

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Class in a Tea Cup**

#### **Introduction**

In January 1895, readers of the *Bulletin* were introduced to a Mister Alfred Thomas Bushell. The image of the bearded, balding 61 year-old was first delivered to this readership in the form of an advertisement, a striking portrait of an elegant gentleman, drinking from a cup that had been stamped with his namesake: Bushells Tea. The simplicity of the image was matched by the brevity of the pitch – ‘None pure and genuine without this signature upon each package of tea’.<sup>140</sup>

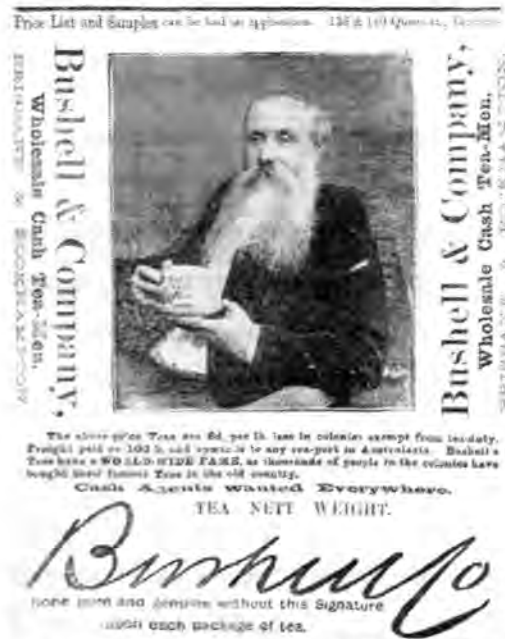


Figure 4.1 *Bulletin* advertisement 1895

This early advertisement bespoke the sort of cultural anchorage that would become characteristic of Bushells' media presence. Firstly, the brand, originally from Brisbane, presciently utilised the logic and language of modern marketing, a relatively fresh approach for the late 1890s. Alfred Bushell prioritised an image and a name, with his signature highlighted in large, bold type, and built his appeal to potential customers on the supposed prestige of that name. This image would have endeared the

brand to the growing number of middle class Australians that were factoring questions of status and quality into their shopping decisions. Secondly, the fact that the advertisement appeared in the *Bulletin* was also significant. From the late 1800s, the Sydney-based publication was the literary embodiment of a growing national sensibility. Besides showcasing the veritable catalogue of Australian cultural talent, the *Bulletin* canvassed the breadth of political, economic and social debates. That Bushells Tea intersected with these discourses so early in its marketing life should not be dismissed as mere coincidence.<sup>141</sup> Rather, it is evidence that the Bushells brand has, practically from its inception, paralleled and reflected important shifts in Australian history.

As noted in the last chapter, early Australians' access to commodities like tea was determined by a variety of interests and forces. From the short-sightedness of London officials, to the avarice of military officers, to the can-do spirit of pioneer merchants, a range of people had either little or a lot to gain from freeing up the foodstuffs marketplace. In turn, a variety of extrinsic pressures and expectations came into play. Eventually, as scarcity and rations gave way to enterprise and variety, there was a corresponding realignment of attitudes and ambitions. Population growth and economic change saw a steady evolution of product choice and buying options: the Commissariat, the visiting cargo ships, the fresh produce markets, the grocery stores – each factor had a significant part in Australia's commercial development. More to the point, each factor helped affect the quantity, quality and promotion of tea in Australia.

This chapter *will* eventually return to both Alfred Bushell, and the next chapter will consider the *Bulletin* more closely. Firstly, though, it needs to be seen how this meeting came about, between a relatively new brand of tea that offered distinction and quality, and a publication that was speaking for and about a growing Australian consciousness. As it was argued in the last chapter, one of the defining features of the late-nineteenth century marketplace, which is to say the proto-modern marketplace, was the widening gap between the production and the consumption of everyday commodities, and the concomitant change in the way consumers were informed of their market choices. The less direct involvement consumers had in procuring and preparing household essentials, the more advice and encouragement was made available, usually in the form of classifieds and advertisements. Since Alfred

Bushell's appearance in the *Bulletin* must be understood as part of this process, this chapter will outline the emergence and entrenchment of this new market paradigm. Not only will this help explain the rise and strength of the Bushells brand in market terms, it will explain the extent to which *all* brands became dependent on a vast and intricate web of commerce, politics, culture and ideology. Most of the rest of this chapter, then, may best be seen as an historical background for the rest of the thesis.

### **New Chums**

In the late 1800s, Australians became increasingly entwined in the economic infrastructure of a consumerist system. Before then, up until the mid 1800s, most households had a rather indiscriminate approach to sourcing basic provisions. Many still retained some connection to the land; often, this was in the form of fruit trees or a vegetable patch; many still kept a cow for private supplies of milk, butter and cream; many still relied on the itinerant salesperson, from whom fish, bread, or ice could be obtained; and, as it has been detailed already, many took advantage of the local grocery store, which was usually within walking distance, and which generally stocked the gamut of household requirements. There was, in other words, a combination of old-fashioned self-sufficiency and new-world shopping convenience. The closing decades of the nineteenth century, however, saw this balance tip more and more towards the latter, as Australia mirrored the general retail patterns of the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States. From the mid 1850s, the transition from traditional to modern shopping practices became a standard measure of city living; one aspect of this transition was the growing accessibility of relative luxuries in everyday life.<sup>142</sup> Firstly, then, it needs to be seen how Australia's city centres became increasingly accommodating to this process, as it will explain the place and purpose of something as arbitrary as branded tea.

An essential feature of this evolution was the rise and influence of an educated and propertied class, one that could eventually embrace and indulge bourgeois tendencies. To understand the scope and scale of this, two factors warrant particular attention: the types of immigrants that were settling in Australia's city centres, particularly those that were already oriented towards urban occupations; and the ways by which the gold rushes vitalised key sectors of the Australian economy.

From the early decades of the 1800s there was a strong correlation between the types of people immigrating to Australia and the spike in certain economic indicators. Between 1831 and 1850, the Australian colonies admitted over 170 000 immigrants from the United Kingdom. One-third of these immigrants paid their own fare. Indeed, there was a core of highly qualified and ambitious professionals, people who had perhaps failed to make a mark in British society, but were of 'respectable' standing nonetheless. In *Australian Colonists* (1993), Ken Inglis suggests that Australia provided a second chance for these 'new chums'.<sup>143</sup>

Not only did these immigrants come from an already urbanising society, they proved, initially at least, disinclined to anything but an urban environment, and settled in the main city centres. This aversion to the countryside lasted at least until the 1850s, and directed labour and commerce towards the key city centres. By the mid 1800s, and especially in Sydney and Melbourne, the signs of a rapidly urbanising society were becoming increasingly pronounced. The concentration of these immigrants inevitably encouraged a concentration of service provision and investment. Of the 186 000 people living in New South Wales, over a quarter lived in the city of Sydney, which already had a fair variety of shops, factories, offices, and banks; similarly, Melbourne attracted about the same proportion of the 100 000 people who lived in Port Philip.<sup>144</sup> The fact that the capital cities were ports as well placed these growing populations in the middle of commercial traffic. Sailing ships loaded with consignments from Britain regularly brought in the latest wares from abroad. Sydney's Circular Quay, for example, was a bustling hub, and kept Sydney's elite (by 1850, one was in fact identifiable) attuned to overseas trends.

The gold rushes had a similarly profound effect on the size and make-up of Australian society. The discovery of alluvial gold in both New South Wales and Victoria in 1851 was of monumental consequence. While there is not the space here to discuss their history and significance at length or in too much depth, it will suffice to highlight the effect they had in multiplying Australia's export earnings, boosting its labour force, and stretching its skills base.

Firstly, the rushes generated extraordinary income for the two states: by 1860, over 22½ million ounces was sent away from Victoria, and almost 31½ million from New South Wales; in turn, trade in both states increased in the 1850s to more than ten times the average of the preceding decade.<sup>145</sup> In the 1850s Australian gold accounted for 40 per cent of the world's total production, and, until the 1870s, remained a more valuable export than wool.<sup>146</sup> Secondly, the rushes dramatically swelled Australia's population: between 1852 and 1861, half a million people emigrated from the United Kingdom to Australia in search of gold, and effectively doubled the population in less than a decade. Thirdly, and as Inglis points out, not only did these hopeful immigrants bring with them a degree of economic independence (over half paid their own fare); many of the would-be diggers actually found they could maintain or increase their wealth away from the gold fields, particularly once the initial frenzy had settled. So, those that had been carpenters, storemen, butchers and so on in Britain often either returned to their original occupation, albeit in a new land, or moved into other areas of Australia's growing economy.<sup>147</sup> Specifically, urban employment opportunities were crucial in absorbing these extra workers.

