

16.0 Material Culture of the Governors, their Staff and Servants

Research Question

The material culture associated with the occupants of both the Stables and Government House should provide tangible evidence of hierarchical behaviour within a pre-eminent household in Australia. This evidence should assist in understanding the lifeways of these occupants which should shed light on how this hierarchy was maintained and mediated through material culture. The evidence for hierarchical behaviour should be understood in the context of the defining of Australian society in the late nineteenth century as ‘egalitarian and prosperous’.

16.1 Background

One of the assumptions behind this research question is that hierarchical behaviour is physically manifested in the artefacts recovered during the archaeological excavation. The way in which we understand how hierarchy manifests itself is by exploring these issues within certain theoretical contexts. Among the other assumptions that allow for the interpretation of hierarchy are that choices about purchases and goods available to the various residents of the house and the differences and similarities about access to these goods and the way they are used and who uses them are meaningful and constructed within social and cultural contexts.

The basis of some of these assumptions is an understanding of how a house of this size was run and people and accommodation categorised within the house and its various outbuildings. An important source for understanding the nature of the household are two household inventories made in the early twentieth century when the house was operated by the State Government for the Governor-General as his second residence after his main residence in Melbourne. The inventories are useful because of the way in which levels of importance were placed on accommodation for the various members of the household. This assists the analysis by providing some baseline data as an interpretative framework for formulating a response to the research question.

There are three inventories that are known from the early twentieth century. They were undertaken in 1902, 1908 and 1911.¹ Some of the specific details of these rooms were analysed for formulating the model. Some aspects of these inventories were discussed in Chapter 8 with the detailed analysis of the main contexts with quantities of artefacts. The aim of Chapter 8 was to explore each of these main contexts individually and to begin some preliminary comparative analysis as a way of revealing the essential or defining qualities of each of these main contexts. The main threads identified in these summary discussions will be developed in this section.

16.2 Theoretical Context: Consumption and Material Culture²

To explore the issues raised in the above question and observations it is necessary to review some of the theoretical context in which this question was posed. The focus of this is on issues associated with consumption and material culture and how they are rendered meaningful of the society that purchased and used them.

One of the main issues that affects consumption practices is why we buy what we buy and why we do not buy other things – the issues of what influences peoples’ choices. The choices made by individuals or families or neighbourhoods or particular social groups about the items they purchase

¹ Copies of these inventories were kindly provided by Robert Griffin, curator at Government House. They are held by Australian Archives. 1902: NL18/1673, Item Box 32, Government House Inventory-1902.

² This theoretical context was written by Mary Casey for an early draft of her PhD. A version of this text was included in Casey & Lowe 2000b.

are not isolated or separated from society and culture but informed and structured by them. According to Grant McCracken, ‘the consumer goods on which the consumer lavishes time, attention and income are charged with cultural meaning’. He contends people or consumers ‘use the meaning of consumer goods to express cultural categories and principles, cultivate ideals, create and sustain life styles, construct notions of the self, and create (and survive) social change’. He defines consumption as the process by which consumer goods and services are created, bought and used’.³ Daniel Miller, who seeks to stress the role of consumer as being loaded with social and cultural meaning, more loaded than the production and selling of goods, defines consumption as a process of objectification – it is ‘a use of goods and services in which the object or activity becomes simultaneously a practice in the world and a form in which we construct our understandings of ourselves in the world’.⁴ Miller sees the act of modern consumption as ‘an attempt by people to extract their own humanity through the use of consumption as a creation of specificity, which is held to negate the generality and alienatory scale of the institutions from which they receive the goods and services’.⁵

Miller further observes that it is ‘in the array of commodities as brought to life in the consumption practices of the household that moral, cosmological and ideological objectifications are constructed to create the images by which we understand who we have been, who we are, and who we might or should be in the future’.⁶

With regard to the concept of ‘choice’ Miller further observed that,

...it is revealed to be very far from some autonomous, independently generated act. Rather it is a limited condition that bears the burden of histories of social category formation in terms of class, gender and other parameters, the normative adjudication of families and peers, and the pressure of business attempts to ensure their particular profitability.⁷

