance for the unemployed, while simultaneously temporary subsidies were being funded by a number of local governing authorities who were trying to provide what additional work they could for their own local unemployed. Gibson knew that these local subsidies were for limited periods only with no guarantee for the future. So why shouldn't the government, if it were already spending the money on sustenance, simply re-route

⁵³⁴ Council meeting, 3 June 1930, Fremantle City Council, Minute Books 1928-29, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 29. SRO, Perth

the funds to local governments and charge the 'current bank overdraft rate'. In this way 'many local governing bodies would be enabled to utilise a large amount of labour that otherwise would be wasted'. The salient conditions of Gibson's scheme made sense: there were many willing workers eager to do the work, local authorities were not in a financial position to take on the extra expenditure, and the government was already spending the money on sustenance in any case. Why not direct the money into a scheme which would benefit a larger number of people for a longer period of time?⁵³⁵

Gibson wrote that his suggestions were 'forwarded with the idea of assisting the government to solve an unprecedented and difficult problem' but despite his obvious good intentions, neither Scaddan nor his government took the mayor's ideas any further. Scaddan's cursory reply was that he was 'negotiating with the Under Treasurer, who has been unavailable for some time'.⁵³⁶ Still waiting for an outcome in August, the *Sunday Times* revealed that the Fremantle Council, 'nearly at tether's end, is awaiting anxiously the result of negotiations between the minister and the under treasurer over the mayor's relief scheme'.⁵³⁷ Whilst the State government seemingly sat on its hands, conditions in Fremantle continued to decline.

A critical element in the worsening situation was that the limits of private donations and limited local government initiatives were now being reached. A letter to the editor of the *West Australian* decried that 'the many schemes in operation for the relief of the unemployed, while useful at the moment, are of too temporary a nature to do more than minimize the evil for a time. With trade bad and money scarce, the public will not be able to subscribe the funds necessary for an indefinite period'.⁵³⁸ The relief committees were finding it harder and harder to fund their supplementary programs. Yet the need continued to grow; in one week in August,

⁵³⁵ Mayor Gibson to Minister for Unemployed, John Scaddan, 22 July 1930, AN 2/2, Acc 1496, Item 480/30, Loans to Governing Authorities. SRO, Perth

⁵³⁶ Scaddan to Gibson, 29 July 1930, Premier's Department Files, AN 2/2, Acc 1496, Item 480/30, Loans to Governing Authorities. SRO, Perth

⁵³⁷ *Sunday Times*, 17 August 1930, p10.

⁵³⁸ *West Australian*, 16 July 1930, p5.

'following a lean period on the wharves, 1004 parcels were distributed among 502 persons', representing half the labour force on the port at the time.⁵³⁹

Throughout the metropolitan area, numbers of local men left home in an effort to find employment in the country. This rarely worked in their favour, however, as country towns had quickly become as devastated by unemployment as the urban districts. Bolton writes that 'this did not stop a number of city youths from venturing into the outback, where before long they wore out even the large hospitality of the bush, with their cadging for hand-outs of food, their incompetence at any type of bush work, and their tendency to leave gates open, neglect their campfires, and generally ignore the code of the North'.⁵⁴⁰

What had not yet been conveyed to Gibson was the result of the meeting of the Federal Loan Council in early August 1930. Senator Hal Colebatch had attended the meeting on behalf of James Mitchell, who was home with a sick wife.⁵⁴¹ Sir Otto Neimeyer, as representative of the Bank of England, had been invited to the conference by the Prime Minister to help solve Australia's fiscal difficulties and provide a solution to the unemployment problem.⁵⁴² Colebatch telegraphed Mitchell a summary of the meeting and Neimeyer's recommendations. In short, he reported that Neimeyer considered the Australian position so critical that it was essential that Australia should clear up its obligations to the London banks and that the Commonwealth and the States should undertake to strictly balance their budgets, and forestall borrowing money from overseas. Most importantly, Neimeyer

⁵³⁹ *Sunday Times*, 17 August 1930, p10.

⁵⁴⁰ Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, p202.

⁵⁴¹ Premier to Senator Hal Colebatch, 9 August 1930, Premier's Department Files, Cons 1496, Item 1930/0554, Meeting of Loan Council August 1930. SRO, Perth. The Federal Loan Council, established in 1928, controlled and coordinated public borrowing. See Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, p49, and Alexander, *Australia since Federation*, p71.

⁵⁴² Bolton writes that 'the Commonwealth government, dismayed at its inability to raise loans on the London market, invited the Bank of England to send an expert to Australia to inquire into the financial position and outlook and to suggest measures for restoring Australia's credit. The Bank sent a formidably brilliant ex-Treasury official, Sir Otto Neimeyer'. Bolton, *G. A Fine Country to Starve In*, p112. Sir Otto Neimeyer's role has been widely examined in Australian historiography: see Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*; Alexander *Australia since Federation*, pp91-2; and Robertson, '1930-1939', pp423-4.

recommended that any internal loans raised in Australia should be 'restricted to works that within twelve months will prove reproductive'.⁵⁴³ On receiving the telegram Mitchell replied, 'my dear Colebatch, your telegraphed summary of the proceedings of the loan council leaves me stone cold'.⁵⁴⁴ Mitchell had hoped to borrow money from London to bolster the State government's finances during the present crisis, but would now have to review his financial options. Certainly this setback presented a difficulty for the State government in funding unemployment relief. Yet the Fremantle City Council, and other councils throughout the state, were in the midst of depleting their own budgets for the welfare of the unemployed.

Recognising that other local governments were trying to manage the financial and social crisis currently underway, Gibson actively pursued his scheme among his contemporaries in other metropolitan areas. A month after he outlined his ideas to Scaddan, a deputation of representatives of the local government association met the Minister for Unemployment in person. The stated object of the deputation 'was to place before the Minister the suggestions made recently by the mayor of Fremantle, Mr. F.E. Gibson'.⁵⁴⁵ Gibson's energy and even desperation to find a solution to the unemployment problem emerges clearly from the contemporary record. While the surviving documents do not provide any detail on Gibson's links with other municipal authorities, or reveal whether his initiative received further serious attention in Perth, the fact that the State government never pursued his plan tells its own story.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴³ Telegram from Colebatch to Premier Mitchell, 7 August 1930, Premier's Department Files, Cons 1496, Item 1930/0554, Meeting of Loan Council August 1930. SRO, Perth

⁵⁴⁴ Premier to Senator Hal Colebatch, 9 August 1930, Premier's Department Files, Cons 1496, Item 1930/0554, Meeting of Loan Council August 1930. SRO, Perth

⁵⁴⁵ *West Australian*, 8 August 1930, p18.

⁵⁴⁶ At least one of the local municipalities, Claremont, rejected Gibson's scheme. Later in August, the *West Australian* reported that 'the scheme propounded recently by the mayor of Fremantle for the relief of unemployment was discussed by the Claremont municipal council where it was decided not to support the scheme on the ground that the mortgaging of future revenue for the relief of present distress was economically unwise'. *West Australian*, 14 August 1930, p4.

As the number of the unemployed in Western Australia rolled past ten thousand, the State government announced its reviewed sustenance program. The circular letter sent to the local government agencies detailing the scheme was a portrait of a severity. It began by emphasising that unemployment in itself was not a claim for Government sustenance and that a recipient must be in extreme necessity before qualifying. Sustenance was paid in exchange for physical labour and was available only to married men. Only once a man had exhausted all his assets except bare necessities due to unemployment, and thus been reduced to the point of not being able to buy food or meet obligations such as the payment of rent, then and only then could he be considered. The only factor taken into consideration in determining the value of sustenance the recipient would receive was the minimum required to provide food for the man and his family, plus payment of rent and clothing. Even then, clothing was not necessarily taken into consideration, because it was taken as a given that in most cases existing local relief organisations would be 'able to supply wholly or in part, an applicant's requirements for either himself or his family'. In other words, a man claiming sustenance must not only have to prove the level of his desperation to the government agency, but would probably also have to be a supplicant to whatever local charity organisation might be able to provide his family with clothing. The letter reminded the local government agencies that the provision of sustenance was strictly a reaction to necessity and its 'enjoyment' was in no way to be encouraged among the population. The State government stressed that it would provide 'the very minimum' amount of work strictly as a relief measure, to avoid 'the effect of the applicant's not seeking normal employment'.⁵⁴⁷

The State's policy was a harsh imposition on the distressed. The subtext was clear: the unemployed were inherently lazy and untrustworthy, and hence had to be strictly watched as they might well prefer to be unemployed and rely on the government for an income, rather than having to work. Above all, therefore, they must not be cosseted through undue generosity. But evidence from the Council

⁵⁴⁷ Secretary, Unemployment Relief Coordinating Committee, Department of Industries, to Town Clerk, 30 June 1930, Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 44-45, 1930. SRO, Perth

records makes clear that the opposite was in fact the case. Alex McCallum had been Fremantle's elected member of the Legislative Assembly since 1921 and a representative of Fremantle people in one form or another since 1905.⁵⁴⁸ As such he was deeply involved in the personal experience of the unemployed in Fremantle during the Depression years. A letter sent to him sometime later (in 1931) makes clear how the process that was implemented of applying for such relief was perceived by its recipients as 'the source of much humiliation to honest men':

On application for relief, a person has to give a signed statement setting out his exact position, financially and otherwise...I don't object to this procedure but I do emphatically object to having an inspector follow in the wake of such application, and running the rule over one's possessions. The majority of applicants for sustenance have been residents of Fremantle for years. They have clean records. Their only crime is that they are unemployed. Why should they be subjected to the indignity of having an unwanted official inspecting their belongings. There may be a few that would take sustenance fraudulently, but I am sure a house examination is no way to entrap them. I am sure that other methods of verification could be employed that would be less humiliating and more effective.⁵⁴⁹

The implication was clear: the unemployment bureau's oblique suspicion of motives and a wanton denial of the right to privacy overshadowed the State's sustenance policy.

Fremantle authorities could do little to shelter their local applicants from the strict processes. Although the administration of government sustenance was undertaken by local governments, those authorities had no real power to grant sustenance to their own people, having to refer in every particular to the State body. Married men were required to register with the local authority for their district. That local authority had to satisfy itself as to the genuineness of the application and confirm that sustenance was a necessity. The State government's policy stated that 'the strictest enquiry is imperative. Where sustenance is not deemed necessary, the application must be refused at once'. When the local authority had formed the

⁵⁴⁸ On Alexander McCallum see: Wendy Birman, 'Alexander McCallum', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.10 (MUP 1986), pp52-53.

⁵⁴⁹ J. McDonald, Walter Street, South Fremantle, to Mr A. McCallum MLA, undated [1931], Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 45 1931. SRO, Perth

opinion that sustenance was necessary, then the provision of sustenance needed to be approved by an authorised officer of the Outdoor Relief Department in East Perth. To organize this, the local authority had to 'arrange for an authorised officer to attend the local authority to definitely determine what sustenance was to be given, or on the other hand, refused'. When sustenance was finally approved, the local authority could then claim the sustenance amount so long as the applicant was employed by them on relief work. Again, the policy stated that 'until the amount of sustenance has been fixed by the government representative no claim for work given by the local authority will be recognised by the government'.⁵⁵⁰

In other words, it is worth restating, that having ascertained that one of their own citizens was living in absolute poverty and need, the Council was not allowed to provide them with relief until their assessment had been double-checked by the State authorities and the paperwork completed in Perth. The outcome was not only cruel delays but unnecessary intrusion into the lives of their local unemployed. The function of the State government was thus simply to fund the minimum amount of sustenance while contributing nothing to a real solution to the unemployment problem. It was left to the local authorities to provide relief work solutions for those receiving government sustenance, and even then they were exhorted not to encourage further applications, as 'real distress will make its own appeal'.⁵⁵¹

There were further limitations on the government scheme which affected minority groups; in Fremantle this meant mostly returned soldiers and the female unemployed.⁵⁵² A number of the Returned Maimed & Limbless Men's Association were unemployed but, owing to the fact that they were receiving a pension, were

⁵⁵⁰ Secretary, Unemployment Relief Coordinating Committee, Department of Industries, to Town Clerk, 30 June 1930, Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 44-45, 1930, SRO, Perth. The rates of sustenance that would eventually be provided to those who satisfied these strenuous conditions were calculated at the basis of 16 shillings and 9pence per working day of 8 hours.

⁵⁵¹ Secretary, Unemployment Relief Coordinating Committee, Department of Industries, to Town Clerk, 30 June 1930, Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 44-45, 1930, SRO, Perth.