### **An Urban Environment: Labour & Lifestyle**

Between the 1830s and the 1890s, the combination of a high intake of British immigrants and the economic ripples of the gold rushes had comprehensively affected Australian society. At the very least, the Australian population had changed enough to irreversibly alter the course of the nation, generally in ways that accelerated a capitalist economy and intensified a consumerist culture. These processes may not have been labelled or recognised as such at the time, yet even a brief overview of Australian society in the last few decades prior to federation suggests that the country was indeed being prepared for what is known today as advanced consumer capitalism. There was a discernible process whereby a very large proportion of Australians lived in urban areas, with the urban environment producing the dominant social, political and economic forces. The extent of this process is worth stressing. In *Investment in Australian Economic Development* (1964), N. G. Bairn notes that, as early as 1891, almost two-thirds of the Australian population lived in cities or towns, a proportion that was not matched by either the United States until 1920, or Canada until 1950.<sup>148</sup> This amounted to what Bairn described as *the* outstanding characteristic of Australian

economic history: a general economic orientation towards commercial-industrial specialisation and towards those tertiary services required of an urban populace.

As was noted in the last chapter, this was a widespread phenomenon in the nineteenth century, as most of the world's high-income countries experienced a discernible shift towards urbanisation. From the mid 1700s to the mid 1800s, there was an extraordinary acceleration in the pace and scale of industrial development, and the specialised production of goods and services reached unprecedented levels. Societies that were a part of this Industrial Revolution were inevitably primed for processes of urbanisation: the sophistication of the machinery, the amount of capital this machinery relied on for its purchase, maintenance and operation, and the increasing specialisation of labour involved in the new production processes amounted to a high concentration of this labour in the growing urban areas. Britain was the first country to experience this process, and its key cities spearheaded an extraordinary period of rapid industrialisation.

Besides the various economic determinants that helped strengthen urbanisation, there were also several non-economic reinforcements. As Sean Glynn argues in *Urbanisation in Australian History 1788-1900* (1975), urbanisation encompassed more than matters of labour and infrastructure; it included the cultural accretions that came with modern city living. Indeed, Glynn argues that the 'richness' of the urban lifestyle owed much to these qualitative, cultural aspects, particularly for those that had come from Britain's urban areas. For this migrant pool, the most important source of metropolitan population growth, the capital cities were especially attractive for this aspect, particularly Sydney and Melbourne. Obviously, these cities had been the chief beneficiaries of intensive government investment, and thus boasted the comfort and security of urban amenities (roads, public buildings, bridges, railways, schools, telegraph and postal services). At the same time, though, the urban milieu was attractive in terms of its sociality – the opportunities for recreation, entertainment, and education. Consequently, argues Glynn, by the late 1800s the cities had become cultural as well as economic beacons, so much so that their range of leisure options actually bettered that of any English city besides London. He writes:

The popular institutions of the day – theatres, hotels, clubs, institutes, sporting clubs – tended to concentrate and proliferate in metropolitan areas which served non-metropolitan as well as metropolitan populations.<sup>149</sup>

The city metropolis thus helped determine not only the economic contours of Australian society, but its cultural and aesthetic preferences as well.

As the major urban areas grew in economic and demographic strength, it became clear that certain sectors, industries and professions were particularly well placed for considerable material gain. An urban middle class assumed shape, and drew its wealth and security from private land ownership, new factories, and a blossoming financial market. The significance of this class was initially due to the growing importance of capital and industry to the economy. In turn, though, and on the varying strength of this importance, the middle class of this period could be loosely stratified. In *The Shaping of Urban Society* (1974), Janet Roebuck identifies two main echelons, the upper middle class and the lower middle class. The upper middle class possessed most of the capital, and was generally made up of bankers, successful merchants, and owners of industrial plants. It enjoyed most of the prestige and status associated with middle class accomplishment. The lower middle class, on the other hand, was a larger group, made up of owners of smaller businesses and industrial concerns, suppliers of goods and services, and retailers. Generally, though, the size and significance of the entire middle class swelled alongside the march of industry; as urban areas grew and prospered, there was a correlated increase in the demand for a wider variety of goods and services.<sup>150</sup> There was, then, an incredible opportunity for members of the middle class to consolidate their place in the economy, as a growing proportion of the population became increasingly reliant on their skills and services. At the same time, the very possibility of economic gain engendered a class preoccupation with social recognition. Particularly among the lower middle class, whose economic leverage was not as assured and intimidating as that of the upper middle class, the desire to demonstrate status and respectability became a powerful cultural force.

In the second half of the 1800s, the economic climate of eastern Australia became increasingly hospitable to the material interests and social ambitions of an emergent middle class. After 1850, capitalist production was the nation's pre-eminent economic

imperative, with the expansion and diversification in commodity production and distribution. In *Constructing Capitalism* (1989), Andrew Wells argues that, from the mid 1800s, a combination of domestic needs as well as the requirements of British and world markets organised the Australian economy as a predominantly capitalist one. While gold and wool were, between 1850 and 1890, the main Australian commodities sold on the imperial and international markets, the close of the nineteenth century saw huge expansion in both intra-colonial and inter-colonial trade, including 'a wider range of pastoral, agricultural, mineral and processed primary commodities.'<sup>151</sup> Colonial capitalists, especially those that were working with merchants and finance capitalists in Britain, were, therefore, particularly well positioned to orient and exploit the lucrative opportunities of the growing economy.

This period of economic expansion generated more than just personal profits, as important as that was. Rather, as Michael Cannon points out in *Life in the Cities* (1975), the more power and influence this class enjoyed, the more that like-minded aspirants were encouraged to emulate its ways. The mere possibility of wealth and status had a profound effect on the psychology and spirit of ambitious Australians. Between the 1850s and the 1890s, the combination of talent, initiative and prosperity saw risks rewarded and fortunes multiplied. This optimism, writes Cannon, had a direct impact on the nation's city environment:

...making possible the rapid building of Australia's cities, establishment of industries, formation of every type of social institution from municipal councils to defence forces, and giving participants the sense that all this arduous effort was worthwhile.<sup>152</sup>

Civic pride notwithstanding, it was not too long before this sense of accomplishment was being demonstrated in far less public ways; namely, through the private signs and symbols of middle class mobility.

In the late 1800s, Australians' access to fashionable and modern commodities grew dramatically, to the extent that the urban middle class enjoyed a consumer marketplace of unprecedented size and sophistication. As this group became increasingly inclined to the display and glorification of middle class attainment, there was an (related) increase in the range of commodities that could be directed to this



end. The great trading houses of the time played a key role in this development. In its management of the 'goods traffic, Australia's import-export fraternity was instrumental in promoting and entrenching the logistics of international commodity exchange. By helping to trade the gold, wheat and wool Australia had to offer for the factory-floor fruits of London, Bradford and Birmingham, these intermediaries – like Paterson, Laing & Bruce of Melbourne, Sigmond Hoffnung & Co. of Sydney, and the Murray Brothers of Adelaide – facilitated Australia's entry into an international economy. Not only were they personally responsible for huge profit margins, and valorised the distinctly middle class notion of 'added value'; they became arbiters of taste and refinement, and furnished elegant Australian homes with the latest in fashionable, covetable merchandise.

The influx of commodities that could communicate status or class was not limited to big-ticket items. The tea traders, for instance, were one of the more viable sections of the importing circle. As Cannon writes, the tea business offered considerable profit for relatively little risk. So, with the rate of tea consumption in Australia growing, 'many comfortable middle-class importers' and retailers' fortunes were being founded on the habit.'<sup>153</sup> They too tended to Australians' deepening engagement in modern commerce, and advertised regularly in the *Bulletin*. For example, one company advertised in the *Bulletin* thus: 'The London & Sydney Tea Co.'s Tea – Chests delivered free to any RAILWAY STATION or PORTS in NEW SOUTH WALES.'<sup>154</sup> Another read: 'Drink Cup Blend Tea. Unrivalled in quality. ALL storekeepers in NSW and Queensland'.<sup>155</sup> And another: 'Every variety of TEA! And each of unrivalled excellence, delivered free by Atcherley & Dawson'.<sup>156</sup> Finally, a third stated, rather emphatically: 'Globe Teas have NO equal'.<sup>157</sup> The breadth of tea's appeal was such that in an increasingly nuanced marketplace, the scope for profit was considerable.

### **Retail Therapy: the rise of the department store**

Few institutions celebrated and symbolised Australia's maturing marketplace quite like the department store. Unlike the modest specialist store of the early nineteenth century, the department store was an emporium, and showcased both the latest in a wide variety of goods, as well as a superior level of customer service. From the 1870s,

such stores could be found in Australia's capital cities. As Kimberley Webber and Ian Hoskins write in *What's in Store?* (2003), these department stores brought the Australian shopping experience in line with that of Paris, London, and New York. In both form and function, these department stores championed the new consumerist ethos, whereby shopping was seen more as a type of leisure and entertainment than as just another household chore. They presented:

...increasingly elaborate 'dream worlds' to their customers, whose traditional ideals of thrift and economy were challenged by an atmosphere of luxury, indulgence, even abandon.<sup>158</sup>

Australia's eager embrace of novelty shopping (which was, essentially, what department stores were designed to encourage) signalled its relatively rapid adoption of international consumer cues. The rise of the department store in the world's city centres was indicative of far more than just extra counter room. From the mid 1800s, and particularly between 1840 and 1870, a new kind of shopping space and sensibility was seen in the cities of France, England and North America. This is a point worth stressing: the department store was not just a 'bigger' store – it was a creature of the modern, bureaucratised age, aligned in both organisation and intention. As such, given the degree to which Australian consumers took to the department store in the late 1800s, and the degree to which its internal rhythm would ultimately strengthen and sustain other consumerist processes, such as the branding of tea, it deserves closer study.