One of the interesting issues at the Conservatorium site is the concern with ‘personal’ and hygiene-related items, such as hair combs, toiletries, washing etc. Within the Australian situation Margaret Maynard’s (1994) book, *Fashioned from penury. Dress as cultural practice in colonial Australia*, was influenced by Michel Foucault and adopts his use of a metaphor of language for the analysis of clothing:

...dress is a form of unspoken language, even though its signs have not fixed interpretation but a multiplicity of meanings. Through processes of decoding, dress discloses information about the most intimate aspects of lives and relationship, and the most delicate perceptions about class. Moreover, the adornment and ornamentation of the body, linked to associated bodily activity, can be a visible significance of the workings of regulatory disciplines, privilege and the ‘microphysics’ of modern patriarchal power...dress and behaviour are crucial to the ways in which both sexes are culturally enacted.⁸

In this case ‘dress’ can be used to refer to the application of toiletries and perfumes to the body as well as dressing the hair. Maynard also notes that the study of dress is cross-disciplinary, much the same as material culture and consumption, and is ‘located within a number of current

³ McCracken 1990:xi.

⁴ Miller 1995b:30.

⁵ Miller 1995b:31.

⁶ Miller 1995b:35.

⁷ Miller 1995b:36.

⁸ Maynard 1994:2-3.

discourses, which may included those addressing beauty, sexuality, class, ethnicity and economics'.⁹

With regard to the meaning and significance of consumption Glennie observed,

Goods usually had multiple meanings, frequently combining utilitarian, ornamental and private associations, and these meanings connected to notions of identity and social ideology. Divisions between public display and private use were far from clear-cut...Meanings and uses were ascribed to objects as they were incorporated into practices, which might be ritualised or spontaneous, and whose character changed over time...Women, in particular, used consumer goods both to establish their families' abstract attributes (status, lineage), much as men used land, and to recognise and negotiate personal qualities of taste, sociability and worth.¹⁰

An important aspect of meaning of goods is that they can mean different things in different places.

Archaeologists work with objects created in a social context formed by culture until, at some point in their existence, they come to reside within an archaeological context. Their role (the artefacts) is not passive for, in Schiffer's words, 'they influence the course of social interaction (Hodder 1982), and influence the course of social change'.¹¹

Mark Leone, departing from Deetz but developing from Hodder, looks at the recursive or active quality of material culture. He contends that people express their lives in the things surrounding them and in that expression and use; daily life is reproduced and bought together into existence each day and each generation. Therefore knowledge of the local context of use and meaning is essential if we are to understand the material culture and mental order that made it.¹²

In *Personal Discipline and Material Culture* Paul Shackel (1993) focuses on archaeological data derived from ceramics and toothbrushes to measure the dissemination of the ideas of personal discipline throughout society. He contends that markers such as greater diversity in plate sizes and the growing functional diversity of ceramics in an assemblage can be interpreted as an indication of the increasing segmentation found at the dinner table, which helped to reinforce a new standardised way of eating. This was behaviour that standardises and segments and requires one dish per person and a variety of dish sizes for different courses in the meal - butter dishes, dessert dishes, meat dishes, etc. An assemblage with this assortment would be an indication of a new etiquette that reinforced a segmenting trend and in turn disciplined people's behaviour at and away from the table.¹³ Shackel proposes that 'as behaviour became standardized and regimented, it encouraged the development of a modern discipline that allowed for a successful manufacturing process and promoted the consumption of goods, such as ceramics, that reinforced this behaviour every day and at special, ritualised meals'.¹⁴ These sorts of practices were also thought to produce individuality. Shackel works within the theories of capitalism and believes that this is one of the areas to which historical archaeology can make a major contribution.