⁵⁵² It is worth noting that recent immigrants to Fremantle were in fact covered by government conditions, whether married or single, under the same regulations as any other local man.

debarred from registering for unemployment relief work. Yet only in cases where a man was permanently and totally incapacitated was a pension large enough to cover the needs of a family. (The Association's 'Men Available for Employment' list contained the names of 40 men from the metropolitan area, 7 of whom were from Fremantle.) It put the Fremantle Council in the very difficult position that if it did employ a pensioned returned soldier on relief work it was not able to them get recompense from the government, as it did in the case of men drawing sustenance.⁵⁵³ The system was simpler for single men. The Town Clerk described the system to his counterpart in Albany in July 1931:

Council has nothing whatever to do with the single men. They are maintained by a Relief Committee, who receive donations from the public and a subsidy from the Government. The men are housed at the Immigrants' Home and are given three meals a day. They do not work, other than routine work in connection with the preparation of their own meals.⁵⁵⁴

The Premier also nominated a Ladies Sub-committee as an adjunct to the State's Unemployment Relief Committee. Based on the assumption that married women were supported by their husbands, this sub-committee looked into the question of how to deal with single women, with its report circulated to all the metropolitan councils. The report recommended that each centre or local committee, in metropolitan areas and in the country, should have at least three women on an investigating committee and that local church, social and other committees should play a supporting role in assisting the committee, such as 'arranging circles to help with clothing'. Although ideally the committee 'thought it desirable that girls remain in their own homes', if this could not be achieved then women and girls were given sustenance 'on the same terms as apply to single men'. This meant that if a place of work was found for them elsewhere, they were compelled to accept it or surrender the right to sustenance. In this way, a number of women and girls were placed in homes in the suburbs of Perth and in country towns, and girls from outside of Fremantle came in to positions in the city. Clergymen and women's organisations in

⁵⁵³ The Returned Maimed & Limbless Men's Association, 905 Hay St, Perth, in Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 44-45, 1930. SRO, Perth

⁵⁵⁴ James Shepherd to Town Clerk, Albany, 12 July 1931 Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 45, 1931, SRO, Perth.

these districts were notified when a woman or girl had been placed away from her home, reporting on the suitability of the establishment and keeping in touch with the women and girls placed there.⁵⁵⁵

On paper, the unemployed were being 'handed over' to the state, yet in Fremantle the burden on the local government did not significantly diminish. Due to the limitations of the State scheme in terms of scope, funding and eligibility, there remained a large number of unemployed in Fremantle who relied on the commitment of the local council to continue its own additional relief works. The Council came up with a detailed plan to employ 350 men. All the men were engaged, as much as possible, in the areas in which they lived. All those residing in South Fremantle were engaged on work improving Sandown Park; the Hilton Park district gang worked on road improvements on South Street; the North Ward gang were given work excavating the footpath in Canning Road between Canning Road and the river; and the Central Ward gang were employed initially on removing rock from the corner of High and Bateman streets. These men were then taken to the tip in Montreal Street to make the site safer by depositing rubble, and afterwards set to work to level and improve a number of other local streets. The North Ward gang, once they completed the footpath at Canning Road for pedestrian traffic, were sent to excavate rock on South Street and to form the roadway there to full width. When they had completed that work, they were 'engaged on removing the rock formation at the corner of Finnerty and East Streets and the rubble from this being deposited on the Reserve adjoining'.⁵⁵⁶ This was intense physical labour and whilst in it is probable that there were experienced labourers among the men employed, there is no guarantee that all were accustomed to hard physical work. Jack Scaddan, putting a positive slant on things, said 'many men were being given hard manual work to

⁵⁵⁵ 'Report by Ladies Sub-committee regarding Relief to Women and Girls', Secretary of Unemployment Relief Coordinating Committee to Town Clerk, 9 July 1930, Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 44-45, 1930. SRO, Perth

⁵⁵⁶ Undated letter Chairman of the Works Committee to Premier's Department, Premier's Department Files AN 2/2 Acc 1496 SRO, Perth

which they were not accustomed, and apart from soreness for a few days, they were doing well'.⁵⁵⁷

The work provided by the Council allowed it to engage a large number of local men, but the Council could not, as Gibson had previously pointed out on more than one occasion, offer any continuity of this work or make any guarantees for the future. The existing plan, as beneficial as it was, could only last for 'the ensuing five months'.⁵⁵⁸ The Council had taken on debt when its own income was significantly reduced. By October, Council funds were depleted. Its bank overdraft at the end of September was £7,865, of which £5836 had been spent on work creation programs.⁵⁵⁹ The Council's financial state was also affected by the decreased earnings of the Fremantle Tramways and Electric Lighting Board, who can best be described as the 'business arm' of the Fremantle City Council. According to Ewers, the balance sheet of the Tramway Board showed that the Council would receive only £284 in income for 1930, compared to an average of £3000 annually for the three previous years. Although the council knew their profits from the company would decrease, Ewers writes that 'the council had expected an income closer to £2000 not £200'.⁵⁶⁰ The size of the Council debt and the lack of income raised once again the possibility that it might have to put to stop relief works if more suitable arrangements could not be made with the State government. The Council wrote to the Relief Committee in Perth that unless its proposal 'regarding the financing of the unemployed is agreed to, the Council may be forced to abandon all work for the unemployed'.⁵⁶¹ Whilst waiting for a response from the State officials, the Council decided to put a stop to any further relief works 'except that which could be performed with no overhead cost other than the wages of the supervisor'. Men employed on all works except Monument Hill were notified that as soon as their

⁵⁵⁷ *West Australian*, 1 July 1930, p10.

⁵⁵⁸ Undated letter Premier's Department files: AN 2/2 Acc 1496. SRO, Perth

⁵⁵⁹ Council meeting, 6 October 1930, Fremantle City Council Minute Books 1928-29, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Item 29. SRO, Perth

⁵⁶⁰ Ewers, *The Western Gateway*, p184.

⁵⁶¹ Town Clerk to Secretary of the Coordinating Relief Committee, Perth, 16 September 1930 Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 45, Vol 1, Unemployed 1930. SRO, Perth

current work was completed no further work could be offered them.⁵⁶² For future works, in order to keep debt to a minimum, payment for the work would be limited 'to the amount received from the Government in rations'.⁵⁶³ Fremantle's position was this: without a comprehensive approach from the State government—and not another temporary stop-gap or highly restricted scheme but a realistic, long-term plan capable of operating for more than a few months—the City Council simply did not have the financial means to take care of its growing numbers of unemployed.

That the breadth of the relief required was financially unsustainable for Fremantle on its own can be seen in the reports of the relief committees. In April 1930 there were 122 single men on the register of the single men's committee, by the end of August the figure had risen to 507 and by October to 544.⁵⁶⁴ By December 1930 a staggering 23,930 hot midday meals had been fed to the unemployed single men, representing an average of 460 per week. Some 6,560 parcels of vegetables and groceries, 4,520 parcels of meat and 650 tonnes of firewood had been distributed to married men. The value of the food was £1,108 and the firewood £1,000. Relief orders for necessitous cases had cost £716.⁵⁶⁵ In an effort to ease the burdens of the community, the relief committee had some success in providing cheaper bread for the unemployed by forming a relationship with the Master Bakers to supply bread at 3½ pence per loaf.⁵⁶⁶ Even this was raised in December when, 'owing to the increase in the price of flour, by which the price for Unemployed Relief Bread is controlled, the price for sustenance workers will be increased to 3¾d. per

⁵⁶² *West Australian*, 7 October 1930, p11.

⁵⁶³ Town Clerk to Secretary of the Coordinating Relief Committee, Perth, 16 September 1930 Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 45, Vol 1, Unemployed 1930, SRO, Perth.

⁵⁶⁴ In October, the single men's committee provided 2121 meals in one week alone. *The Daily News*, 14 October 1930, p2. The paper also revealed the continuing program of relief funding being carried out in Fremantle; on October 24 the Fremantle Cycling Club and the Cycling Association were to hold a cycling carnival with 25 events, and the 'whole of the proceeds will be donated to the relief executive'.

⁵⁶⁵ See the committee reports published in the *West Australian*, 7 October 1930, p11.

⁵⁶⁶ Fremantle City Council correspondence files: AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 44-45, 1930-32, SRO, Perth.

loaf, until further notice'.⁵⁶⁷ The Council sold the coupons for the requisite amount of bread at the reduced price and the coupons were honoured by all bakers in Fremantle.

For all these costs, the committees still relied almost exclusively on the generosity of the people of Fremantle. Nonetheless, private donation simply could not cover the cost of all the needed relief areas. These included 'sickness, maternity, housing, clothing, warmth, schooling, infant health, pre-natal and anti-natal help and all the ramifications of the well-being of our citizens'.⁵⁶⁸ In the last weeks of 1930 the Fremantle sustenance workers welfare association (a reformation of the earlier committee of unemployed workers) asked the Council for two weeks of full time work before Christmas 'which would enable them to better their lot and give a few comforts to their children at Christmas time'.⁵⁶⁹ The two weeks' work was granted, a response typical of the commitment long demonstrated by the mayor and Council to the welfare of their local unemployed despite the continual diminishment of its resources. On another occasion the council employed 'two of the Government sustenance workers who live in the vicinity of Hilton Park, to water the trees'.⁵⁷⁰ Later, in 1932 the council created six weeks work for the unemployed, cleaning up the hospital grounds.⁵⁷¹ The Fremantle businessmen's association also took the initiative by forming a committee for 'absorbing the unemployed on works of a reproductive nature'.⁵⁷² They asked for a member of the Council to participate and once again leading from the front, Frank Gibson offered to join the committee himself.

⁵⁶⁷ Master Baker's Industrial Union of Employers to Town Clerk, 2 December 1931, Fremantle City Council correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 44-45, 1930-32, SRO, Perth.

⁵⁶⁸ Premier's department files, AN 2/9, Acc 1703, 232/30, Alleviation of distress and unemployment. SRO, Perth

⁵⁶⁹ Fremantle Sustenance Workers Welfare Association to Town Clerk, 20 November 1930, Fremantle Correspondence files, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 44-45, Unemployed, 1930. SRO, Perth

⁵⁷⁰ Memo to Head Gardener, 20 January 1931, AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 45, 1931. SRO, Perth

⁵⁷¹ Fremantle correspondence files 19 January, 1932 AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1931-32 SRO, Perth

⁵⁷² Fremantle correspondence files AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1931-32 SRO, Perth

But the underlying problem of resources could not be overcome by mere goodwill or personal commitment. Already by the end of January 1931, the *Fremantle Advertiser* reported that ‘the Committee now finds itself without funds. Distress in the district is growing. The need for help is urgent’. A public meeting was held to discuss the problem and the mayor and all the relief committee members were present, in order to listen to any solutions the public might be able to offer. Reverend Nye told the meeting that the funds of both single and married men’s committees were now exhausted. The chairman of the married men’s committee, Edmund Gray, told the meeting his committee had spent £308/12/6 providing milk for children, expectant mothers and the sick but ‘when the schools opened next week there would be no money to continue the supply of milk to the little ones’. The mayor confirmed that the ‘unemployed problem was an acute one, and the condition of these people during the winter months is unthinkable’. The *Fremantle Advertiser* concluded that ‘the question of unemployment has become the Council’s greatest anxiety’.⁵⁷³

Facing despair: January to December 1931

The year of 1931 brought increasing challenges to both Fremantle and the State. Initially, at the Fremantle Council, some small administrative changes were required.⁵⁷⁴ In February the mayor and councillors decided that the single men who had to visit Town Hall every morning for the distribution of meal tickets ‘should be removed to a more commodious and less conspicuous locality’. For this purpose, the

⁵⁷³ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 29 January 1931, p1.