One way to appreciate the historical and cultural significance of the nineteenth century department store is to examine one of the most celebrated examples: the Bon Marché. This famed department store (or *grand magasin*) not only captured the zeitgeist of 1890s Paris, it was the perfect microcosm of a modernising nation. Built by the Parisian draper Aristide Boucicaut in 1869, the store was the retail extension of the city's 1855 Grand Exposition, which had inspired Boucicaut enough to have him borrow some of its features. He fused the logistics and atmosphere of modern material splendour: the combination of free entry and clearly marked price tags, with bountiful displays in a dream-like setting. However, as Bill Lancaster notes in *The Department Store* (1995), this pseudo-egalitarianism was double-edged. While the store *did* invite the masses to browse at leisure without spending a single centime, their appreciation

could only be consummated (and hence validated) with an actual purchase. This had a culling effect, as full membership of the bourgeoisie became contingent on a degree of disposable income, and the good taste to spend it wisely. Lancaster writes:

‘[This] confident class were the inheritors of the modern world; lacking title and land they turned to the unfolding realm of finery and consumer goods to signify their presence.’<sup>159</sup>

Not only was the Bon Marché the ultimate expression of middle class pretension; every aspect of its operation reflected changes in the world’s modern economies. This could be seen in the store’s hierarchy of bureaus, clerks and managers, the nominal reliance on a broad-based clientele, and the unabashed glorification of unbridled self-indulgence. The Bon Marché was modelled on and managed by the reigning tenets of bourgeois ideology. The logistics demanded the sort of systemic efficiency that was to become the supposed hallmark of modern industry. With an emphasis on the rapid turnover of a huge volume of goods, Boucicaut oriented every aspect of the Bon Marché’s organisation to the comfort and convenience of his sophisticated clientele.

In its promise of both unfailing efficiency *and* escapist frivolity, the Bon Marché actively demonstrated one of the ironies of modern consumerist culture. On the one hand, the store became a paragon of retail expedience, and guaranteed fixed prices, the right of return, home deliveries, and conscientious service. On the other hand, though, and just as essentially, the Bon Marché was beautified in ways that dramatically belied its machine-like organisation. In this way, the store exemplified the extent to which modern marketing would increasingly favour atmosphere and identity over actual product information. From its palatial galleries, oriental rugs and cascading silks, to its series of concerts, guided tours and purpose-built reading room, Boucicaut cleverly merged the commercial requirements of his business with the aesthetic disposition of a discerning middle class. Importantly, and as Michael B. Miller argues in *The Bon Marché* (1981), such conceits represented much more than Boucicaut’s personal vanity. They celebrated the theatricality of consumption, and wrapped the marketplace with an irresistible and necessarily elusive charm:

Dazzling and sensuous, the Bon Marché became a permanent fair, an institution, a fantasy world, a spectacle of extraordinary proportions, so

that going to the store became an event and an adventure. One came now less to purchase a particular article than simply to visit, buying in the process because it was part of the excitement, part of an experience that added another dimension to life.<sup>160</sup>

By advertising the values and ideals of the Parisian bourgeoisie, the Bon Marché effectively assumed a socialising role. This amounted to equating the pursuit of a 'respectable' lifestyle with the appreciation and consumption of particular commodities. In this sense, the Bon Marché, a reference point for subsequent department stores in France and throughout the capitalist world, was not unlike an instrument of social homogenisation. As Miller writes:

[It] illustrated how successful people or people who wished to be successful lived their lives. All this it did in ways that fit the upper-middle-class mould. In its pictures and in its displays the Bon Marché became a medium for the creation of a national middle class culture.<sup>161</sup>

When department stores like Printemps (1865), Samaritaine (1870), and Galeries Lafayette (1895) joined the Bon Marché, Paris itself became a cultural reference point for an international bourgeoisie. Before the close of the century, urban populations around the world were familiar with the strategic, seductive inducements of the modern department store – its exhibitions, advertising material, mail order catalogues, and numerous articles in the popular periodicals. Put simply, the *grand magasin* of Paris, and in particular the Bon Marché, had become both the template and textbook for modern retail convention.

By the late 1800s, the managerial style of the *grand magasins* was a trans-Atlantic phenomenon. Indeed, by the 1890s, the department store was the leading force in American retailing. Compared to their European counterparts, American retail managers waged an even more intense pursuit of efficiency and order. Their trade journals extolled the virtues of control – control of the floor space, product categories, staff and clientele. In some ways, America's retail innovators actually exceeded Boucicaut *et al*, and found new ways to maximise the size and variety they could offer. R. H. Macy's, for example, championed diversity. With around 120 sales staff, the store's stock included dry goods, ready-to-wear, home furnishing, toys, books, sweets, sporting goods, fine china, glassware, and silverware, all under the one roof.

The emphasis on proximity was not just a nod to convenience. Managers hoped that the combination of beautiful displays and obliging staff increased the chances of impulse shopping. Ideally, customers would wander through several departments and, overwhelmed by the variety, make spontaneous purchases, often from departments they had not originally intended to visit.

The idea that the shopper could be coaxed and cajoled became a standard assumption in American retail. In addition to the merchandise itself, store managers began to offer facilities and services that rendered the shopping experience even more leisurely and accommodating. In *Counter Cultures* (1988), Susan Porter Benson argues that these provisions were always ultimately about sales, beguiling customers with anything that would lengthen their shopping time, and render them more susceptible to further spending. There were lavatories with the latest fittings, lounge suites that provided reading materials, restaurants that specialized in a 'lady's' palate (department stores were, almost from the beginning, gendered spaces, as Benson argues), and quiet meeting areas for the shoppers to catch up with friends. Macy's in New York was especially generous with such niceties: it installed a soda fountain in 1870, a lunchroom in 1878 and, by the mid 1880s, telephone and telegraph stations, a lost and found desk, and a post office.

Ultimately, all these efforts to attract and pamper customers were fuelled by a strong and uncompromising didacticism. As in Europe, the rising living standards of an urban middle class, coupled with an emerging set of class-specific manners, encouraged a cultural emphasis on style and respectability. Ostensibly, department stores 'catered' to this class, and provided a virtual catalogue of lifestyle requirements. However, as Benson argues, the stores' role was actually far more educative than acquiescent, since they shaped middle class mores in ways consistent with the commercial impulses of modern consumer capitalism. These stores, Benson writes:

...reinforced the notions of bourgeois good taste and propriety, particularly insofar as these required ever more material accompaniments: the correct clothes for each occasion, the huge assortment of china, silver, and glassware necessary for proper entertaining, the home decorated in the acme of good taste.<sup>162</sup>

Department stores encouraged, if not depended on, the paranoid vigilance of fashion and decorum, and the belief that the right commodities could allay such anxieties.

The department store courted the fashion-conscious bourgeoisie so successfully that its consumerist core became both economically entrenched and culturally naturalised. This is less a tribute to the department store *per se* as to the way it harmonised so well with the mood and make-up of the modern urban population, seizing its spending power by exploiting its insecurities. As the Australian examples will attest, the formula was even strong enough to survive the long trip to the antipodes.

### **Department Stores Down Under**

Like their antecedents abroad, Australian department stores proved similarly adept at tailoring the ambitious middle class around an approved set of lifestyle accessories and expectations. Wherever it appeared, the development of the department store was a tactical response to modern production methods. At the very least, it was one way to harness the profit potential of mass manufacturing. For retailers, the challenge was how to best mobilise and manage the traffic of people, or, how to make sure a mass marketplace could engage and entice a mass market. In turn, the rise of the department store in Australia must be seen within this context of major societal change. From the mid to the late 1800s, in terms of either occupation or orientation, a growing number of Australians could be readily identified with capitalist institutions and bourgeois inclinations (often both). There was, then, a dynamic that could be easily construed as an affinity, between the business imperatives of these large-scale enterprises, and the material comfort of an emerging class.

As in Europe and North America, the emergence of the Australian department store was initially a big-city affair, its growth encouraged by and dependent on the size and sophistication of an urban population. The story of one particular Sydney store, Anthony Hordern's, could, for example, be seen in light of the changing pace and direction of Sydney itself. The store began in 1825 with Ann Hordern's staymaking (corsetry) business; by 1838, with her husband on board, it had become a general drapery; stores in Brickfield Hill and the Haymarket followed in 1847 and 1854

respectively; and by 1876, their son Anthony was advertising as a 'Universal Provider'. As Gail Reekie argues in *Temptations* (1993), such a store meant much more than private profit – it was a stamp of public progress, and a salute to the wealth and ambition of the city.