An example of this is the control of behaviour according to standardised time. A fob watch found in the fill of a drain in the Stables illustrates how the behaviour of those working in the Stables was prescribed by having to be in certain places at certain times (Table 1000.24). An intention behind

⁹ Maynard 1994:3; Miller 1998.

¹⁰ Glennie 1995:179, referring to Vickery 1993; Whitbread 1988.

¹¹ Rathje 1979; Schiffer 1983:676.

¹² Leone 1987:235-261.

¹³ Shackel 1993:5.

¹⁴ Shackel 1993:30.

a watch is to co-ordinate the wearer's time with absolute time. In this case their time was probably prescribed for taking the coach or horses or messages to be somewhere else at a specific time. The time and use of the time of the occupants of the Stables was controlled by other people, mostly those at Government House. In addition, the ownership of this watch may have meant the owner had a certain status among other members of the household because it was an attractive ornamental item as well as an artefact designed to support efficiency and productivity in the wearer. There are interesting tensions present in the very ownership and use of such an item by a servant or staff member of the governor's household. This watch is on display in the Conservatorium of Music foyer.

16.3 Government House Inventory - 1908

Some of the bedrooms in the 1908 inventory have been analysed in detail (Tables 16.1, 16.2). Various bedrooms were chosen because many of the artefacts recovered from the large rubbish dump were associated with bedrooms. In addition bedroom furnishings provide us with details about early twentieth-century perceptions of requirements for the day-to-day activities of the governor's family as well as the staff and servants. It is likely that in such a conservative environment where the furniture was owned by the State government that many of these items had been present within the house for some time.

In addition there is a consistency of types of furniture available in the various levels of the rooms suggesting a systematic process behind the ordering of what goes into a specific type of bedroom. The presence of dressing or washing tables in all the bedrooms except the male servants' bedrooms presents a striking contrast. They occasionally had tables with mirrors to serve the same purpose but not the specialised item of furniture. This same pattern was present in the 'set of ware', wastepaper baskets and toilet pedestals generally found in all bedrooms but the male servants' bedrooms. Among the servants' rooms only the visiting maids (lady's maid) room had a fireplace, suggesting the absence of heating. The male servants had to use the communal bathroom down the hall but none of the female servants were allowed to appear outside their bedrooms without being properly clean and tidy.

None of the servants' rooms had ornaments listed in the inventory. If they had them they were personal possessions while the main bedrooms has some paintings or a clock. Boudoir 6 which was not a bedroom but probably a sitting room had Dresden china ornaments as well as flower pots, none of which were present in the bedrooms. Other differences are represented by the presence or absence of gas brackets, the variety of furniture for storing clothing and the types of woods used to make this furniture, the type and range of floor coverings, the variety and number of curtains and blinds and the range of seating and their coverings. Markers of difference were the types of fabrics used in furnishings and the timber used in furniture associated with members of the family. They had furnishings in silk, lace and chintz and furniture in walnut and silky oak which were not found in any of the servants' rooms.

The above brief examination of the 1908 inventory sets forward and supports the assumption that material culture, the objects used in daily life within Government House, were categorised and ordered according to who could use them and how. In addition some of them were invested with ideological choices and meaning. The female servants had to wash and tidy themselves before they left their rooms as they could not be seen in public or private – outside their room – in any state of disorder. This was a clear circumscribing of their behaviour – they were to meet standards being set by someone else. The issue of personal hygiene and discipline will be discussed in more detail below.

The raw data (Table 16.2) clearly illustrates that there were more items in the non-servant bedrooms than in the servants' bedrooms. This reflects both the size of the rooms and the range

of activities undertaken within a room. Of the 60 chairs of various descriptions only 16 were in the servants' rooms. The non-servant rooms mostly had wooden chairs although two had easy chairs. Clearly the servants were not likely to be doing anything in their bedrooms but sleeping, washing themselves and changing their clothes. The female servants did have another room for recreational purposes, the "housemaids' sitting room" which included a sofa, heath rug, range of chairs, a bookcase and a 'cosy gas fire' and three framed 'photographic view of N.S.Wales'.¹⁵