⁵⁷⁴ Since, according to the new regulations, the local authority had to interview every applicant for sustenance, it had become difficult to conduct the ordinary affairs of business in the Town Hall. The gatherings of unemployed men had clearly become something of a chaotic event. From February the following poster was pinned up in the building at moments of the highest congestion: ‘Persons frequenting the Town Hall for the purpose of interviewing officials of the Unemployed Relief Committee are earnestly requested not to stand in the main entrance or sit on the stairways. The waiting place is in the triangle and sustenance will only be granted to those who refrain from committing any nuisance by way of spitting, depositing cigarette butts on the floor, or using profane or obscene language while waiting’. (Memo, Town Clerk to the Chairman of the Executive of Unemployed Relief Committee, Fremantle Fremantle Correspondence files: AN 217/3, Acc 1377, Item 45, 1931, SRO, Perth.) Yet the newspapers did not rail against the general behavior of the unemployed in Fremantle, so perhaps the general sloppy behavior criticized by the Council was simply the product of the lengthy waiting periods required by a deeply unpopular administrative process.

mayor made arrangements with the Ugly Men's Association for a separate and permanent position in Uglieland, opposite the railway station. In all likelihood the councillors were hoping to reduce the visual impact of this proliferation of unemployed men in Fremantle's civic centre and perhaps apply some degree of normality to this change in the city's social environment. However they also expressed the feeling that 'the men who receive the meal tickets would prefer headquarters which are less public than the Town Hall'.⁵⁷⁵ This decision was less about moral opprobrium than recognition that despite the universality of the unemployment problem, there remained a sense of personal shame to the recipients in having to line up for a ration ticket. An additional burden on the single men specifically was that, when employment was available, preference was given in all cases to men who had families to feed. With so many men out of work and only a limited number of positions to be filled, this inequity was the cause of serious deprivation among the single men of Fremantle, whose numbers continue to grow. As the depression conditions continued, the *Fremantle Advocate* printed the following anecdotal story. The truth of the report is quite unlikely; what is more credible is the underlying dim view of the state system of unemployment relief held by the paper, and by the people of Fremantle:

An official of the Labour Bureau discussing the unemployment position, expressed the view that hundreds of single men had been forced into matrimony in order that they might not starve. On numerous occasions, he stated, men, single and unattached, have applied for work at the bureau only to be told that work or sustenance was only given to married men. 'Oh well' hundreds of them have said, 'I'll soon fix that - marriage for me'. And sure enough within a week or so they return to register as married men.⁵⁷⁶

The Council could with some justice feel that it had done all it could to protect its own workers at least. In March 1931 a letter to its insurers reveals that the Council had only twenty permanent employees who qualified to be covered by

⁵⁷⁵ Town Clerk to Chairman of the Executive of Unemployed Relief Committee, 3 February, 1931 Fremantle Fremantle Correspondence files: AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1931. SRO, Perth

⁵⁷⁶ *Fremantle Advocate*, 20 April 1933, p1.

their insurance policy. All its other workers were government sustained workers, of which they employed 325 and these were outside of the policy guidelines.⁵⁷⁷

Times were grim. Throughout the year the dire condition of Fremantle's men, women and children was one of the main topics in the press and these articles provide the best source for relief figures at the time. The newspapers reveal that in February 1931 the relief committees had 700 families under their care yet had had no contributions of clothing for three months and many needy cases had been turned away.⁵⁷⁸ A month later, registered single men in Fremantle numbered 494. By mid-April there were 225 destitute single men on the streets. The physical presence of suffering was inescapable in Fremantle, the city was burdened by need. Furthermore, the calls for assistance in the newspapers were staggering. For example, in April 1931 Fremantle people were told that 3,000 pairs of boots and shoes were needed for all ages, from children to adults.⁵⁷⁹ Efforts to find work and goods for the suffering population were also driven by the changing weather. With winter approaching, a scheme for the provision of firewood was established under which government sustenance workers 'hewed the wood'. In July, there were 400 families in Fremantle being given this assistance. At the same time, '200 families which included children under twelve months' were supplied every week with milk and a staggering 1000 families in Fremantle were being helped by the local fund. Yet the most salient part in this whole exercise was the appalling lack of funding available for this staggering number of needy people. The July newspapers reported that 'applications for relief were twice the number they had been last year but the available funds were fifty per cent less'.⁵⁸⁰ The balance among the local people, as more of them joined the ranks of those needing help rather than providing it, became more and more unequal. Yet the financial burden continued at this stage to

⁵⁷⁷ Town Clerk to Queensland Insurance Co., 17 March 1931, Fremantle Correspondence files: AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1931. SRO, Perth

⁵⁷⁸ There were also 193 unmarried men who, as they were able to live at home with their parents, were simply on ration tickets. *The Daily News*, 6 February 1931, p3.

⁵⁷⁹ The Rev. Nye appealed to the public at this stage for 'fifty more pairs of warm blankets' which were urgently required for the destitute men *Fremantle Advertiser*, 15 April 1931.

⁵⁸⁰ *The Daily News*, 4 July 1931, p10.

be borne only on a local level. Thankfully, the State government was now taking some long overdue steps to remedy the situation.

In July 1931 Premier Mitchell joined the other State premiers in Melbourne for the Premiers' Conference. In advance of the conference the Prime Minister, Jack Scullin, wrote to each of the Premiers:

As it is necessary that Governments undertake works to provide employment I suggest each Government bring to the Conference particulars of Government works that could be undertaken at once, a list of similar works which could be undertaken by Local Government authorities or State instrumentalities is also desired.⁵⁸¹

As a result of the conference, the Premier announced that 'those people currently being paid sustenance relief, 16,089 in number, would be transferred to public works projects as quickly as possible'.⁵⁸² On 28 September, the Minister for Works announced a government scheme through which the State government intended to provide 6000 men with part-time work within a month, and eventually provide work for 10,000 men. The Minister explained that the Commonwealth Bank had pledged to advance money to the States 'for relief works of a reproductive character', and the share to Western Australia was calculated at £1,100,000. The Premier had committed to spending at least eighty per cent of that money on wages, 'and as much as possible of the remainder on materials of local origin, for the stimulation of local industries and the further relief of unemployment'. The idea was to spread the available money over the greatest number of men possible. For Fremantle, the importance of the scheme was the inclusion of the 'reconditioning of the north wharf at Fremantle' among the projected works. The government intended to spend around £50,000 on the improvements to the north wharf on which 'local timber and cement' would be used whilst '150 married men would be employed upon the work'.⁵⁸³

Among other projected works, the government planned to employ 4,240 men on work on metropolitan water supplies whilst sewerage and drainage would

⁵⁸¹ Telegram from J. Scullin, Prime Minister, to Premier, 25 July 1931, Perth Mines Department AN 350 Item No. 1409 1931. SRO, Perth

⁵⁸² Snooks, 'Development in Adversity', p265.

⁵⁸³ *West Australian*, 29 September 1931, p1.

absorb '790 married men in various metropolitan and suburban areas'. In Fremantle this included sewerage work on the South Street drain. In the introduction of this particular project, although there is no correspondence on the subject extent in the archive, the mayor must have had the ear of the Minister for works, for this particular drain had been on the mayor's 'to do' list since 1929.⁵⁸⁴

On the down side, due to the new unemployment bureau policy, the Council could no longer choose the labourers for sustenance work from within the ranks of its own unemployed; instead labour was drawn from the main office of the unemployment bureau. This meant of course, that men from outside of Fremantle could be brought in to work on local projects. The system also meant that men from Fremantle were chosen for work outside their own town. The local men of Fremantle objected to this arrangement, feeling that they should be given preferred access to local work. The Town Clerk wrote to the Minister for Works that 'numerous applicants have represented to me their desire to obtain work on the South Street drain' but had not been allocated to this job.⁵⁸⁵ At this time there were 2,852 men distributed on sustenance work throughout the metropolitan area but only eighty-eight men on the Fremantle sewerage work, hence the competition for placement among the local men.⁵⁸⁶ For most Fremantle men, their desire to obtain work closer to home, and have some control over their working lives, was paramount. James Shepherd wrote to the Secretary of the Unemployed Coordinating Relief Committee that 'the men who are on sustenance in Fremantle and who are working for the Council have organised themselves into a very efficient body, with a president, secretary and a reliable committee'.⁵⁸⁷ That committee wrote to the Town Clerk, 'it is the wish of the majority of men working on sustenance to be allowed to work locally on South Street storm-water drains, making and forming footpaths,

⁵⁸⁴ Mayor's Annual Report 1929, 25 November 1929. SRO, Perth

⁵⁸⁵ Town Clerk to Minister for Works, May 1931, Fremantle Correspondence files: AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1931. SRO, Perth

⁵⁸⁶ Fremantle Correspondence files: AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1931 SRO, Perth

⁵⁸⁷ Town Clerk to Secretary of the Unemployment Relief Office, Perth, 11 May 1931, Fremantle Correspondence files: AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1931. SRO, Perth

road making and South Beach foreshore. We claim as rate payers that we should have the right to improve our local surroundings'.⁵⁸⁸

Once again, in a case of a Fremantle Town Clerk butting heads with the supervisory authority in Perth, James Shepherd wrote to the unemployment relief office in support of his local men. Shepherd suggested to the Perth committee that the men, who had the support of the Council, could be given a little more autonomy within the sustenance program in organising the pick-up for the unemployed workers. The Secretary of the Unemployment Relief Office in Perth replied denying the request and reminding him that 'the Supervisor will be making the selections according to the usual criteria; preference to be given to: men longest out of employment; experienced sewerage workers; men on sustenance'.⁵⁸⁹ The regulations regarding the pick-up changed as numbers of unemployed increased. Always the priority was the employment of men with families to feed. The hours a man could work in turn depended on how many children he had to support, which was set at 7 shillings for each child. Thus a man earning 35 shillings per week had to have at least five children.⁵⁹⁰ This new arrangement, whilst understandably prioritising men with large families, put further strain on local men who did not fit the criteria. With over 800 unemployed men in Fremantle and that number increasing, these limitations on work in their own city frustrated Fremantle's

⁵⁸⁸ Letter to the Chairman, Fremantle Works Committee, signed by E. Short (for) President and Paul H. Stratton, Secretary, 13 October 1931, Fremantle Correspondence files: AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1931 SRO, Perth

⁵⁸⁹ Secretary of the Unemployment Relief Office, Perth to Town Clerk, Fremantle Correspondence files: AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1931 SRO, Perth

⁵⁹⁰ The desperate circumstances of these men can be seen in the example of Worsley Hymus, 83 Solomon Street. On 23 October 1930, Council records note that his relief 'has been increased by 7 shillings per week, on account of additional child'. Two months later, on 24 December 1930, a letter from the Town Clerk noted that, while engaged by the Council as a Government sustained worker, he had suffered from a stroke and was in hospital. The sad end to this story came with his death less than two months later, in February 1931, leaving his wife, newborn child and eight other children to face the worst years of the Depression alone. See: Fremantle Correspondence files: AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 44-45 1930 and Item 45 1931. SRO, Perth

men.⁵⁹¹ On their behalf the Town Clerk wrote again to the Minister for Works, complaining that 'in the allocation of Government work in the metropolitan area, work in the Fremantle district was not in proportion to the number of unemployed'. Shepherd suggested to the Minister that more works should be created in Fremantle which would enable a proportionate number of married men to earn their sustenance in the district in which they lived, at a time when the Council was 'besieged with requests for work by men on sustenance, so that they may receive cash instead of ration tickets'.⁵⁹²

The amount of the sustenance payment, deliberately set by the State at a minimum, contributed significantly to the distress among the unemployed, even those receiving relief work. The Secretary of the Trades Hall, James Burgess, wrote directly to the Premier protesting the deprivation that hundreds of men and their families belonging to the Trades Hall were experiencing. Burgess pleaded to the Premier to increase the sustenance allowance per family unit, because the amount being received was not sufficient to provide proper food, especially for children. In the clearest terms, he added a dire warning: 'there is no doubt that the evil effects of malnutrition are quite apparent'.⁵⁹³ This was no exaggeration or cry of false alarm. As Bolton writes, in Fremantle there were now 'cases of scurvy and rickets, diseases previously almost unknown in Australian hospitals'.⁵⁹⁴ Sadly, but perhaps unsurprisingly considering the vast sums currently being spent on sustenance, no addition was made to the allowance. Trying to do what he could on a local level, in

⁵⁹¹ Premier's Department Files AN 2/9 Acc 1703 Item 232/30 SRO, Perth

⁵⁹² Town Clerk to the Minister for Unemployment, 20 October 1931, Fremantle Correspondence files: AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1931. SRO, Perth. Census data from 1933 suggests that the Fremantle men were correct in their representation that their employment was disproportionate to their unemployment. The census figures reveal that 3,203 Fremantle men were then receiving 'no income', out of a total of 13,320 unemployed males in the metropolitan region of Western Australia. Thus Fremantle unemployed comprised almost one quarter of the entire metropolitan area, yet were provided with far less than a quarter of the sustenance work.

⁵⁹³ Premiers Department files, AN 2/9, Acc 1703, 232/30, Alleviation of distress and unemployment, SRO, Perth.

⁵⁹⁴ Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, p 121.

November 1931 Gibson boasted that 'Fremantle has employed every man who resided in the district who has been sent along by the Department and given them the privilege of drawing cash instead of rations, which is very much appreciated by the men'.⁵⁹⁵ His boast was not insignificant considering the number of local unemployed men in Fremantle.⁵⁹⁶ By December 1931 the 'number of families unemployed in the Fremantle district had risen to 1300 'representing around 5,200 men, women and children'.⁵⁹⁷ In other words, by December 1931 about a quarter of the population of Fremantle was unemployed and in distress.⁵⁹⁸

In an effort to disentangle themselves from unemployment at home, some Fremantle men looked toward the sustenance schemes which were available in the country. The largest of the government schemes were the Harvey drainage scheme and the Collie irrigation scheme.⁵⁹⁹ When the Harvey river diversion works were first introduced, two thousand single men were engaged within a month.⁶⁰⁰ Some men preferred work on these schemes rather than the sustenance work available for the Council because the country work tended to be of longer duration, plus for country work the rate of pay was £1 per week above sustenance.⁶⁰¹ The living was a little rough, the men were required to take blankets and cooking utensils, but it placed their families in a better position. Not only was the pay and duration of the

⁵⁹⁵ Town Clerk on behalf of the mayor to Jack Scadden, Minister for Unemployment, 30 November 1931, Fremantle Correspondence files: AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1931. SRO, Perth. The mayor also asked the Minister if he might grant these men a day's extra work prior to Christmas and 'that possibly some concession might be granted, by way of a Christmas box, to those men who have faithfully observed the Government's regulations and performed some work in lieu of rations'.