As in Paris, it was the city's draperies, like Hordern's, that tended to lead in retail innovation, so much so that they stood alongside banks, post offices, theatres and town halls as monuments to both civic pride and general betterment. By the 1880s, Reekie writes:

[T]he principal drapery businesses were significant urban landmarks and architectural symbols of the growing stability and prosperity of Australian urban culture. They provided visible proof that Sydney had entered an emerging international consumer culture, and was well qualified to join the ranks of the great cities of Europe and North America.<sup>163</sup>

Put simply, with its development encouraged by the overarching demands of industry and capital, the department store had become an index of economic maturity.

In the late 1800s, Anthony Hordern's not only punctuated the city centre with a retail hub; it was a reflection of demographic change and cultural sophistication. Its expansion paralleled the growth of Sydney's trading capacity. This was evident in the shops' facades, with each new location marked by a more ornate and imposing style than its predecessor, in the size and specialisation of the company's staff (by 1879, the firm had about 300 employees, and the number grew at a rate of about a hundred each year), and by the number and variety of its product lines. It was on this last point that Anthony Hordern's distinguished itself as a pioneer in Australia's retail environment, and effectively brought the modern department store to Australia.

As Anthony Hordern's evolved into a Universal Provider of unprecedented scale, at least by Sydney standards, it introduced a relatively adventurous approach to its merchandise, from the most pedestrian essentials to chic luxuries. As such, Anthony Hordern's broadened the range of products deemed appropriate for a respectable establishment, and boasted a hitherto unheard of variety of goods and services. While its promotional material foreground this diversity, and turned the notion of

departments into the store's chief selling point, it initially generated some hostility from competitors. One particular competitor, so aggrieved by Anthony Hordern's seemingly unrestrained embrace of variety, differentiated itself thus: '...the extensive business done at this popular warehouse, renders it unnecessary for the proprietor to resort to selling sardines, crockery, boots and shoes, or tin pots.'<sup>164</sup>

Competitors' annoyance aside, Anthony Hordern's did not so much *demean* its standing by peddling 'sardines' and such. Rather, through publicity and marketing, the store actually elevated this kind of merchandise, and bathed the most ordinary products in a complimentary glow. This was one of the enduring triumphs of the early department store: if the shopping experience could be made more recreational and leisurely, then the purchase of everyday household essentials could be made to seem more indulgent and exciting. In this way, even one's choice of sardines (or tea) could in fact communicate social status and acquired knowledge.

From the late 1890s, shopping in Sydney's fashionable stores became a very middle class affair, a milieu as much as an activity. It was both an opportunity and an arena for the display, instruction and reinforcement of important social information. Anthony Hordern's, for one, played a part in the education of Sydney's bourgeoisie, and hosted events that had little to do with shopping as such, but which were entirely consistent with the interests and ideals of its educated, cultivated patrons. These themed fairs, promenade concerts, and spring shows were part of a larger plan, to flatter not only the discerning shopping tastes of its customer base, but its overall appreciation of art, music and design. Much as the Bon Marché became the symbolic apex of a Parisian bourgeoisie, so too might Anthony Hordern's be considered a cultural touchstone for Sydney's middle class in the late nineteenth century.

The trend towards novelty shopping in the late 1800s also surfaced in Melbourne. In 1880, two brothers, William and Harley George, opened their first drapery store – George & George – on Collins Street. It was such a success that, in 1883, they moved to new premises on Collins Street, into a massive four-story building they called 'The Federal Emporium'. From then, they advertised in the *Age* and the *Argus* as 'Universal Drapers', and incorporated the fresh glamour of diversity and quantity. Not unlike the *grand magasins* of Paris, the brothers repeated the seemingly paradoxical



promise of both equity and opulence. On the one hand, advertisements for George & George professed a certain egalitarianism. One advert in the *Age* from September 1883 read:

[We] wish it to be distinctly understood that while we shall endeavour to secure the patronage of the elite of Australia we shall aim to make our business attractive to all ranks of society. In the Federal Emporium will be found a stock of goods unprecedented in variety, unsurpassed in novelty. And a variety of accommodation to customers that has never yet been witnessed in the Southern Hemisphere.<sup>165</sup>

Such rhetorical appeals notwithstanding, though, it was clear which demographic the store preferred. Reports in the social pages of the weekly newspaper *Leader* suggest that George & George was Melbourne's ultimate example of luxury shopping, a marriage of entertainment and exhibition, with the quality merchandise floating somewhere in between. From the Garden Palace of ferns and canaries, to the art gallery, the men's club, the ladies' lounge, and the daily performance of the Herr Plock Band, the store essentially erased any line between the marketing of commodities and the marketing of ambience.

Not surprisingly, patronage of stores such as Anthony Hordern's and George & George was rather uneven, despite their widely touted claims of broad-based service. For shoppers in the cities, suburbs and larger towns, the department store was both convenient and accessible, provided they found what they were after at the price they could afford. For those living far from the main cities, though, the occasional trip to George Street or Collins Street was something of an occasional treat. This was a challenge for the trading community, since there was a sizeable customer base that was literally distanced from the main retail strips, and therefore beyond the conventional marketing belt. There needed to be some other way for traders to reach this well of purchasing power.

One way to reach consumers in regional and country areas was through catalogues. In the late 1800s and the early 1900s, these catalogues became increasingly important as Australians in non-urban areas sought the lifestyle improvements that came with affluence. Besides town-dwellers reaping the benefits of industrialisation and city development, the growing export value of sugar, meat and wheat was having a huge

effect on life away from the urban centres. So, while those living in country areas may have had less opportunity to frequent department stores as such, they were nonetheless attractive to the large retailers. Around Australia, the market for manufactured goods, from furniture to foodstuffs, was on the rise. In turn, marketeers had to find alternative ways to access these more remote consumers. While there were general stores in these areas, they rarely boasted the breadth and quality of merchandise offered by the new department stores.

Commercial entrepreneurs were relatively quick to respond to this opportunity. A major figure in this trade was Frederic Lassetter, who began issuing catalogues in the early 1860s. Lassetter's catalogues not only advertised the latest in all manner of household goods; they were instrumental in extending the glamour and diversity of the city centres to other parts of Australia. As Peter Hutton points out in *Australia in the Good Old Days* (1976), before the advent of catalogue shopping, even small luxuries 'were frequently impossible to obtain without a protracted and expensive journey into the city.'<sup>166</sup> Lassetter's catalogues bridged this divide, and the major retailers were keen to match his success; Anthony Hordern's, for example, began issuing catalogues in 1884. As it happened, it was a very similar story in the United States, where the Sears Roebuck catalogue, formed by Richard Sears and Alvah C. Roebuck, proved equally successful. It too had much to gain from the country's westward sprawl in the late 1800s, and had, by the mid 1890s, catalogues of over 5 hundred pages, including shoes, women's clothing, musical instruments, and glassware. As in Australia, these catalogues were what Ann Roush called 'the answer to the rural dweller's prayer.'<sup>167</sup>

The popularity of catalogues, especially between the late 1800s and the early 1900s, suggests that the acute interest in appearances that had characterised and preoccupied the urban middle class had well and truly enveloped Australian households generally. Catalogues became especially important for those householders that were far from the urban centres, but keen to maintain the standards and symbols of material comfort. As such, and as Peter Cuffley suggests in *The Federation Catalogue* (1997), catalogues from this era might well be seen as insights into the cultural predilections of the period. Besides the variety of wallpapers, furnishings, rugs, lamps, and so on, these catalogues were replete with what Cuffley called 'enough knick-knacks to ensure that

both occupants and visitors would have a sense of propriety and respectability.’<sup>168</sup> Catalogues thus became cross-country conduits, between the urban world of department stores and product choice, and a growing number of Australian consumers, seduced by the gloss of modern marketing and the promise of social status.

### **An English Immigrant**

As the Australian economy developed, from the disorganised dumping ground of 1788 to the strident internationalism of the late nineteenth century, there was a gradual expansion in the nation’s cultural vocabulary. The spread of middle class ideals had an implicit impact on the way Australians communicated. As a growing proportion of the population became implicated in the culture and commerce of modern consumer capitalism, appeals to status, taste, and distinction became more meaningful. The rise of the Bushells tea brand must be seen within this context. The close of this chapter, then, will reconcile the broad historical sketch outlined so far, with the story of an English immigrant who turned Australians’ growing sophistication into a significant marketing prop: Alfred Thomas Bushell. In turn, this will underline the extent to which Bushell imbued his brand of tea with specific values and interests – namely, those that could be linked to the power and influence of the urban middle class.