The inventory also contains lists of ceramics stored in various rooms. Stored in the housemaids' room were pieces of a blue patterned breakfast set with cups and saucers, plates, bread and butter plates, slop basin, sugar basin, milk jug, egg cups, covered muffin dish and a butter dish.¹⁶ In addition there were blue and gold plates, meat dishes, white and gold bread and butter plates, stoneware jugs, inkwells, bread platter, metal teapot and a kettle. Stored in the kitchen were a range of ceramics and glass items used for cooking: 'K' basins, pie dishes, pudding basins, store tins, French fire-proof dishes, jelly dishes, and various jugs. There was a blue and gold dinner service with four different types of plates and ten types of serving vessels. Another dinner service in the 'Lichfield' pattern (Gothic cathedral) had four types of plates and five types of serving vessels. In addition there were many assorted serving vessels, various patterned plates (odd not matching), as well as 'common white plates', and dozens of other types of items used for cooking. Most of these were stored in the kitchen with some others in the baking room. There was a "stewards" room dinner service with white and gold vessels with four types of plates as well as three types of serving vessels. There were other serving vessels in unidentified patterns. Other sets included a Worcester breakfast and tea service, a 'blue Minton fibre pattern' breakfast and tea and coffee service. Stored in the housekeeper's sitting room was Lord Carrington's blue and gold dinner service which consisted of 20 meat dishes, 93 soup plates, 677 plates, 85 small plates, 67 coffee plates and 66 tea cups. There were more vessels in the butler's pantry as well as large quantities of glassware including 447 champagne glasses as well as various spirit glasses, decanters and jugs. Among the extensive range of items kept in the housekeeper's store room were Foley, Minton and Belleek teapots as well as white and gold chambers, toilet jugs, and basins and soap dishes which would have been part of the 'sets of ware' found in the bedrooms. Three dessert services were identified - Dresden, Crown Derby and Royal Worcester. The 'best' dinner service was the Coalport service. In this service there were six types of serving vessels and four types of plates and one type of bowl among which were items that had been repaired or were cracked. For example, of the 11 covers for vegetable dishes only two were undamaged. Other table, serving and cooking wares were stored in the southern wing of the stables. Among these ceramics were 'common white' wares as well as various vessels in 'white', 'white and gold' and different patterns.¹⁷

Among the ceramics were a broad range of shapes used at the dinner table, for breakfast, or dessert or for taking tea and coffee. There were dinner services that were for 'best' and others that were obviously relatively good but were for large-scale public events such as Lord Carrington's dinner service which is actually quite a thick earthenware and some used for the servants, probably the 'white and gold' or the 'common white' wares. Each dinner services contained a variety of forms, such as the dinner, salad, soup, dessert and cheese plates as well as the soup tureens, sauce tureens, vegetable dishes and covers, meat dishes salad bowls, fish drainer, and gravy dishes. These reflect a complex range of dishes and courses that were fed to the governor's guests and family. Many of these specialised serving vessels were not found in the commoner types of wares that would have been used by the servants. These conform to the pattern suggested by Shackel where an assemblage with this assortment of specialised forms were likely to be an indication of a

¹⁵ 1908 Inventory, p. 27.

¹⁶ 1908 Inventory, p. 28.

¹⁷ 1908 Inventory, p. 34-42, 44-45, 49-53, 68-69.

new etiquette that reinforced a segmenting trend and in turn disciplined people's behaviour at and away from the table.¹⁸

The above review of the 1908 inventory supports the contention that material culture was used by the residents of Government House as part of establishing and maintaining behaviours which supported and reinforced the *status quo* of governor, staff, servants and yard staff. This material culture both reflected and actively constructed the rules of behaviour by which the various residents of the house were to live and types of behaviour that they were allowed to enjoy. Clearly if there were 10 different types of plates to be used at a meal in the dining room when the governor had important guests then there needed to be food and wine to be served on them. This required servants to select, prepare and cook the food and then to serve it to the table, transferring it from the kitchen to the dining room, remove each course and return the used vessels and glasses to the kitchen and scullery. Someone then had to wash the dirty dishes and return them to their storage places. This type of lifestyle could only be supported where numbers of servants were available to perform these tasks because of the range of hierarchical behaviours and specialised jobs.