⁵⁹⁶ By the end of 1931, the total number of meals for the year supplied at the Immigrant's Home to single men had been 202,754 and the single women's committee had provided parcels of clothing to 1,309 children and 346 women, plus rent had been paid for 59 women and girls. *Fremantle Advertiser*, 28 January 1932, p5.

⁵⁹⁷ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 7 January 1932, p1.

⁵⁹⁸ Throughout the year two local dentists, Messrs Braham Bros. and Mr. P. Bennett, had 'acted as honorary dentists to the committee and 250 men, women and children received free dental treatment'. *Fremantle Advertiser*, 7 January 1932, p1.

⁵⁹⁹ For a fuller discussion of these schemes, see Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*.

⁶⁰⁰ *West Australian*, 29 September 1931, p2.

⁶⁰¹ Fremantle Correspondence files AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1934. SRO, Perth

work an improvement, but if husbands were picked up for jobs outside of town, their wives would be supplied with a ration order. In January 1932, 'ninety men left Fremantle for the Government works at Harvey'.⁶⁰² Men were also sent to many of the other country projects such as one week when thirty-four men from Fremantle were sent to Goomalling 'and another twenty-eight men to a roads project at Brunswick Junction'.⁶⁰³ At this time an average of four-hundred men were employed each week by the Council on sustenance work. In early 1932 'there was a slight amelioration owing to seasonal activities at the port and some local men being employed on state government public works' and the number of families considered to be in distress in Fremantle was reduced to 1,018.⁶⁰⁴

Finding relief: gambling and the lottery

The penury and uncertainty throughout the state caused social as well as financial problems. Unable or unwilling to rely solely on charity to relieve their distress, many of the unemployed took to gambling as a way of taking control of their own destiny. Many also gambled for amusement or distraction. Although local football matches were free for the unemployed after half time, most other entertainments were outside the budget of the unemployed, 'the small sixpence fee to go to the pictures was more often than not beyond the reach of most'.⁶⁰⁵ Gambling offered excitement and an escape from ennui. So, understandably, gambling became a popular method of escapism, and generally took one of three forms: starting-price betting, newspaper competitions, or the purchase of illegal lottery tickets.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰² *Fremantle Advertiser*, 28 January 1932, p4.

⁶⁰³ Department of Labour files AN 25/9 ACC 1772 Item 7/31 Relief Work SRO, Perth

⁶⁰⁴ The newspaper also reported later that, for 1931, footwear and clothing had been needed for between '1,000 to 1,500 heads of families, for which the Committee never had enough funds, providing a source of keen embarrassment to both the unemployed and the committee'. *Fremantle Advertiser*, 7 January 1932, p1.

⁶⁰⁵ Bolton, *A fine country to starve in*, p192.

⁶⁰⁶ In 1901 the newly federated government had placed a postal ban on the proprietors of the sweeps and their agents. This meant that a letter addressed to Tattersalls would not be delivered, and in an effort to eliminate the practice altogether, the postal authorities black listed any person believed to be an agent of Tatts. But it was a difficult thing to police and all over Australia people managed to find residents in Hobart who would buy tickets on a small commission and post

For Fremantle men there was a popular tradition of betting with a starting-price bookmaker, more commonly known as an S.P. bookie, with whom the unemployed could put on bets for as little as a shilling.⁶⁰⁷ Newspapers from 1927 to 1930 contain numerous reports of the prosecutions at Fremantle police court for street betting, obstructing the footpath (which was due to street betting) and the keeping of betting houses or common gaming houses. Market Street was particularly disreputable. In the defence of one of the men charged with keeping a betting house in Market Street, his lawyer told the court that 'Fremantle people must have their bets, the sooner these houses are licensed the better for all'.⁶⁰⁸ In defence of his own electorate, the member for Fremantle, Joseph Sleeman, argued that gambling was seen as the workingman's evil and therefore 'the law was invoked rather heavy-handedly in Fremantle'. He told his fellow assembly-men that 'a man can go to the racecourse and bet as much as he likes. If another man takes up a position on the other side of the river and desires to have a shilling bet, the police become active and he is put inside'.⁶⁰⁹

Into this environment, with the costs of administering sustenance and relief being, as Premier Mitchell stated, 'quite literally unremunerative', the Minister for Police, Jack Scaddan, announced that it was his intention to introduce during the next session of Parliament a Bill to legalise State Lotteries.⁶¹⁰ Scaddan introduced the Lotteries Control Bill to the Legislative Assembly of the West Australian parliament on 28 September 1932 but had established the viability of a State-run

them in plain envelopes to the persons designated in the order. Bolton writes: 'Thus the cryptic announcement "I communicate with Hobart" announced that the person advertising could obtain Tattersall's tickets for anyone willing to send the money plus a few pence for commission'. Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, p252. In Fremantle, one of the popular businesses was Jim Balfour's who was also a 'Turf commission agent', so he catered for two of the three 'vices'.

⁶⁰⁷ For more on S.P. bookies and their role in Western Australia and the Depression, see Charlie Fox, 'Bookies, Punters and Parasites', in *Studies in Western Australian History*, 11 (June 1990).

⁶⁰⁸ *Daily News*, 18 February 1929, p6.

⁶⁰⁹ W.A. Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 88-89, 15 November 1932, p 2523. SRO, Perth

⁶¹⁰ Premier's Department Files AN 2/9 Acc 1703 232/30, SRO, Perth, and *West Australian*, 28 June 1932, p12.

lottery eighteen months before. In June 1931, Scaddan had initiated a State-run Charities Consultation Committee. This committee ran 'consultations', an alternative term for 'lotteries', profits of which were distributed entirely to charities, once the expenses and prizes had been taken from the ticket sales. By the time he introduced the Bill to the Legislative Assembly in September 1932, the trial Charities Consultations had received subscriptions of a little over £68,000.⁶¹¹ This represented an enormous figure, capable of doing a great amount for the welfare of Western Australians. Scaddan tried to convince parliament that it was pragmatic to legalise lotteries:

Were it not that it is hoped to provide benefits for these people I would not be introducing the Bill. I am not bringing it down to enable people to indulge in gambling. I want that to be distinctly understood. There are people who are struggling and finding it difficult to get the wherewithal to live. Many of these too, are not responsible for the condition in which they find themselves. If institutions cannot get money in any other way I am not prepared to take the backwash from a conscientious section of the community and be roundly abused for bringing down a method that savours of stepping into the breach.⁶¹²

Despite the success of Scaddan's trial lottery, the introduction of the Bill caused an enormous amount of controversy among the public and politicians alike. The problem with gambling, for those objecting to it, was that it was an unethical way of obtaining prosperity. Gambling contravened the Protestant work ethic 'because it broke the link between work, merit and reward'; indulgence in gambling equated to moral and spiritual danger.⁶¹³ One of the fundamental pretexts for the Lotteries Bill was its contribution to the social good; but the social reformers (which included the very church group which combined to ease the distress of the unemployed in 1928) insisted that money earned by gambling was inherently immoral.⁶¹⁴ At one of the many rallies in opposition to the Lotteries Bill, a visitor from Belfast, the Rev. A. Wylie, told his audience that 'the appeal for gambling on the

⁶¹¹ Figures cited by Scaddan, 6 October 1932, W.A Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 88-89, pp1029-1031. SRO, Perth.

⁶¹² W.A Parliamentary Debates Vol. 88-89 6 October, 1932 p 1029. SRO, Perth

⁶¹³ Fox, 'Bookies, Punters and Parasites', p62.

⁶¹⁴ *West Australian*, 15 September 1932, p14.

ground of the need for charity is wrong and rotten'.⁶¹⁵ Moral arguments against gambling also dominated debate of the Bill in the Legislative Assembly. The Leader of the Opposition, Phillip Collier, declared that 'it is not the province of Parliament to cater for the weaknesses of the people, but to legislate in such a way as to diminish the opportunities of the people to give way to the weaknesses inherent in them'. Collier argued that the traditional method of voluntary giving would sustain charities and he refused to accept that a lottery was a proper method to fund charitable organisations. Scaddan asked Collier and his supporters to find a better solution. He argued that the people were already overburdened with taxation; a State lottery would provide a method by which people could voluntarily tax themselves. The benefit of that kind of taxation, argued Scaddan, was that there was no compulsion about it. No one need subscribe to a sweep or a lottery who objected to paying taxation by that means. The moment a person objected to that form of taxation he ceased to pay the tax, because he no longer contributed to the lottery. That, according to Scaddan, was a much more equitable way of gaining the necessary funds for charity.⁶¹⁶

Scaddan prevailed and on 2 February 1933 the Lotteries Control Act was proclaimed. In the light of all the public speculation and criticism the Government took some care in the choice of the four members of the inaugural Charities Consultation, soon to be everywhere known as the Lotteries Commission. In a testament to his commitment to community welfare, Frank Gibson was nominated to the four-man board. On 23 March 1933 the *West Australian* published an article announcing the fruits of the very first lottery draw, drawn on 21 March, which was described as 'a vindication of the government's policy of controlling lotteries to serve charitable ends. The allocation covers a very wide field of deserving organisations and institutions, the majority of which benefited by a substantial sum'.⁶¹⁷ In Fremantle, the Lotteries Commission funds found their way to numerous

⁶¹⁵ *West Australian*, 13 September 1932, p10.

⁶¹⁶ W.A Parliamentary Debates Vol. 88-89, 15 November 1932, 1826-27 SRO, Perth

⁶¹⁷ *West Australian*, 23 March 1933, p14.

charities, including the local unemployment fund, at a time when they were most needed.⁶¹⁸

The Council confronts its finances, 1932-1933

In January 1932 the Council identified that the widespread non-payment of rates had left a significant hole in its finances that directly impacted on its ability to maintain its own staff. The finance committee told the councillors that the Council's well-intentioned commitment to keeping employees on half-time rather than putting them out of work, had actually left these employees 'in a worse position than Government sustenance workers'. Thus the finance committee suggested a policy 'of pressing persons able to pay their rates' which would allow the Council to employ council workers on a pattern of two weeks on and one week off. If they did not pursue this policy of recovery, the committee warned, the alternative would be to 'arrange for the whole of the Council's road work to be performed with sustenance labour'. The recommendation was that 'all those ratepayers who owe rates for last year and who have not made satisfactory arrangements for payment be given seven days' notice that the Council will commence proceedings for the recovery of the rates outstanding'. At the end of July the amount of outstanding rates was £12,654.⁶¹⁹ Aware of the amount of employment that could be created with even a portion of this figure, the City Treasurer, Councillor Stevens, made an appeal to the ratepayers to meet their obligations in connection with municipal rates and charges. At the same time, the finance committee became more proactive in pursuing repayment plans, deciding on a policy of examining the merits of each individual case where ratepayers had not met their obligations and what action to take to ensure that wherever possible, all rates that could be collected would be recovered.⁶²⁰ However, by October, the amount of outstanding rates remained

⁶¹⁸ Lotteries money also funded the extension to the outpatients clinic at Fremantle Hospital, built and named in memory of the South Fremantle football club's late captain coach, Ron Doig.