In several ways, Alfred Bushell’s career trajectory can be plotted alongside the development of Australia’s market economy. In the last chapter, it was argued that, as the Australian economy modernised, there were corresponding changes in the ways consumers interacted with the market. The grocer, for example, was immensely important in the days before mass media and modern advertising. Without access to specific product information, consumers relied on the grocer’s knowledge and advice. In time, this relationship weakened, to the point where the flow of market information practically bypassed the grocer and focused almost exclusively on the consumer. Before he immigrated to Australia, Alfred Bushell was a grocer. Literally, then, his professional life spanned transitional moments in the history of modern marketing.

Born in 1834 in St Clement, Worcester, Bushell was one of five children born to Henry Bushell and Mary Edmunds. His marriage to Agnes Brooke (born 1843) not only produced seven children, four boys and two girls; it also put him in familial touch with her relative Arthur Brooke, who founded the Brooke Bond tea brand in England in 1869. It was not long before Bushell demonstrated his own aptitude for the same product, albeit in his new home of Brisbane, in the northern colony of Queensland. In 1883 Bushell commenced business under the name Bushell & Company, and sold both Bushells Tea and Bushells Coffee throughout Queensland. Over the next hundred or so years, though, and despite numerous modifications and makeovers (most of which will be discussed in this thesis), the brand continued to spotlight three particular elements: the Bushells name, the image of its founder, and the tea side of its operations.

### **Bustling Brisbane**

The strength and success of the Bushells brand in its early years was a measure of the strength and success of the Brisbane economy. On that point, the fact that the young city could even accommodate branded tea was a market triumph. Given the rationale for Britain's settlement of the area, it was a social triumph as well. On the advice of Commissioner Bigge, the northern colony was chosen as the tough option for the very worst of criminals, those that had, according to Bigge, 'shown, by their bad conduct, that they required a more severe and rigid system of discipline'.<sup>169</sup> The district was to be the last resort for the most serious offenders and hardened recidivists. In September 1824, a small party of convicts under Lieutenant Henry Miller landed at Redcliffe Point on Moreton Bay; within a year, it moved to a permanent base up the Brisbane River. The settlement yielded little of value until the arrival of Captain Patrick Logan, in March 1826. While the Logan years (1826 to 1830) were characterised by stern discipline and harsh punishment, the tough regime also lifted the settlement's productivity and helped lay a firm economic base for further development. By the 1830s there was a food surplus and an export trade.

It was not long before Brisbane Town displayed a few of the economic indicators that characterised its southern counterparts. Since settlement, Brisbane had been the centre of government administration and economic activity, with its barracks, officers'

dwelling and Commissariat store. Much like Sydney and Melbourne, then, the city was set up and organised in a way that facilitated (if not encouraged) trade and commerce. In 1842, Brisbane was officially opened for private settlement and enterprise, a move that only reinforced the city's rather rapid adoption of urban practices. When Queensland was officially separated from New South Wales in December 1859, Brisbane was chosen as its capital city. With its own bicameral legislature and responsible government, Queensland was established along the same executive lines of the other colonies.

Between the 1860s and the late 1890s, Brisbane underwent a steady transformation and developed a robust urban economy. A few examples should illustrate the extent and effects of this process. Firstly, the considerable growth of the capital city's population – a population that could be reasonably classified as predominantly urban: according to an 1861 census, Brisbane's population was 6 000, around 20 per cent of the entire colony; by 1891, it was 88 000, around 22 per cent of the entire colony.<sup>170</sup> Some of this increase could be attributed to the publicity campaigns waged in Europe (especially Britain and Germany), which sold the economic opportunities in the new colony. These campaigns were spectacularly successful: in the 1880s there were around 106 000 arrivals into Queensland, of which 45 per cent were from England.<sup>171</sup> While many of these immigrants settled outside of Brisbane, many, like Alfred Bushell, started a new life in the capital city. This period of general population growth coincided with a period of intense urbanisation in Brisbane. This could be seen from the construction of particular buildings and investment in certain amenities: for instance, the building of the Queensland National Bank, the Opera House, and Customs House, the introduction of gas lighting, and significant improvements in public transport, health and general utilities.<sup>172</sup>

In the 1870s and 1880s, the image of Brisbane became one of a busy metropolis, and its town life boasted the spirit and diversity characteristic of any capital city in the industrialised, capitalist world. The streets were lined with impressive stone and brick buildings, and the roads were abuzz with carts, buggies, cabs, and the carriages of the newly rich.<sup>173</sup> One recollection of late nineteenth-century Brisbane, courtesy of a British visitor, drew an increasingly familiar picture of urban affluence and affectation. According to the author of *Kennedy's Colonial Travel*, published in

Edinburgh in 1876, there was an hour in every day, presumably around dusk, when what he termed Brisbane's 'elite' (that is, the urban middle class, most likely its upper echelon) would promenade and pose, when:

...the fashionable father rides alongside his fashionable daughter; when Mr Innkeeper, Mr Grocer, and Mr Draper air their respective families in their several 'sociables'; and when every person is showily dressed, every horse sleek, and every vehicle speckless.<sup>174</sup>

It was a scene that, by the late 1800s, was befitting of many capital cities. The fact that it was about Brisbane suggests that its metamorphosis from penal drudgery to urban vigour was far swifter than either Sydney's or Melbourne's.

If Kennedy's montage is any indication, by the time Bushell & Company began operating in Brisbane in 1883, the city's consumer market was more than ready for the sophistication and specialisation of brand marketing. As has been noted already, the degree of consumerism in a modern society is, in many ways, proportional to the degree of urbanisation. Bushell was thus exploiting a viable market option. By the early 1880s, Brisbane had urbanised enough to accept and in fact celebrate the particular logic of niche advertising. Moreover, as in the other colonies, tea was a basic staple of the Queensland diet. It was incorporated into the everyday, pretty much without question or compromise. For example, when the colony first experienced the heady excitement of a gold rush in the 1860s, tea was among the few basic items that were sold to the diggers from travelling tabletop wagons. Alongside sugar, tobacco, potatoes and bread, tea was a reliable commodity around the gold fields, making the itinerant teamsters very wealthy.<sup>175</sup> In other words, even with the fields' combination of rough conditions, fluctuating fortunes, and dashed expectations, there were still enough customers to make tea a profitable product.

Two decades later, and in an environment sharpened by metropolitan tastes and image-conscious habits, it was feasible that, if marketed shrewdly, tea could still command a handsome return. Indeed, one impression of late-century Brisbane, from Nat Gould's *Town and Bush*, published in London in 1896, suggests that Bushell's timing was just about perfect. Gould's account goes so far as to nominate three exact years, during which the mood in Brisbane was one of cheerful optimism. Buoyed by

successful speculations on the stock exchange and in real estate (to cite just two of its more fruitful endeavours), Brisbane's middle class had assumed significant commercial clout. As Gould writes:

[F]rom 1884 to 1886, including those years, times in Brisbane were good, and everything went with a swing. Compared with times in Brisbane five or six years later, they were wonderfully good. There was plenty of money in those days and men spent it like water.<sup>176</sup>

For both Kennedy and Gould, British travellers accustomed to the atmosphere and energy of urban life, Brisbane had developed similarly – and therefore admirably. Materially and culturally, Brisbane was on par with other urban cities in the modern capitalist world. Bushell could thus advertise his brand of tea to consumers that were becoming more receptive to the potential and power of conspicuous consumption. So, just as Brisbane's middle class began to flex its buying power and flaunt its status, Bushell introduced a product to the marketplace that turned an otherwise ordinary habit into yet another class comment: branded tea. It was far from the *first* of its kind – as mentioned earlier, branded tea was an increasingly common option in the late 1800s. What was noteworthy, though, was the extent to which the Bushells brand would become, for several decades at least, so entwined with a very particular sensibility. As the next chapter will discuss, a brand is an exercise in difference and, compared to the competition, Bushells would cultivate a very distinctive point of difference. As Duncan Waterson and Maurice French explain in *From the Frontier* (1987), in Queensland in the late 1800s, Bushells became a succinct expression of a certain lifestyle:

Wagons, trains, bicycles and cars were all used to transport men, women and children to their favourite place of recreation – watering hole, swimming hole or seaside retreat. For the ladies, the morning or afternoon tea party with its cake, conversation and cup of Bushells was an important social outlet...<sup>177</sup>

Subsequent chapters will show that, in its pursuit of tea drinkers, Bushells did not just promote a 'better' tea – although that was part of the brand. Rather, the brand merged its product with a certain lifestyle, one that was as dependent on technology, housing transport and communications as it was about tea.

## **Conclusion**

In its first decade or so, Bushell & Company enjoyed a viable share of the Brisbane market. Bushell's shop on Queen Street (comparable to Sydney's George Street or Melbourne's Collins Street) was busy enough to require a staff of at least fourteen. What this thesis is concerned with, though, is not so much the market efficacy of the brand. Rather, it is interested in the ways the brand intersected with the culture – specifically, the culture that was forming alongside an emerging national sensibility. By the late 1800s, it is arguable that the spread of particular ideals, habits and inclinations had contributed to a degree of uniformity amongst a growing number of Australians. As it has been suggested in this chapter, at least some of this uniformity can be attributed to the effects of urbanisation, effects that, as contemporary accounts attest, differed little between continents, much less capital cities. Furthermore, one of these effects was a growing interest in matters of status and taste. It seemed that the more mobility the economy allowed, the more that middle class Australians were keen to parade their upward slide.