The serving of food at the dining room table would have been one of the main events in which the hierarchy and the specified roles of the various residents of Government House were enacted to their extreme with most of the residents having a 'role' which they were to appropriately perform or there may be punishment. In addition, the type of food served to the governor, his family and his guests with a variety of food courses and wines, salads, and desserts would have presented a stark contrast to the food served in the small servants' hall with its stout and two or three courses. Perhaps typically this would have been a main course with vegetables and a dessert or sweet. Material culture was one of the main ways in which people established and maintained barriers, both physical and mental, as part of the upholding social hierarchies.

16.4 Artefacts from the Conservatorium Site

When interpreting the main groups of artefacts from the Conservatorium site the 1908 inventory can be explored in relation to items that would have once been stored and used in the rooms of Government House. In addition these artefacts flesh out other aspects of life at the Stables and Government House and help reveal how hierarchy was established, mediated and maintained. The inventory has proven useful mostly as a way of firmly establishing a material culture framework in which to more appropriately address the social context of use for the artefacts recovered from the excavation. The inventories became more significant documents once the artefacts were found and needed to be analysed – the inventories could now be looked at in a new way and given new meaning.

The range of items associated with hygiene, grooming and adornment found in the various archaeological contexts assists with furthering the analysis of how female and male behaviour was circumscribed by the hierarchical environment of Government House. As discussed above the presence of washing sets were common in all but the male servants' bedrooms to assist with the daily rituals of personal grooming. Table 10 (Volume 6) presents an analysis of personal items from some of the main contexts. There were 27 items associated with hygiene found in the main rubbish dump (#850). As discussed in Chapter 8 there were some fascinating pharmaceuticals designed to improve a person's appearance, such as, 'Florida water' used to enhance the complexion, 'Mrs Allens Hair restorer' and 'Trichpherous for skin and hair' to help regrow hair that has fallen out or inhibit the receding hairline. Other items for grooming were French and English perfumes, and brushes and hair combs. The imported perfumes were presumably expensive and originally purchased by the more affluent members of the household rather than the servants. In addition the female servants probably did not use hair combs or they were not visible,

¹⁸ Shackel 1993:5.

as they had to wear hats. Access to and use of these goods were probably therefore limited to those in the upper part of the hierarchy and helped to physically mark the role people played in the hierarchy.

Other ways to establish peoples' position in the hierarchy was to put them in uniform so they could be labelled. Examples of this are badges and buttons fallen off uniforms and found in the Stables forecourt. There were military, police and livery buttons belonging to people who worked in the grounds of Government House and the Stables (Chapter 8). Typically these buttons were brass and were highly visible on the various uniforms. The uniforms and buttons sought to establish the legitimacy of the person wearing the uniform and their role of service for the governor or the State and emphasised the official position of the governor. These uniforms represented the power of the person the wearer worked for rather than any power possessed by the individual.

Another way to emphasise and reinforce the allegiance of the servants and staff was to provide them with goods that bore the symbols of the state and therefore the symbol of the persons to whom they owed obedience. The use of royal crowns and the symbols of Great Britain on clay pipes found in the western garden beds suggest that the residents of the stables were provided with pipes as part payment for their duties and these pipes bore the symbols of their employer and the country and King whom they acknowledged (Chapter 8.1.5.2, drwgs 8.9-11). It is also possible that they users of these pipes purchased them to flaunt their role and position in the larger society, thereby reinforcing the hierarchy of the British Empire and their role within it. The use of such symbolism and its meaning has previously been suggested as being relevant to Irish or Australian identity in New South Wales.¹⁹ Therefore in this case it may be relevant to British identity at the Government Stables in colonial New South Wales and the established colonial hierarchy.