⁶¹⁹ Fremantle City Council files AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Minute Book 1931-1932 SRO, Perth

⁶²⁰ *West Australian*, 7 August 1932, p8.

almost undiminished.⁶²¹ As a result the finance committee recommended that the Council employ a 'collector of arrears of rates, at a salary of £1 a week and commission of twenty per cent on all moneys collected'. After considerable discussion, the recommendation was agreed to on a division, the voting being six to five in favour of the proposal. It was explained by the chairman of the finance committee, Councillor Stevens, that the committee had no wish to harass those who were not able to meet their obligations. It was proposed that a list be made of those who owed rates over of period of four or more years. The matter was straightforward according to Councillor Stevens, who said simply 'the Council needed money'.⁶²²

Since the introduction of the Municipal Act of 1906, which enabled councils to charge interest on rates owing over one year, the Fremantle Council had never acted on it. In November, however, the finance committee wanted to do so. In fact, the chairman took the position that the Council was *obliged* to comply with the Act. Perhaps being a touch disingenuous, Stevens said 'the Council has tried to do its utmost to relieve the ratepayers as far as possible and I don't think the Council would force the issue now if the law would permit it to escape it'. The finance committee's suggestion produced a heated debate in Council which was reported in the press. Councillor Edmund Davies was absolutely opposed to the idea and challenged Stevens' suggestion that it was 'obligatory' for the Council to enforce the Act. 'Why then', he asked, 'had the Council not done so before?' Newly elected councilor and former secretary of the Fremantle Trades Hall, James Burgess, advocated taking a middle ground and taking action only against those the Council judged 'would not' pay their rates as opposed to those who 'could not', because 'the indiscriminate imposition of interest at the present stage was manifestly unfair'. The mayor was not as confident that there was any such distinguishing line. He told the meeting that he could 'see no reason for imposing the interest charge at a time like

⁶²¹ The report of the finance committee stated 'that £7,060 was outstanding in current rates and £3,823 in arrears'. *West Australian*, 18 October 1932, p11. SRO, Perth

⁶²² *West Australian*, 18 October 1932, p11.

this when people are out of work and businesses fail owing to abnormal conditions'. In the mayor's opinion there was no wrong in allowing ratepayers to pay their obligations the best way they can. Those who can't pay deserve the utmost consideration'. When councillor Grigg suggested that they couldn't defy the Act, the mayor responded: 'we are not defying the Act. We are just not putting it into operation'. While the mayor's heart was in the right place, his sanguine attitude to the Council's finances was perhaps imprudent. The finance committee, however, was more prosaic. It had its eye on the five per cent interest it could charge on the substantial overdue amount of rates. The figure would certainly make a significant contribution to the Council's depleted coffers. This divided opinion among the councillors was reflected in the final vote, in which the motion was defeated seven to six.⁶²³

Despite the lack of income resulting from non-payment of rates the Council continued its program of relief works. Whilst this was of benefit to the city's unemployed, the fact of the matter was that the work had to be paid for. In February 1933 the finance committee resurrected the notion of taking strong measures to collect overdue rates. The mayor and councillors who had protested against aggressive action for the recovery of rates in 1932, were now overruled. When the finance committee again introduced the motion to charge interest on overdue rates, this time it prevailed. At the Council meeting, similar arguments were debated as they had been four months previously, until councillor Hollis, a member of the finance committee, told the councillors that they had legal advice to the effect that 'if we do not put this into operation councillors who vote against the proposal may be called upon to pay the interest. You must realize that any councillor who votes against the proposal will make himself personally liable'. This threat was not enough to sway the entire council; councillor Thornett bravely said he would take the risk. However, when it came to a vote, the recommendation to enforce payment of 5% interest on overdue rates was put and carried, by six votes to five. The decision,

⁶²³ *West Australian*, 15 November 1932, p7.

unsurprisingly, was not well received in the Fremantle community. The *Fremantle Advocate* had this to say:

For 27 years there has been a law in existence which provides that interest at the rate of 5% shall be charged on all municipal rates 12 months in arrears. And the provisions of the Act insofar as they relate to this imposition, have never been enforced until now, the year 1933, the worst year of depression ever known. Why have the civic Rip Van Winkles now awakened from their 27 years sleep to impose a hardship upon people which they will be unable to stand?⁶²⁴

That the Fremantle people were facing incredible hardship at this time was undeniable. Alex McCallum addressed a crowded hall in Fremantle in March, telling them:

I never thought I would ever see people living under the conditions they are faced with today. Men can't get a job unless they are on sustenance, and they can't get on sustenance until they have got right down to a state of utter destitution.⁶²⁵

McCallum was at this stage Leader of the Opposition, so his speeches were of course going to be strident, but his point that people were living in destitution was accurate. In June 1933 the national census revealed that about half the unemployed males in Western Australia had been without a job for over two years, about one in ten for four years or more.⁶²⁶ In Fremantle, the census figures showed that 3,203 men in a male population of only 8,445 were receiving 'no income'. Of these, 1,968 men had a combined total of 4,406 dependent children. As we have seen, 'no income' generally meant no warm clothes, no shoes, no rent, no proper food and all the connected misery that the condition entails.⁶²⁷

In May about 600 Fremantle men who were finishing other relief works were given employment on 'new works in various parts of the State'.⁶²⁸ There was also some work provided at home on the Fremantle fish jetty where 'the small job of reconditioning the wall which protects the fishing boat jetty at Fremantle employed

⁶²⁴ *Fremantle Advocate*, 9 February 1933, p1.

⁶²⁵ *Fremantle Advocate*, 22 March 1933, p5.

⁶²⁶ Figures from Robertson, '1930-39', p 418.

⁶²⁷ Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933, Parts V and XXVI. There were also 208 unemployed female breadwinners in Fremantle.

⁶²⁸ *West Australian*, 19 May 1933.

about twenty men on part-time for nine weeks'.⁶²⁹ The Town Clerk's 'summary of sustenance workers employed for week ending 7 January, 1933' shows that the city had only 203 men employed on nineteen different projects.⁶³⁰ As this number was so small, the Council asked the works committee to confer with the Ovals and Parks committee and suggest a program of works for the 'profitable employment of sustenance labour for the ensuing six months'.⁶³¹ As a result, the head gardener submitted a plan showing that 'a good playing area could be constructed economically on the Stephen Street reserve' and the Council decided to employ sustenance labour in this way. By June the Council decided, for the future of Fremantle and of its unemployed, 'that the whole of the sustenance labour available to the Council is to be engaged on beautifying the reserves and providing increased playing grounds'. The administration of the sustenance workers then moved from the Works committee to the Oval and Parks committee.⁶³² This committee told the Council that 'sufficient labour will be available for the next four months to perform all the work necessary on Parks and Reserves, and also to provide one properly organised and continuous gang on the construction of foundations of footpaths in outlying residential districts'.⁶³³

In August 1933, J.J. Kenneally, the new Minister for Employment, wrote to the Town Clerk that the State government believed that the 'position of the workless people of Western Australia would not improve until a complete wage basis had been restored'.⁶³⁴ Accordingly the state-supported program for local works came to

⁶²⁹ Department of Labour files AN 25/9 ACC 1772 Item 7/31 Relief Work SRO, Perth

⁶³⁰ Fremantle Correspondence files AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 44- 45 1933. SRO, Perth

⁶³¹ Meeting of 11 January 1933, Fremantle Correspondence files AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 44- 45 1933 SRO, Perth

⁶³² Fremantle Correspondence files AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 44- 45 1933 SRO, Perth

⁶³³ Town Clerk to the Parks and Oval Committee, 2 June 1933, Fremantle Correspondence files AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 44- 45 1933 SRO, Perth

⁶³⁴ J.J. Kenneally, to Town Clerk, 5 August 1933, Fremantle Correspondence files AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 44- 45 1933 SRO, Perth. In April 1933 Mitchell and the Nationalist/Country party had lost government and a new Labor ministry under Phillip Collier had been established. Collier, writes Bolton, intended 'to restore wages as far as possible' as a way out of Depression conditions. For more on Collier

an end.⁶³⁵ Following his announcement that the employment of sustenance labour by local governing bodies was to cease, there was a backlash among most of the metropolitan local councils and in the media. The *Sunday Times*, for example, criticized the decision as being premature, as the Minister had not made any provision for absorbing the men who would be put out of work as a result. In Fremantle this amounted to 300 men.⁶³⁶ With so many of his local men facing unemployment Mayor Gibson wrote to Kenneally asking if the Council could employ more men, but pay them the full basic wage. The Council would employ these men on the completion of the work already started on Fremantle Park and Stephen Street reserve. These works, Gibson explained, were put in operation for the employment of men on sustenance over twelve months previously, and would be of considerable benefit to the community if completed. However, Gibson explained that the Council would need the help of the government to complete the work: 'the Council are prepared to do this provided your Department will contribute one third of the amount paid by the Council, which is estimated to cost £1,250 for labour. Under this scheme the Council would employ approximately 24 men continuously for 13 weeks'.⁶³⁷ Kenneally agreed to the arrangement in September.

Conclusion - Moving forward

Years later, in his final annual report for the year ending 31 October 1951, Frank Gibson reflected on the enormity of the experience he had shared with his

and the end of the Depression Era, see Bolton, G. *A Fine Country to Starve In*, pp237-70.

⁶³⁵ Kenneally wrote to Fremantle Council and to all local governing bodies that the expense of the scheme could no longer be borne by the State government, because 'whilst local authorities may have been contributing to the costs of maintaining a local sustenance work scheme, by providing materials or a small financial contribution, the Government had been responsible for almost the whole of the expense of the sustenance workers themselves'. Fremantle's response to this letter is unrecorded, but one can imagine that the conversation around the Council table at Kenneally's suggestion that their Council had contributed no more than some materials and a 'small financial contribution' must have been fairly heated. J.J. Kenneally to Town Clerk, 5 August 1933, Fremantle Correspondence files AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 44- 45 1933 SRO, Perth

⁶³⁶ *Sunday Times*, 27 August 1933, p11.

⁶³⁷ Fremantle Correspondence files AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 44- 45 1933 SRO, Perth

ratepayers: 'we have had to contend with a world depression, a destructive economic condition that destroyed contentment and happiness and created uncertainty and bitterness, the consequences of which were almost as chaotic to our well-being as a war'.⁶³⁸

The parallels with previous experience exhibited during the crisis of the Depression are illuminating. The situation in Fremantle by 1930 was reminiscent of the problems the Council had faced in the years of the bubonic plague. As in 1900, the efforts of a Mayor earnestly trying to secure the welfare of his citizens were hampered by the constrictions of bureaucracy and politics. At the time of the plague, it was control of the waterfront and issues of health and sanitation that caused a clash between the State and local government. In the Depression, the problem was unemployment and the solution was relief work. As they had thirty years earlier, the Fremantle Council suggested a number of solutions to local problems which, had they had autonomy to enact, they were convinced would be of benefit to their residents. The State government, however, had both the financial and jurisdictional upper hand, and would only fund unemployment relief of its own design.

The unemployed were being let down by the State government's slowness to act, which forced them to accept the perceived humiliation of charity. Repeatedly they had asked for the chance to work for a basic wage. They simply needed to feel that, despite the change in their circumstances, they were still able to provide something for their family. In Fremantle, possibly more than in any other metropolitan suburb, the need of the working-man to feel his worth in this way received the understanding and empathy of the mayor and councillors. In August 1933 the Minister for Employment, J.J. Kenneally wrote to the Town Clerk in Fremantle that his department 'trusts that the co-operation of all those who are desirous of assisting Western Australia to be one of the first States to emerge from the depressed period will be freely given'.⁶³⁹ By this time, the state was 'slowly emerging from the trough of depression', writes Crowley, and 'each year thereafter there were fewer men on sustenance, export prices were generally improving and

⁶³⁸ Ewers, *The western gateway*, p198.

⁶³⁹ Fremantle Correspondence files AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 44- 45 1933 SRO, Perth

the government was able to use loans for public works'.⁶⁴⁰ This recovery and the program of public works, were carried out with the financial, administrative and most importantly, ideological support of local governments.⁶⁴¹ Snooks observes that over the years of the Depression, 'the main public relief projects included water and sewerage, railways, roads and public buildings'. As a result there was a considerable increase in the 'length of roads and the number of bridges, culverts, fords and drainage facilities constructed by municipalities and road boards'.⁶⁴² In Fremantle this was certainly the case: roads, footpaths, reserves, parks and Monument Hill were all improved and beautified by the labour of the unemployed. Snooks writes that in April 1933, 'sixty per cent of the men under government care were employed on public projects'.⁶⁴³ By January 1934, all government sustenance workers had reverted back to the State government and were no longer employed by the Fremantle City Council.⁶⁴⁴ Over the course of 1934, Fremantle did not begin new ventures or programs of works, but quietly got on with those it had already begun.

By November 1935, the mayor was able announce in his Annual Report that 'visitors from all parts of the world have commented on the improvements that have taken place and the beauty which exists'.⁶⁴⁵ It was a fitting end to the trials that had beset Fremantle over the previous six years, and one which must have swelled the heart of a Mayor so attached to his City. The recovery was equally as positive for the rest of the country. As J.R. Robertson writes, 'despite the setback of the early thirties, a few years later Australia's standard of living was one of the highest in the world'.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁰ Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, p270.

⁶⁴¹ In addition, a particular result of the Depression at the port of Fremantle was that 'the pressure to reduce costs led to the introduction of bulk handling of grain'. M. Tull, *A Community Enterprise: The History of the Port of Fremantle, 1897 to 1997* (St Johns, Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 1997), p59.

⁶⁴² Snooks, *Depression and Recovery*, pp100-3.

⁶⁴³ Snooks, 'Development in Adversity', p265.

⁶⁴⁴ Fremantle Correspondence files AN 217/3 Acc 1377 Item 45 1933 SRO, Perth

⁶⁴⁵ *West Australian*, 28 November 1935, p23.