For ambitious traders like Alfred Bushell, this was a most advantageous convergence. In 1895, his eldest son, Alfred Walter Bushell, opened a branch of the Company on Sydney's George Street, near the Town Hall. That same year, the brand appeared in the *Bulletin*, with the advertisement discussed at the beginning of this chapter. It was a near-perfect time to launch a national campaign, on the presumption that the pitch would reach a sizeable number of like-minded consumers. As John Molony argues in *The Penguin History of Australia* (1987), from as early as 1880, Australians were already exhibiting aspects of homogeneity. In general, 'they spoke the same language with the same accent, ate essentially the same food and drank similar beverages – tea and beer.'<sup>178</sup> Obviously, for the Bushells brand, this element of sameness was a marketing boon. When the Company opened a branch in Victoria in 1899, its march through the urban centres of eastern Australia was practically complete.

This chapter opened with a brief description of a seemingly simple advertisement, placed by Bushell & Company in an 1895 edition of the *Bulletin*. For this advertisement to have cultural weight, it latched onto values and practices that were



already present and powerful. Such is the way branding works – through the lifestyle choices that target consumers are assumed to have made. By the late 1880s, this consumerist dynamic was both widespread and on the rise, even outer regions of Australia were within the marketing reach of advertisers and manufacturers. In this way, it can be argued that Bushell's appearance in the *Bulletin* was a watershed moment in his brand's ascent. By that time, Australian consumers had been adequately trained for the new economy, that is, they had moved away from the parochialism of the grocery stores, and moved into the modern, glamorous world of department stores, recreational shopping, and brand marketing. As these consumers became more aware of the options available and the relative merits of competing brands, the question of class entered the decision-making process.

This chapter has tracked the means by which one particular current – urbanisation – organised the economy and culture of a growing proportion of the Australian population. Not only did urban processes connect the nation to the increasingly complex and specialised web of international commerce, they had a profound impact on the interests and aspirations of Australians. This thesis is most concerned with the growing adherence to middle class mores, particularly the use of commodities as bearers of cultural meaning. Consumption became another, if not the primary, means by which class values could be articulated and asserted. Therein is the cultural significance of Alfred Bushell's *Bulletin* appearance: it signalled the moment that the brand made the link between one's choice of tea and the maintenance of class. The Bushells brand would subsequently reinforce this connection over decades, and co-opt those attributes that were of contemporary value, from progress and modernity to patriotism and sacrifice. The next chapter, then, will look at the ways Bushells greeted the first few decades of the twentieth century, from the early days of federation up until the eve of the Depression.

*Notes to Chapter Four on pp. 260-262.*

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **A Tale of Two Brands**

#### **Introduction**

On 1 January 1901, the Commonwealth of Australia came into being. With Lord Hopetoun sworn in as Queen Victoria's representative, the federation of the colonies was marked with much fanfare. Around the country, there were picnics, sports, and fireworks, with a particular emphasis on children's involvement – no doubt to underscore the hopeful promise of a new nation in the new century.<sup>179</sup> In the legislative flurry, talk of common bonds and visions summonsed what one commentator called 'a galaxy of political talent.'<sup>180</sup> The sense of cohesion that underpinned this excitement became the focus of much attention. For the first time, Australians were bracketed within national frameworks, in legal, commercial and political arrangements, and the question of national identity surfaced. The early decades of the 1900s thus saw numerous attempts to define and represent this identity. This chapter will look at two such attempts, and will examine how competing brands of tea so succinctly represented alternative versions of Australian cultural life.

In the last chapter, it was argued that, in the late 1800s, Bushells vied for the attention of a powerful market force: the middle class consumer. In this chapter, this address will be examined more closely. A comparison between Billy Tea and Bushells will show that both brands drew from and contributed to a growing bank of images and ideals. By analysing each brand's verbal and visual props, and its relationship to key cultural sites, it will become apparent that each approach was loaded with critical meanings and fashioned from 'real-life' processes, namely, the complex interplay of political-economy, and the profound effects it had on Australian society.

#### **Depression, Drought and Urban Development**

The optimism of Australian federation punctuated what had been a relatively bleak period. After the remarkable prosperity of the mid 1800s, the tail-end of the nineteenth century saw the colonies enter a protracted period of economic depression. There was a range of underlying causes: international trade conditions had turned

against Australian exporters, with the value of wool, wheat and silver all declining, and a subsequent contraction of credit and investment finance; public works were aborted once governments realised they could not service additional loans from overseas investors; and farmers' plight was compounded by the untimely effects of both a rabbit plague and drought, which lasted from 1895 until 1903, and devastated the once-fertile crescent of eastern Australia. As unemployment rose, many small investors had little option but to live off their savings. With the widespread withdrawal of funds, anxiousness turned to panic, and numerous banks, building societies and loan companies collapsed. The domino effect was swift, far-reaching and destructive; Melbourne alone lost 21 such organisations between 1891 and 1892. Many of these institutions could only pay their depositors a fraction of their original savings, and thousands of individuals and businesses were bankrupted.<sup>181</sup>

A lasting effect of this period was a sharpened sensitivity towards the rural industries, and the economy's precarious dependence on key export industries. Almost no rain fell in 1902, and there were no reserves of feed or water to fall back on. New South Wales lost close to one-third of its sheep, and the wheat crop was about one-tenth of the usual harvest.<sup>182</sup> While most Australians lived and worked in towns, the primary industries sustained considerable sections of the entire economy: numerous workers helped carry, process, and sell farm produce.<sup>183</sup> This realisation of the land's importance manifested itself in various ways, including an enhanced appreciation of rural life in the popular imagination. This notion will be examined more carefully shortly, but it will suffice to note here that the fact that Australia's federation coincided with a period of rural hardship only helped conflate the nation-building rhetoric of the one (federation) with the myth-making romanticism of the other (the bush).

Straddling both discourses was the celebrated bush worker. He (for this figure was invariably male) embodied all the stoicism, resourcefulness and perseverance needed to work the land, and therefore build the nation – or at least that is how he lived in the period's poetry and prose. Indeed, federation literature is replete with such imagery. In an era of self-determination, there was much to admire in this individual, and, from the late 1800s, 'the bush' became a convenient term to define both the landscape and its people.<sup>184</sup> The drought *did* eventually break, with a run of especially good seasons

after 1903, and a dramatic jump in the value of Australian primary products. Still, the years of hardship not only underscored the tenuous viability of the land; they seemingly confirmed the popular opinion that such work demanded tenacity, collectivism and endurance. Moreover, the attraction of this rugged figure impressively outlasted whatever economic truth it ever possessed. Decades into the twentieth century, as rural industries weakened and waned, the mythology of the bush hero only intensified.

Despite the wide popularity of the bush setting in the art and literature of the early 1900s, there was also a strong acceleration of town life and urban development. There is no need to retrace the reasons for and patterns of this process, since they were amply covered in the last chapter. It will be enough to note that the nation's urban centres remained the focal points for immigrants, investors and commerce. If anything, by the turn of the century, the cities were actually drawing people *away* from the hinterland. The cities' features ranged from the attractive to the unsavoury. On the one hand, there were striking advancements in urban infrastructure, such as extensive tram and train services, electric lighting, and telephony. These technologies offered qualitative advantages to the more affluent city dweller. On the other hand, the less fortunate experienced the rougher end of urban growth: high rent, congestion, filth and crime. Commonwealth attention to matters of public health and safety was slow and sporadic, and usually stalled by local government bodies and council inspectors.

### **The National Beverage**

Given the tardiness of early Commonwealth initiatives, life in the cities and towns often entailed as many objectionable practices as progressive ones. One area that suffered in a mostly *laissez-faire* environment was food production. As Anne Gollan points out, until the introduction of government guidelines in the early 1900s, the convenience of processed foodstuffs came at a cost. As factories replaced home kitchens in the preparation of biscuits, jams, breads, and so on, Australians suffered the effects of widespread adulteration. Unbeknownst to many, for instance, bread was loaded with alum, cocoa contained brick dust, and coffee was mixed with chicory. For this reason, 'purity', or lack thereof, was a recurring theme for many brands. For

example, one advertisement for Arnott's Biscuits read: 'A word! The word ARNOTT on a Biscuit guarantees that Biscuit's purity.'<sup>185</sup> Similarly, Cadbury's Cocoa was advertised as 'Absolutely Pure therefore the Best'.<sup>186</sup> Cost-cutting measures certainly extended to tea. Manufacturers mixed the product with:

...spent tea leaves, the leaves of several other plants, iron fillings, gypsum and Prussian blue. One parcel of tea analysed in Victoria contained no fresh leaves at all!<sup>187</sup>

Between 1906 and 1912, pure-food controls were introduced in all six states. After a series of conferences and royal commissions, a nationwide agreement on standards was reached. Not only did this allow for an Australia-wide market, one of the aims of federation, it safeguarded consumers' interests against fraudulent hucksters, and instigated a long-term awareness of quality controls.