Many of the artefacts recovered during the archaeological work add to and extend the perception of class strongly influencing the type of goods purchased and how these goods were used. One of the strongest impressions gained from the ceramics recovered from the rubbish dump was their generally low quality - no porcelain or fine earthenwares were found. Most items were robust, thicker earthenwares with some china but not of a particularly fine quality. It was unlikely the governor and his family or guests would have used any of these ceramics. The only items from the large rubbish dump they would have used were the champagne bottles and the finer glassware and condiments from the condiment bottles and the toiletries and pharmaceuticals discussed above. All in all the disposal of highly fragile items or ones that had no intrinsic value (their contexts had value) – glass bottles and drinking vessels – were the only items that appeared to represent non-servant related activities.

It was only when the inventories were made available that the accuracy of this impression was confirmed and the reasons for it were also confirmed. It was assumed that if no finer or more expensive ceramics were found in the rubbish dump then the broken items must have been disposed of separately or differently. As already mentioned there were a number of different good quality dinner, breakfast, tea and coffee and dessert sets identified in the 1908 inventory. In many cases a number of the vessels in each set were identified as being damaged or repaired and were curated and stored rather than thrown out with the other rubbish on the dump. They were more expensive and therefore they could not be thrown out willy-nilly like the cheaper ceramics. This different treatment for the finer ceramics reflects the hierarchy of choices for those who were the true residents of the house and those who worked there. The ceramics purchased for and used by the servants were cheaper and therefore disposable while the more expensive broken items had to be stored and inventoried and someone had to make a decision to dispose of them. In some cases it was clear that the broken ceramics on the 1902 inventory were also on the 1908 inventory, suggesting that few people were willing to make this decision. It was simpler to inventory the

¹⁹ Denis Gojak. unpublished seminar paper.

broken ceramics rather than dispose of them and then have to explain where they were. Their presence was more important than the disposal of broken items that were useless objects.

Other interesting aspects of the servants' sets were how they reflected some of the complexity of the serving vessels found in the inventories, likely due to the communal nature of meals in the servants' hall rather than for the complexity of their meals. The vegetable dishes, tureens and meat platters were found in both types of sets, cheaper and finer quality, and according to Shackel these represented a higher level of organisation in society and a new etiquette but in this case they actually represent the maintenance of a longer social and cultural institution of service. In the case of the dinner services, the cheaper ceramics mirror the range of dishes found in the services used for the governor and his family and guests and are perhaps suggestive of a Royal association through the presence of gilded and white ceramics (77 vessels) as well as purple-printed patterns (66 vessels) (Table 13). The frequency with which both these patterns are found on working-class sites is typically low, therefore the pattern at this site is meaningful rather than incidental. This relationship is therefore interpreted through the perspective of reinforcing the hierarchy. The communal meals in the servants' hall tend to emulate elements of the meals served to the governor, his family and guests but their meals were served on inferior ceramics and included beer rather than wine or champagne, had two or three courses in comparison to the four or more in the main dining room and the servants have to cook for and serve themselves. This was a pattern repeated at every meal of the day and every day of the year. It was a behaviour that reinforced who was servant and master and it was only through following this model of hierarchical behaviour that the staff and servants would be successful in their daily tasks.

16.5 Discussion

The material culture of Government House and the Stables, through its use of a complex hierarchy of fabrics, forms, patterns, labels, and uniforms, circumscribe the behaviour of its users and residents and was essential in the establishing and maintaining of hierarchical behaviour in colonial society. The residents of Government House and the way in which they lived and interrelated was very much a part of British society and culture transported along with the convicts to New South Wales. As long as British culture survives in NSW so will remnants of its cultural patterns of behaviour. Material culture and the class boundaries it established and maintained was a way of reinforcing the hierarchical nature of this society. If there were no servants and no large infrastructure for them to service then the rules of society begin to change and its nature begins to change. Much of the material culture was chosen – probably subliminally – as a way of reinforcing the patterns of this behaviour so as to ensure its survival.