⁶⁴⁶ Robertson, '1930-39', p442.

Conclusion

This has been the story of a community coping with crisis and the municipal activity that supported its efforts. At its centre was the Fremantle Council as the representative and voice of its community. This thesis has argued that the Council was effective in the management of the three periods of crisis examined. In contending with these crises, the council had to do so within the wider landscape of governmental authority. Depending on whether the larger administrative processes were driven from Perth or Melbourne, or from within Fremantle, the understanding of each time of crisis differed slightly. In this context, the Councils, placed both within and against institutional arrangements, did find a way to make their own solutions. The Council did make a difference.

The common themes stretching across the three case studies are a sense of identity and a struggle with outside authority. Fremantle Council understood the needs of its community better than did Perth or Melbourne and was more engaged and had a clearer sense of what was needed, in each of the three times of crisis. The other constant theme can best be summarized in the questions 'who is going to pay for this?' and 'who is in charge'? The evidence shows in the wider administrative landscape, the responsibility for funding in each time of crisis was both contentious and unclear. Fremantle, in its efforts to steer through periods of social disruption, repeatedly put itself into debt in order to fund its policies effectively. Equally, the Council had to enter into battle over jurisdictional authority in order to safeguard the welfare of its local people.

The crises which Fremantle experienced between 1900 and 1933 were not what they might be presumed to be at first glance. The bubonic plague was not about swathes of dead bodies, as might be immediately expected by anyone with any knowledge of the great epidemics of medieval Europe.; Rather, while some tragic deaths did occur, it was a crisis of sanitation and health in a port-side town that had deteriorated to such an extent that it required a plague epidemic to occasion change. During this time, with the presence of plague in its midst, whilst not only bearing the brunt of outside derision for its lack of sanitation, the Council and the people of

Fremantle recognized themselves that changes had to be made for the health of the community. Far-reaching improvements were initiated as a result of the plague to building laws, the sewerage system, paving of back-yards and general matters of sanitation. At the same time, Fremantle had to negotiate through the existing chaos of authority on the waterfront, resulting in the successful introduction of a single port authority, the Fremantle Harbour Trust.

The Great War for Fremantle and its Council was not about the tragedy and loss of life that defines so much of what we know of that conflict, particularly as we see it from the centenary perspective. The crisis for Fremantle was how to settle over two thousand men, many of them broken in mind and body, into civilian life. On this occasion, the Fremantle Council conformed with rather than butted against the larger authority. The Federal government had instituted a Department of Repatriation with a large and generous policy for the resettlement of returned soldiers into their former lives, as best they could. The nation-wide feeling of gratitude to these soldiers dominated policy during this period and Fremantle was fully committed to the well-being of its own local men. Fremantle felt and acted as the country did, that they owed their soldiers a debt and this had to be repaid in terms of safeguarding their return to employment and security. The Council returned to its employ all the soldiers who had left for the war and wished to return. For other locals who could not return to their usual occupations, the Council ensured that street barrows and stalls were available to them; the 'wingies and stumpies' were given employment on the gates of Fremantle Oval for cricket and football games, as Fremantle's sporting life became reestablished after the war. The issue of funding was again a battle in this period, but of a slightly different nature. In order to look after those of its own who were made unemployed during and after the war, Fremantle pitted itself against the larger, Perth-run charity. The period was not without controversy, the 1917 strike took its toll not only on the social harmony of the town but on its prosperity. The influenza epidemic was another disruption as was the threat of venereal disease, but the impact of these, whilst transiently chaotic, did not challenge Fremantle's sense of purpose during the crisis of the Great

War. Fremantle managed to get through the war years and through the return of its soldiers with relative equanimity.

In the Depression era, known historically as a time of great unemployment and poverty, the crisis in Fremantle was centered on the creation of a solution. Whilst knocking on the doors of both State and Federal governments to create policy and provide funding, Fremantle resolved its own crisis by creating local employment and depleting its own coffers. The Fremantle Council and the local business community quickly realized that the secondary but equally important nature of the crisis of unemployment was how to salve the position of local men, how to give them work that would return to them a sense of personal value and dignity. Fremantle's unemployed told the Council explicitly that they wanted to work for whatever sustenance or relief they could be given. The Council responded to the voice of its own community rather than await policy change and funding from the State or Federal governments. In the lack of a solution coming from higher authority, the Council determined to find a solution of its own. For two full years before the Premier of Western Australia introduced a 'sustenance scheme' for the unemployed, Fremantle took in and created work for its own local unemployed, willingly going into debt to do so. Yet for this two-year period, the Mayor, Frank Gibson, took a strategic plan for the employment of the unemployed to the State government, haranguing both the Premier and the Minister for Works to initiate a broader solution to the crisis. Here we see for the only time across the three case studies, evidence and public reports of conflict within the Council itself. Some councillors wanted to press the local population for their unpaid rates, while the Mayor and other councillors did not want to harass an already overburdened population. Eventually financial necessity prevailed, but this did not curb the Council's continuing commitment to create projects that would allow unemployed men to work at home.

During the Depression Era, the Fremantle Council answered the crisis as it had the two crises before it, by identifying what would work in Fremantle and for Fremantle. The Council responded to the challenges of these times of crisis, by engineering its social policy and by vigorous effort on behalf of its community.

Addendum:

Addendum:

In writing a history of a community or, more specifically in the case of this thesis, a council's role in that community during three times of crisis, there are few, if any, studies on which to model a thesis. With that in mind, it was necessary to encompass a broad range of secondary studies that crossed over the case studies included in this thesis. It was also necessary to consider urban histories in general. I have discussed the more pertinent of the secondary readings in the introduction to this thesis. However, it is the aim of this addendum to further elucidate the secondary sources with which this thesis interacted.

Patricia Brown's *The Merchant Princes of Fremantle* provided essential background reading in understanding the men who made up the various councils during the three cases studies of this thesis.⁶⁴⁷ Brown discusses the role of the 'merchant princes' in the civic arenas of Fremantle, as members of the Fremantle Road Board, the Town Council and various boards and departments. Brown writes that these merchants became power brokers in Fremantle. In point of fact, Brown asserts on a quest of 'self-aggrandizement', the Fremantle merchant elite had to 'try to impress on those over [whom](#) they exercised a hegemony a strict system of manners and standards, upheld by law and by religious belief and practice'. The rules, she suggests, were based on the tenets of the Protestant faith and the British public school. Brown's examination of the nineteenth century certainly holds during the plague era. My thesis concurs that the homes of the merchant elite were outside of plague-infected areas and that those living in the tenements of the West End were the plague's only victims. In support of Brown's research, the ruling elite were unaffected in many ways by the plague but uninterested in any but a financial way [in](#) the effects of the plague on the town. However, once we move beyond the plague

⁶⁴⁷ *The Merchant Princes of Fremantle: The Rise and Decline of a Colonial Elite 1870-1900* Perth: UWA Press, 1996

years and into the twentieth century, my thesis suggests the ruling hegemony has significantly changed. During the Great War and the Depression Era, the function of the Fremantle civic body was a much more organic and responsive group. Further I would suggest that the Fremantle community itself was no longer dominated by a merchant-led 'hegemony' but was more self-sufficient than the Fremantle of Brown's *Merchant Princes*.

Another secondary source of importance in researching a civic history of Fremantle was M. J. Edmonds *City of Fremantle: Progress through Purpose*.⁶⁴⁸

Edwards' report is a result of an overseas study in the management, development and growth of port cities in Europe and the United Kingdom. It questions the 'fundamental function and purpose of government' in terms of social change, which, while tantalizingly close to being useful, veers instead to a focus on how a city such as Fremantle can and should respond to the reality of urbanisation.⁶⁴⁹

Placing Edwards' work in the context of other urban histories, such as Lawton, and Lee(eds) *Population and Society in Western European Port-Cities c.1650-1939*, [examines the work of a port city](#) in the wider context of demographic dynamics.⁶⁵⁰ Most important to my thesis was Lawton and Lee's 'hypothesis that the demographic profile of a city 'is, at least in part, a reflection of its function'.⁶⁵¹ This hypothesis was pivotal to my approach in examining Fremantle as a community or urban study. Through these texts my thesis [is](#) able to [understand](#) the relative importance of the demographic characteristics of port-cities and the economy and labour markets of port-cities. Expanding from this work, in my thesis I [is](#) able to position a port-city such as Fremantle within the urban profile. This

⁶⁴⁸ Edmonds, M.J Deputy Town Clerk, *City of Fremantle: Progress through Purpose* (Fremantle: City of Fremantle 1969)

⁶⁴⁹ For further information on the West End area itself I would refer the reader to City of Fremantle, *Conservation Policy for the Fremantle West End Conservation Area* (Fremantle: City of Fremantle, 1990).

⁶⁵⁰ Lawton, R. and Lee, R. (eds) *Population and Society in Western European Port-Cities c.1650-1939* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002

⁶⁵¹ *ibid*, p5

work was most useful in understanding the relationship between Fremantle, as a port-city with the capital city of Perth further up river. The text's examination of the social conditions of nineteenth century port-cities, however, relied heavily on themes of labour and migration, both of which were outside the scope of my thesis.⁶⁵²

Having placed the thesis in the larger urban framework, it is necessary then to move to the more particular aspects of a civil history. Specifically, it was necessary to consider not only the people who constitute the council, but the role of the council itself on each of these occasions. [These aspects of the council had varying degrees of relevance.](#)

[During the plague years for example, it may be that the poor quality of residential housing and sanitation in the West End of Fremantle was not high on the list of concerns among Fremantle Councillors, whose predominantly mercantile interests meant that, in general, improving the roads and the harbour were foremost on their agenda. However, their representative, the Town Clerk, George Bland Humble, was at the centre of the crisis. Bland Humble, who served as town clerk of the Fremantle Town Council from 1874 to 1883 then of the Fremantle Municipal Council 1883 to 1904, also acted as secretary of the Local Board of Health. In this capacity, Bland Humble had a constant dialogue with the secretary of the Central Board of Health throughout the years of the plague in Fremantle and it is through this material that we see the role of the council during the period. It is through the pens of these two](#)

⁶⁵² Also outside the scope of my thesis, but providing important contextual secondary material, was Davies, S et al. (eds) *Dock Workers, International Explorations in Comparative Labour History Vol.1-3* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1988) In their introductory chapter, 'Towards a comparative international history of dockers', Sam Davies and Klaus Weinbauer discuss what they call 'international explorations in comparative history' of dock labour history. The comparative approach is highly useful in that it draws together general questions from port histories around the world, and provides a framework for analysis. The comparative history looks at dock-workers as a distinctive occupational group and provides a general methodology and historiography for looking at histories of these groups and the port in which they operated. Whilst the framework provides a comprehensive starting point for a thesis that includes waterfront workers and their families, it is only valuable so far as studying the lives of port workers. Whilst the chapter poses some interesting and helpful points of reference, such as the existence of 'waterfront neighbourhoods' which was a useful tool in my examination of the plague, and 'housing, living and workers' culture in the port city', the text provided merely close examination only of waterside workers without situating them in a wider context and certainly not in the framework of their representative civil body.

men that the battles of jurisdiction were fought and won and their colourful letters inform the plague years.

During the Great War it is the Mayor, William Wray, upon whose character the period revolves. Historian J. K. Ewers wrote that William Wray had only agreed to accept the re-nomination for the position of Mayor in 1914 in the hope that he would one day 'be able to hoist the Allied flags at the top of the town hall'.⁶⁵³ Certainly the records show William Wray as unswervingly active during the war, along with his wife who had an acknowledged role assisting the Red Cross during the war years, Wray's leadership best signifies the role of the Fremantle's civic body during the years of the Great War. In addition, during this entire period, Mayor Wray had as his Town Clerk Henry Haynes, whose letters to bereaved parents in Fremantle and on behalf of returned soldiers looking for work, are a testimony to his personal involvement in the work of the council during this time.

In the Depression Era, Frank Gibson plays the leading role on the stage of both local and state politics, in his activism for changing the lives of the unemployed. In this he is joined by several leading councillors. Councillor Joseph Sleeman was as much an advocate for the unemployed as Frank Gibson. Both were in the early years of what would become lengthy and historic, years of service in their respective positions. In 1930 Sleeman was in the second year of what would become thirty-five years as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. Gibson became the Mayor of Fremantle in 1924 and served almost twenty-nine years in that role (excluding a two year break between 1924 and 1926), retiring as Mayor in 1951. He was knighted in 1948. As in the earlier two periods of crisis, Fremantle's town clerk during the entirety of the Depression Era, James Shepherd, was also unceasing in his efforts to co-ordinate relief for the affected families in his community throughout this period.

Whilst acknowledging the personal efforts of Fremantle's leaders over the three case studies considered in this thesis, it is important to recognize that

⁶⁵³ Ewers, *Western Gateway*, p118.