There was still much to suggest that Australia boasted many of the characteristics of an economically advanced society. There was a declining death rate, a significant drop in infant mortality, and an overall rise in living standards. Australians generally consumed the same amount of bread, staples and sugar as their British counterparts, but Australians enjoyed twice the amount of meat and a much wider range of fruit and vegetables.<sup>188</sup> Still, there *were* income disparities that inevitably affected health and diet. Humphrey McQueen cites a Commonwealth survey from 1910-1911 that shows that families of more than four who earned less than 2 hundred pounds per annum spent around half as much on meat, fruit, vegetables and dairy products as the richer households. To their nutritional detriment, the less affluent relied on much more starch than protein. However, McQueen also notes that, '[both] groups spent the same amount on bread, sugar and tea.'<sup>189</sup> Indeed, not only was tea widely embraced irrespective of income; the less well off did not even compromise their consumption of it. On the strength of habit, its status was practically regularised. The average worker, earning approximately 3 pounds a week, factored tea into a weekly food budget of around 22 shillings.<sup>190</sup> Across the income divide, the systemic inclusion of tea in the household budget constituted a nation-wide commitment of substantial market significance. By virtue of such widespread and unwavering consumption, tea had very well become *the* national beverage.

As an everyday staple that appeared in numerous social settings, tea enjoyed extraordinary cultural presence. The fact that the tea market in Australia had become so wide and diverse was the perfect context for brand marketing. As it was argued in previous chapters, the nineteenth century saw profound changes in the ways consumers in industrialised societies shopped. The historical (and interrelated) overlap of capitalist mass manufacturing and the ascent of the middle class created a specific economic culture, one within which branding flourished. From the early 1900s, then, two factors had a major effect on the marketing of tea in Australia: the growing indistinguishability of assembly methods, and general compliance with Commonwealth standards and content regulations. So, when it came to advertising respective merits, *something else* had to be different – if not the product's attributes, then its associations. Brand marketing focused on this 'something else', the images that emerged at the connotative level. As production techniques diminished generic differences between brands, marketers spotlighted perceptual differences instead. In this way, a powerful brand drew strength from the market pull of its particular set of meanings.

### **The Bush, a Billy and a Scotsman**

Billy Tea's set of meanings was directly linked to a powerful and popular discourse of nationhood, and it reflected Australians' growing appreciation of shared interests. Developments in transport, communications and trade had improved inter-colonial traffic to the point that rivalries and prejudices were either nonsensical or counter-productive. Moreover, the proportion of native-born Australians was rising. The native-born comprised 60 per cent of the continent's total white population in 1871, 75 per cent in 1891, and 82 per cent in 1901.<sup>191</sup> As the growing 'currency' population acquired a sense of its own achievements and characteristics, social debate from the late 1800s often focused on what was distinctively Australian. In 1877, Marcus Clarke's essay 'The Future Australian Race' predicted that, in the course of a century or so, the 'average' (male) Australian would be an outdoors type, sunburnt, self-reliant, and resourceful.

Billy Tea's successful co-option of this discourse was largely due to the market acumen of its owner and managing director, James Inglis (1845-1908). A native of

Scotland, Inglis arrived in Australia in 1877. His resumé suggested a man of literature and ideas; he had worked in journalism, politics, and was a published author. Indeed, several of the pieces he had written for the *Pioneer Mail* newspaper were compiled and published as a book, *Our Australian Cousins* (1880). This was Inglis' observations and analyses of Australia and its people, what Inglis called 'the opinions of a cosmopolitan.'<sup>192</sup> Still, it was in tea that Inglis really made his name. Following a trip to India in 1866 on the advice of his brother Alexander, a Calcutta tea merchant, and a lengthy stint as an indigo planter in north-west India, Inglis turned his focus to the marketing of Indian tea in Australia. To this end, he appeared at the Sydney International Exhibition in 1880 as an agent of the Calcutta Tea Syndicate; and at the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1881 as India's executive commissioner.<sup>193</sup>

Inglis helped orchestrate a major transition in the nation's tea supply. He became what Beverley Kingston called 'an unofficial one-man India information office in Sydney'.<sup>194</sup> This was to the obvious advantage of his firm Inglis & Co., which he set up in 1887. Up until the 1880s, Australia imported most of its tea from China. In 1884, for example, 79 per cent of the tea in New South Wales came from China; by 1904, 84 per cent came from India and Ceylon, with only 8 per cent from China.<sup>195</sup> In 1823 wild tea plants had been discovered in India's Assam highlands; within a decade, Indian tea cultivation was underway. In 1838 the tea growers of Assam shipped twelve chests of tea to England, the first such delivery; the Assam Tea Company was formed two years later. Nearby, Ceylon turned to tea cultivation when disease wiped out its coffee crops in 1867. This shift to tea from the sub-continent signalled a growing appreciation of the product's purity. As noted already, Australians had been subject to rampant adulteration; from the late 1800s, tea from China came under particular attention for its sometimes-questionable quality. Inglis & Co. launched the Billy Tea brand in 1888. By 1893, James Inglis & Co. was selling over 600 000 pounds of Billy Tea a year.<sup>196</sup>

A major part of Inglis' promotions was packaging. From the late 1800s, technological advances dramatically widened the packaging options for almost all commodities. On this point, though, Inglis followed convention and chose what had become an almost haloed motif – the lone bush hero, accompanied by little more than a dog, a billy and swag. The image of the 'billy' was visual shorthand for bush survival. The term

referred to a cylindrical tin pot with a lid and wire handle that was used in the bush to boil water for tea. Use of the term in colonial Australia can be dated from the 1830s, and is believed to have derived from 'billy-pot', meaning 'cooking utensil' and of Scottish origin.<sup>197</sup> However, the term became far more common and popular on the goldfields, when miners recycled their empty meat tins, tins that were generally quite sturdy. Not only was the imported can re-contextualised, putting a resourceful spin on what would have otherwise been discarded; the appropriation was two-fold. The tins of 'bully-beef' were often from France and therefore labelled '*boeuf bouilli*'.<sup>198</sup> So, the '*bouilli*-can' made a short trip to 'billy-can'.<sup>199</sup> Reconfigured as a makeshift kettle, the billy thus bespoke a sort of idiomatic improvisation: simple, humble and reliable.

From the late 1800s Australian grocery shelves were lined with tea brands that clearly sought the popular resonance of the bush. There was Camp Tea, Pannikin Blend, United Australian Blend, Swagman Blend, and the Coo-ee Brand. 'Coo-ee' was an Aboriginal word that had become something of a clarion call among white workers in the bush. Inglis also owned the Coo-ee Brand. Together, they comprised a virtually seamless montage, with practically interchangeable imagery. Indeed, it was not just tea brands that claimed an affinity with the bush. As well as Coo-ee Brand tea, there were Coo-ee Cigarettes, Coo-ee Clothing, and Coo-ee Beer.<sup>200</sup> Between the gold rushes of the 1850s and the early 1900s, the bush provided a gallery of icons that was mined for marketing appeal. To mention just a few, there was the Digger Brand of jams and pickles, the Stockrider Brand of eucalyptus oil, the Buckjumper Brand of hams and bacons, and the Stockman brand of veterinary ointments.<sup>201</sup>

### **Banjo Paterson & the *Bulletin***

Billy Tea did not just add to the image pool of bush populism, it became one of its most celebrated signifiers. Inglis did this by placing his advertisements within what had become a key source and screen for bush legend. Throughout the 1890s advertisements for this brand appeared in the *Bulletin*. One of the most frequently used was this one:

**The Billy Tea is the Finest Tea ever sold at its price. IT HAS A LARGER SALE THAN ANY PACKET TEA IN AUSTRALIA. It is used by all**



classes of the community. It is always the same and never disappoints.  
Sales exceed a ton per day.<sup>202</sup>

Hyperbole aside, it is argued here that Billy Tea's prominence in the *Bulletin* was a case of mutual benefit, as both the brand and the publication would eventually represent the high point of a particular ideal. First published in January 1880, the *Bulletin* was a Sydney-based weekly that possibly did more to idealise the bush than any other periodical. Under founding editor J. F. Archibald, it featured gossip, commentary, news, anecdotes, short stories and essays, from both professional writers and ordinary readers. Submissions were considered on the basis of brevity and the vernacular. This stance saw the *Bulletin* become what numerous commentators now consider one of Australia's richest sources of folk literature.<sup>203</sup> As it will be shown, this had a direct impact on the Billy Tea brand.