Fremantle in each period has emerged as community whose experience of three times of crisis forged a unified response. Whilst each crisis was unique, strong representation from the Fremantle community's representatives in Council, elicited solutions that were distinctly local. This thesis argues that a civic-driven response enabled a self-defined community to emerge from each of the three times of crisis in Fremantle.

In comprehending the physical environment in which this thesis was located, City of Fremantle's *Conservation Policy for the Fremantle West End Conservation Area* was of considerable use.⁶⁵⁴ The report lists the council's heritage policy areas specific to the West End and studies the role of Local Government in the interests of heritage issues. It details the various conservation zones and gives a statement of significance for the West End. It differs from previous reports in that it suggests that the Gold Boom years provide the highlight for historical significance in the area, whereas previously the 'gateway to Western Australia' theme was prevalent in assessing the area's heritage. It also provides interesting detail on architecture and construction.

Whilst these urban histories [helped](#) my thesis by allowing an initial 'starting-block' from which to base the 'concept' of an urban or community based history, the most important work was obviously that which directly related to the three case studies of my research.

Bubonic Plague

Whilst there has not been any historiographical exploration of the plague in Fremantle, there has however, been considerable discussion of Fremantle during the turn of the twentieth century – the time at which the international plague pandemic made its way to the town. Among these, the text of most use to this thesis was Patricia Brown's *Merchant Princes* which provided a demographic overview of the west end. Brown suggests that by the end of the nineteenth century, the

⁶⁵⁴ City of Fremantle's *Conservation Policy for the Fremantle West End Conservation Area* (Fremantle: City of Fremantle, 1990)

Fremantle merchants 'were the largest employers of labour at the port apart, probably, from the Government'. This would certainly agree with the findings of this thesis. Brown continues that rate books show that in the 1880s and 1890s the biggest occupational group comprised industrial workers. This general classification included lumpers, carpenters, carters, blacksmiths, bootmakers, clerks, mariners and shipwrights'. Whilst my thesis did not conduct an analysis of the rate books, Brown's contention would certainly have been borne out by the empiric evidence of my research, namely the occupations of the residents of the homes, boarding houses and tenements of the west end during the plague years.

As mentioned in the introduction, primary among the relevant texts for the plague case study was Myron Echenberg's work *Plague Ports*. Echenberg's study examines the progress of the bubonic plague pandemic at the turn of last century throughout the world. It is worth further mentioning that Echenberg does not include Fremantle in his investigation of 'plague ports', possibly because Fremantle has not been chronicled in existing historiography, however he does consider to a limited extent the civic reactions to plague in the harbourside city of Sydney.⁶⁵⁵ Most particularly, Echenberg writes that the plague pandemic 'produced highly variable results' and that whilst millions were killed in India, China and Indonesia, 'elsewhere, the pandemic proved relatively benign'.⁶⁵⁶ This was certainly the case in Fremantle. His work was also influential in understanding the socio-demographic conditions in which the plague-flea operated. Echenberg writes that 'the risk for humans boils down to whether they come within range of an infected rat flea, especially for the urban poor who lived in overcrowded, unsanitary and rat-infested housing'.⁶⁵⁷ Essentially, this aspect of Echenberg's study provided important support for the findings of this thesis.

⁶⁵⁵ M. Echenberg, *Plague Ports: The Global Urban Impact of Bubonic Plague 1894-1901* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid* p,5.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p9

Another useful text for the examination of health in port-side Fremantle at the turn of the twentieth century was Lawton and Lee's, *Population and Society in Western European Port-Cities* which explores the mortality and fertility rates within port cities. The work pays particular reference to issues of health in port cities, but its examination is restricted to the mortality rates specific to dockside worker's increased risk of exposure.

These texts' identification of the tendency for epidemic diseases to follow shipping routes and enter ports provides an essential framework the bubonic plague in Fremantle in the age of shipping. This thesis expands upon the work, primarily of Echenberg but also of Lawton and Lee by examining how Fremantle's role as a port town, with its issues of administrative dysfunction and sanitary deficiency was vulnerable to bubonic plague from 1900 – 1906. Further, this thesis has argued that the town's sanitation, alongside its role as a harbour town (and therefore vulnerable to incoming diseases from shipping) was the centre of crisis for Fremantle during the plague years.

Great War

In examining the Great War as a time of crisis in Fremantle, it is the conclusion of this thesis that the war itself, as in the war fought abroad between 1914 and 1918, was not in itself the cause of crisis in Fremantle. Rather, it was the issues engendered by returning soldiers that caused a crisis in the community. This thesis would argue that 'repatriation' of these men became one of the most important issues of the time, asserting itself as one of the most essential social and civil concerns of the post-war period.

The most recent texts on the Great War in Fremantle are Deborah Gare and Madison Lloyd-Jones' *When war came to Fremantle* and Andrew Pittaway's *Fremantle's Anzacs*. Gare and Lloyd-Jones' informative work examines both the presence of and the effect of, war on Fremantle. The breadth of the subject matter includes a consideration of the lives of women in the city. The text examines the

administrative and social implications in Fremantle of the existence of a war abroad, which aspect was of particular relevance to this thesis, in particular, its discussion of the base hospital and the role of the Red Cross. The study does not, however, extend the examination, to any significant degree, to the issue of repatriation, which was the central focus of this thesis.

Likewise, Andrew Pittaway's *Fremantle's Anzacs* whilst providing a statistical analysis of the men who left and then returned from war, once again provides no serious discussion of the implications of their return.

Thus, one of the most important works to provide a point of embarkation for this thesis was the work of Ernest Scott. Scott wrote that 'repatriation is defined as the process of restoring or returning men or women to their native country. Applied to Australian soldiers, it was properly the process of bringing back to Australia those who were overseas, and in that sense it was used by the commander and staff of the A.I.F. when endeavouring to forecast, as they did as far back as 1916, the methods which must be prepared for returning the A.I.F. to Australia at the end of the war'.⁶⁵⁸ He adds that 'in Australia, however, the word was already being employed to describe the subsequent and even more difficult function of replacing the returned men in civil employment'. Whilst Scott examines this function in an Australia-wide study, this thesis examines the issue of repatriation at a community level, examining repatriation in Fremantle.

Scott writes that the Federal Parliament's War Committee, which had previously had charge of recruiting and training camps, recognised in 1916 that some organisation needed to be established to deal with the problem of returned soldiers. The formation of 'War Service Committees' in each local government area then followed and between 1915 and 1917, 'these bodies remained chiefly responsible for the actual work of repatriating invalided men, and caring for their dependents'. Once again Scott examines these issues on a national basis, looking at the administrative role of these organisations. With this thesis, I was able to take this

⁶⁵⁸ Ernest Scott, *Official History of the War of 1914-1918. Volume XI: Australia During the War* (7th edition, 1941), ID no: RCDIG1069950 Digitised Collection, Australian War Memorial, Canberra. P9

notion a step further and examine how this organisation worked within the Fremantle community.

This thesis, in the absence of any historiographical discussion on the subject, examined the repatriation of soldiers following the Great War, and how the return of Australia's 'soldier-heroes' became a civil and civic undertaking in Fremantle and the rest of Western Australia. Between 1915 and 1919 thousands of returning soldiers from the Great War came home to re-settle into civilian life. Of these men, a vast number were wounded; many, the self-styled 'wingies and stumpies' had to re-established life without one or sometimes two, limbs. Whilst the recognition of the physical boundaries which limited the wounded of these soldiers' chances of being returned to 'normal' life formed the impetus for administrative and civil action on a local, state and federal level during the war and the post-war period, this thesis has examined how Fremantle, as a civil society responded, in terms of policies and practical schemes of assistance—to the return of men they viewed as soldier-heroes.

Depression Era

By far the most influential text on Depression Era Australia is Geoffery Bolton's *A fine country to starve in*. Bolton writes that the State governments of Australia considered that their prime responsibility to the unemployed was merely to provide 'sustenance' or 'a dole' for their temporary relief. Likewise, John Robertson writes that 'though it had obvious political and moral responsibilities, the Commonwealth government had no clear constitutional obligation to participate in unemployment relief'.⁶⁵⁹ Economic historian Graeme Snooks lets the government further off the hook, by suggesting, rather benignly that both State and Commonwealth Governments in Australia followed a 'philosophy of non-intervention'.⁶⁶⁰ Whilst their work provides a body of unsurpassed academic merit, and are essential as an

⁶⁵⁹ Robertson, '1930-39', p 418.

⁶⁶⁰ G.D. Snooks, *Depression and Recovery in Western Australia 1928/29 – 1938/39* (Perth: U.W.A Press, 1974), p263

interpretative framework, the work of these Historians overlooks the question, 'if the government were not looking after the welfare of the unemployed, who was?'.⁶⁶¹

The historical record shows that as early as June 1928, a group of religious leaders, from all the main church groups in the metropolitan area, met in the State's capital, Perth, met to discuss ways to relieve the distress of their communities. At the meeting were leaders of the Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Hebrew, Congregational, and Presbyterian churches, as well as the Church of Christ and the Salvation Army.⁶⁶¹ That the leading church groups should cooperate on behalf of their communities seems a quite natural response to the suffering among their congregation. But why should it belong to the churches to remedy a situation that was obviously a state-wide concern, if not a national one? The result of this meeting of minds was the formation of a committee. Whilst initially made up of the representatives of the leading churches, the committee then invited members of the business community, the returned soldiers association, the trades halls and, most importantly, a number of metropolitan municipal councils to a meeting at which they could all join in discussing ways to relieve the poverty and want created by the large scale unemployment. The Mayor of Fremantle was one of the first civic leaders to join this committee, and further, to recognise the urgent necessity of providing relief for the unemployed and to find ways to relieve the distress of his local community. The committee's first action was to write to the Premier of Western Australia, urging him in one voice to treat they matter as urgent, in the hope that the state government would take up the baton. This thesis asserts that what actually happened, was that the committee set in motion the formation of a 'civic movement' for want of a better expression, in which religious and civic institutions, alongside private individuals and business organisations, would support and administer the provision of food, clothing and shelter for thousands of men, women and children over the next two and a half years.

⁶⁶¹ Preliminary committee to Premier, 26 July 1928, Premier's Department Files, Cons 1496, Item 1928/0709, Conference of representative citizens to discuss unemployment. SRO, Perth

Bolton writes that 'if the government and people of Western Australia were slow to recognize the need to prepare for a prolonged depression, their lack of foresight was no greater than that of any other part of Australia, or indeed of the world'.⁶⁶² Yet this thesis identifies that the 'people' of Western Australia were not slow to act at all. Alexander, commenting on the government's slowness to act, observes that 'two whole years were virtually wasted by Australian governments while the hardships caused by the deepening depression were being felt increasingly'.⁶⁶³ Yet he does not examine the community-level attempts to address the hardship which he acknowledges. Again, Graeme Snooks rather writes that in the early days of the Depression 'the State government preferred to take as small a part in unemployment relief as possible. It was felt that unemployed men should be given work by local authorities on relief works' but does not consider what form that unemployment relief actually took.⁶⁶⁴

The benign oversight shown by Bolton et al in their historiography of the Depression Era creates a gap that this thesis, albeit with only Fremantle in its focus, has attempted to address. This thesis examines how the local government of Fremantle, working with church leaders and local men and women, created a civic movement during a time of crisis in Australian society during the Depression Era.

This thesis argues that whilst the State and Commonwealth governments, were patently ignoring their 'moral responsibilities' and delaying the establishment of a program of work for the unemployed, the more local families and their civic leaders had to rely on the munificence of their own communities. It further examines the case in Fremantle showing that by January 1931, the Committees' funds had completely depleted, whilst distress in the district was growing and that the

⁶⁶² Bolton, G. *A fine country to starve in* (Perth: UWA Press, 1972) p51

⁶⁶³ F. Alexander, *Australia since Federation*, 4th edition (West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1980), p90.

⁶⁶⁴ G.D. Snooks, *Depression and Recovery in Western Australia* p100.

problem caused by unemployment had become the 'Council's greatest anxiety'.⁶⁶⁵ Historians have recognized that neither Federal nor State governments had taken the initiative to provide funding or create administrative solutions. Indeed it would be a full two years before they would do so. Yet this thesis examines how, in the absence of state or federal funding, local governments and religious groups worked together for the relief of the unemployed, facilitating and overseeing a 'citizens' movement' which brought food, housing and clothing to thousands of struggling families.

In July 1931 Premier Mitchell joined the other State premiers in Melbourne for the Premiers' Conference. As a result of the conference, the Premier of Western Australia announced that the people then being paid sustenance relief, 'would be transferred to public works projects as quickly as possible'.⁶⁶⁶ Put simply, the introduction of this scheme meant that, both single and married men could, by means of working on projects sponsored by the state government, receive a higher rate of sustenance and better conditions for their families. From this point and for the remaining years of the Depression, the State and Commonwealth governments' took custody of Australia's unemployed.

This thesis has argued that with the leadership of local government, in concert with church leaders and other members of the local community, a robust civic movement was forged in Fremantle that is worthy of further examination in other Western Australian regions.

⁶⁶⁵ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 29 January 1931, p1.

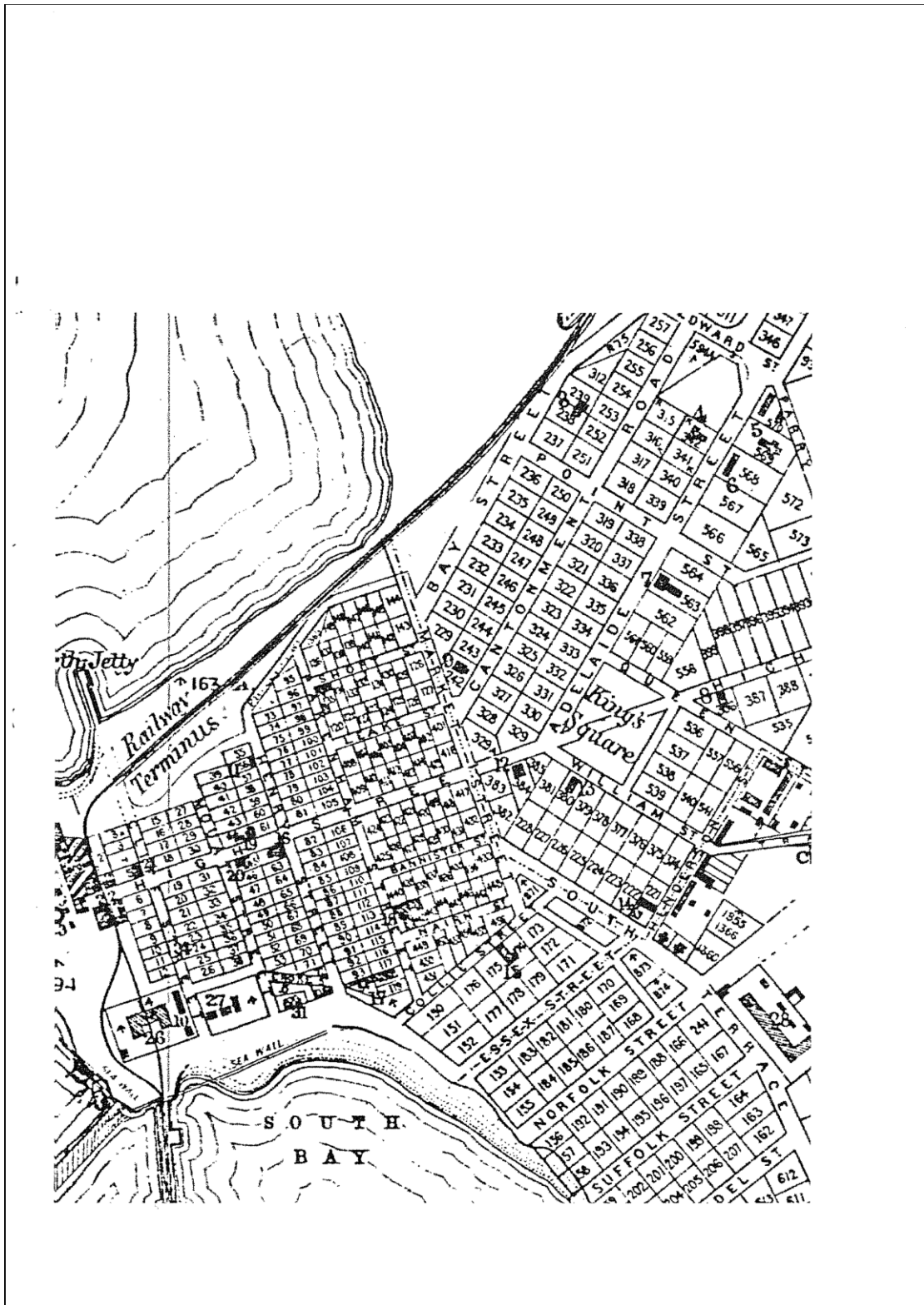
⁶⁶⁶ Snooks, 'Development in Adversity', p265.

Appendix A:

Map of the West End of Fremantle

Abstract from F.C.L.H.C. Map 1892

Plan of the town of Fremantle, includes East Fremantle and North Fremantle
Fremantle Local History Collection



Appendix B:

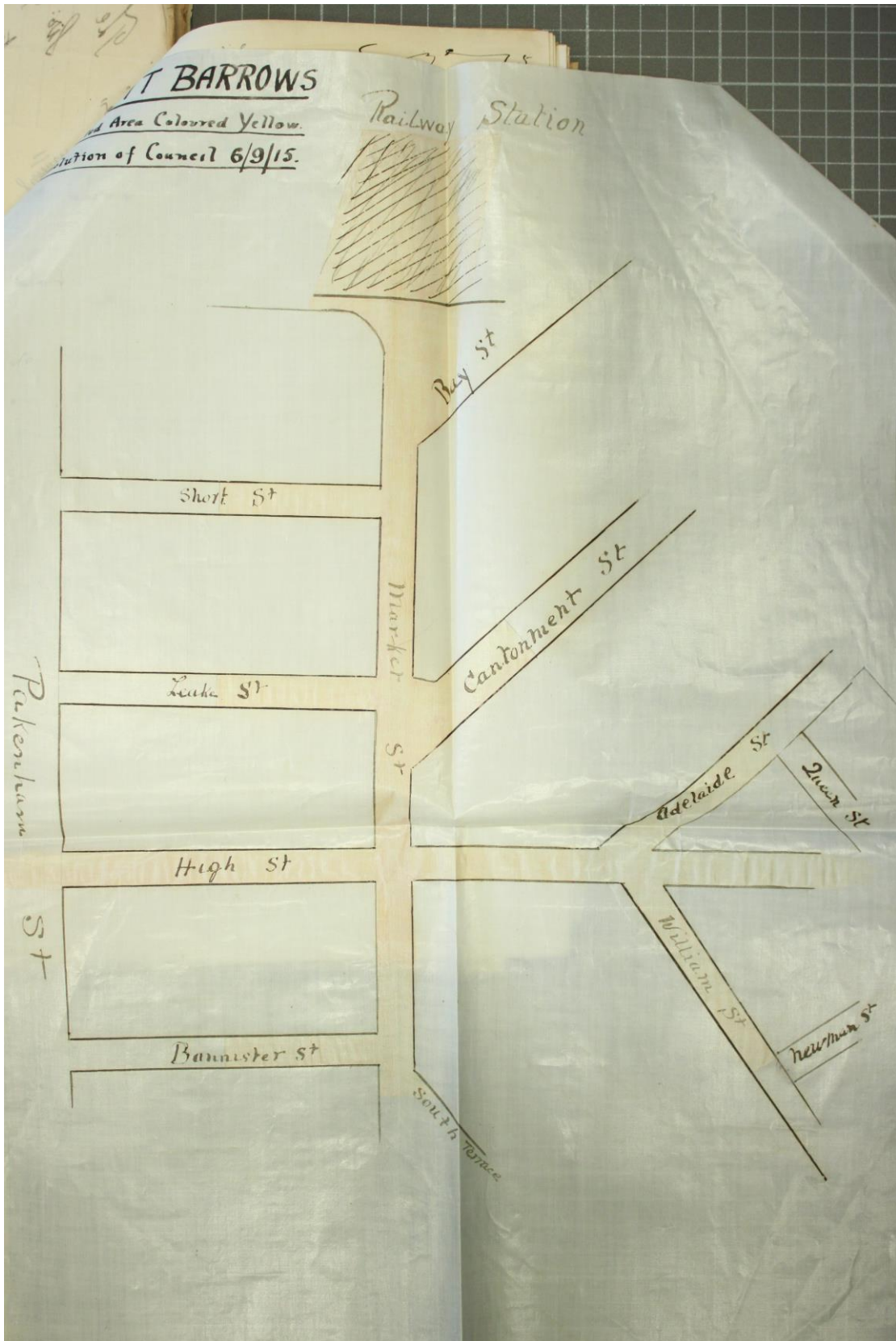
Hand drawn map from Dr Anderson showing where rats were found in the West
End of Fremantle, 1903

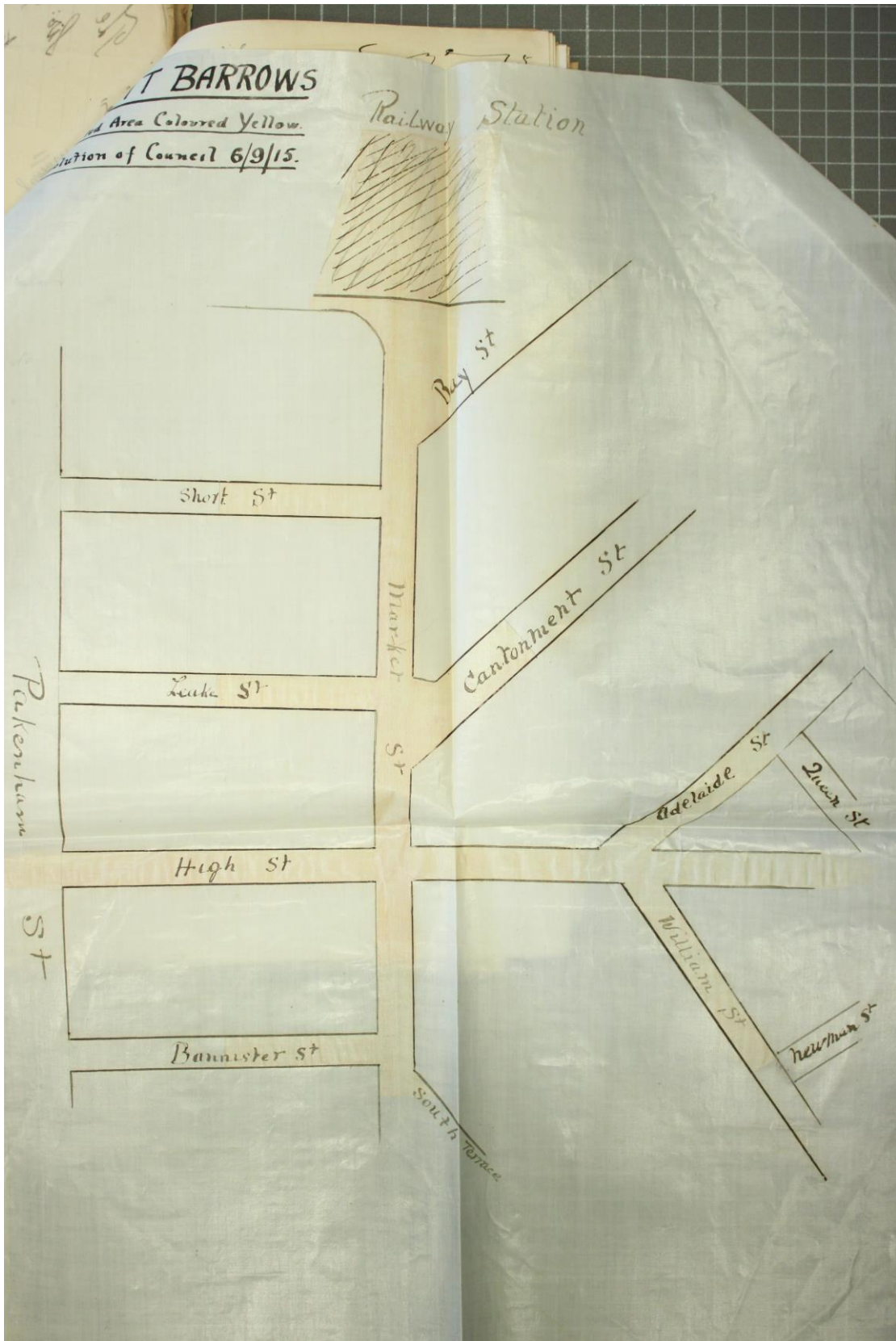
Central Board of Health Files AN 120/4, Cons: 1003, Item 1903/0418A, Outbreak of
Bubonic Plague Fremantle, Second Series of Cases, February 1903, S.R.O. Perth.

Appendix C:

Street Barrows - Map

Fremantle Municipal Council Correspondence Files, 1917-1919, Acc: 1377, AN 217/2, Box 55, Item 2. SRO, Perth. A map is contained in the archive with the prohibited areas coloured yellow: By Resolution of the Council, 6 September 1915, Fremantle Municipal Council, Cons 1377, AN 217/3, Box 39, Item 31. SRO, Perth





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