In its conspicuous vernacularism, the *Bulletin* popularised a highly influential representation of national literature, tilted towards bush ballads and campfire yarns, stories of swaggies and horsemen, struggling farmers and hard-drinking shearers. Like their contemporaries in the other arts (such as the Heidelberg painters), contributors like Banjo Paterson, Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy echoed the patriotism and politics of the late 1800s. Indeed, and as Geoffrey Serle suggests, 'their vision of and literal recording of Australia were probably only made possible by their individual consciousness of *being* Australian in the new sense.'<sup>204</sup> As such, tales of bush heroism reverberated well beyond the page. These heroes became standards by which Australians came to think of themselves, through their easy egalitarianism, preference for action over ideas, and aptitude for the outdoors.<sup>205</sup>

As a projection of the nation's identity, it was a flattering self-portrait. In the *Bulletin*, the outback summonsed a quick wit, rough humour, and dogged tenacity – faculties supposedly dulled in the urban milieu of banks, new chums, Asians and authorities. There were stunning ironies at work. By the time the *Bulletin* emerged, the colonies were predominantly urban, yet most of its literature was set in the bush. On this point, some have seen bush mythology as an expression of intellectual disenchantment. In *Inventing Australia* (1981), Richard White argues that, in the late 1800s, urban

bohemians channelled their frustrations with city life into a rural eulogy. They sensed that their values were stifled in the city, so:

[T]his new intelligentsia carried into their image of the bush their own urban bohemian values – their radicalism, their male comradeship, their belief in their own freedom from conventional restraints – and presented it as the ‘real’ Australia.<sup>206</sup>

Still, even *if* urban malcontents exaggerated bush heroism, it does not diminish the appeal of the myth, nor the extent to which the *Bulletin* school resonated with its readership, both urban and rural. While some of the *Bulletin*’s more famous contributors were city dwellers, it was also avidly read by and contributed to by the gamut of bush workers (drovers, shearers, miners, fencing-contractors and so on). For this reason, the *Bulletin* was often called ‘the bushman’s bible.’<sup>207</sup>

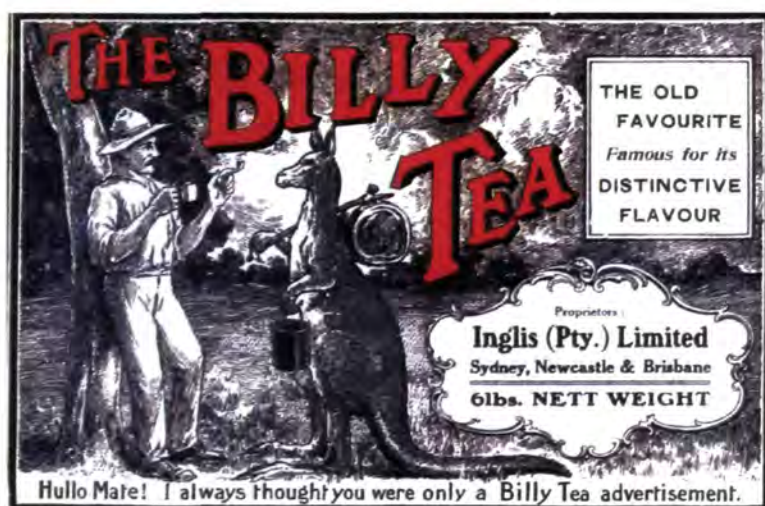


Figure 5.1 Billy Tea advertisement

By advertising in the *Bulletin*, Inglis secured Billy Tea’s association with what was widely considered both the ultimate expression of bush pride, and a celebration of nationalist spirit. Inglis also incorporated the *Bulletin*’s style for a trade journal his firm distributed to its customers. A prescient example of brand consolidation, the in-house publication was, like the *Bulletin*, a pastiche of unabashed Australiana.<sup>208</sup> It usually took the form of a printed folder, with poetry and prose in between advertisements. Early on, then, Inglis organised his marketing around this popular

association, between life in the bush (which necessarily included regular tea breaks, billy can in tow), and the characteristics that were attributed to this lifestyle. For brand consistency, Inglis was always on the lookout for material that would complement his stable. This pursuit led Inglis to a verse by Banjo Paterson called 'Waltzing Matilda'. With Billy Tea in mind, the packet of which featured a bushman boiling a billy, Inglis seized the marketing opportunity.

### **From 'Waltzing Matilda' to World War One**

The story of 'Waltzing Matilda' is notoriously contentious. Any attempt to construct a clear chronology is fraught by the nagging incongruities that characterise its historiography. Questions of authorship and composition have become matters of intense and often unkind debate. Nonetheless, for all the conflicting accounts, it is possible to extract several relevant points. In 1902, Inglis bought the verse from publishers Angus & Robertson, to whom Banjo Paterson had sold it two years earlier with what he had called a 'lot of old junk'. The verse, written in 1895, was amongst *Bush Ballads*, a collection of short bush poems for which Paterson received a token sum of five pounds from the publishing firm.

Much has been made of the verse's origin. Most of the controversy can be explained by the fact that it was, from the beginning (1895), a collaborative piece. As late as 1939, in response to an enquiry from the Children's Book Council in Canberra, Paterson had this to say:

I wrote it when travelling in Queensland. [A Miss Macpherson] used to play a tune which she believed was an old Scottish tune but she did not know the name of it. I put words to it.<sup>209</sup>

Paterson and Christina Macpherson were guests at a dinner party at Dagworth, a property station in Winton, Queensland. Three important things happened at this gathering. Firstly, stories were related to the guests about the drowning of an itinerant worker, a swagman, at the Combo Waterhole in 1892, as well as first-hand reports of unrest caused by a shearers' strike. Secondly, Paterson surveyed the Winton guests for new bush slang, one of which was 'to Waltz Matilda', which meant to carry one's swag and travel the road. Thirdly, at the homestead, Macpherson played a tune on an

autoharp, based on music she had heard played at the Warrnambool Races in Victoria in April 1894.<sup>210</sup> Inspired by the tales of bush upheaval, and the catchiness of the music Macpherson had played<sup>211</sup>, Paterson wrote 'Waltzing Matilda', a ballad about a swagman pursued by policemen and a squatter for the theft of a sheep; to escape, the swagman drowns himself in a billabong (a waterhole). True to its genre, the tale preserved the anti-establishment tone of most bush balladry.<sup>212</sup>

First sung by a party from Dagworth at Oondooroo Station that same year, the song travelled quickly. In *Fair Dinkum Matilda* (1973), Richard Magoffin writes, 'From singer to singer, from bush camps and bar-rooms, through the stations and townships, from shearers and teamsters to squatters and swaggies, the song rolled on.'<sup>213</sup> Even without printed copies, the song became a regular part of the bushman's repertoire. Thanks to his popular poems in the *Bulletin*, Paterson was one of the nation's most famous balladists, his name synonymous with the *Bulletin*'s style of bush nationalism.

By the time Inglis & Co. bought the rights, the song was already infused with the easygoing colloquialism associated with the outback. It had also already ventured overseas, during the Boer War in South Africa. Of the many Western Queensland horsemen that had served in this campaign, several were from the Winton district. Upon acquisition, Inglis immediately had the song fine-tuned for Billy Tea's benefit. Keen to distribute complimentary copies of the verse to the brand's customers, he enlisted the help of Marie Cowan, whose husband William Cowan was a company director with Inglis & Co. Mindful of Inglis' intention, Marie tweaked the lyrics and foreground the boiling billy: the swagman became 'jolly' in the opening line, in anticipation of his Billy Tea (as pictured on the tea packet), while the words 'leading a waterbag' were cut from the chorus to make room for the repetition of 'Billy', with an upper-case B.<sup>214</sup> Inglis effectively instigated one of the first product placements in Australia – the flagrant insertion of brand advertising within what was meant to be a tribute to anti-authoritarianism.<sup>215</sup>

With Cowan's amendments, the song fused the romanticism of bush balladry with what was arguably the national (non-alcoholic) beverage, tea – *Billy Tea*. Thereafter, every time the song surfaced at various cultural sites, this association was strengthened. In turn, the image of the boiling billy referenced a range of values and

ideals popularly attributed to the Australian outback. Billy Tea became a part of this symbolic chain, one that included Banjo Paterson, the *Bulletin*, and the underdog ethos they celebrated. Once Cowan's version was printed and circulated by Inglis & Co circa 1906, it spread quickly. In 1911, 'Waltzing Matilda' was included in *The Australasian Students' Song Book*, published by Sydney University and circulated widely. According to Professor Frederick Todd, chairman of the book's selection committee, it was the Billy Tea connection that first brought 'Waltzing Matilda' to his attention. Professor Todd admitted that: 'I heard the song (till then unknown to me) sung by an undergraduate and was told by him it was in some way associated with "Billy" tea.'<sup>216</sup>

World War One strengthened the emotional impact of 'Waltzing Matilda'. The song was used in recruitment drives, and military bands took it wherever the troops marched and ceremony was required, at home and abroad.<sup>217</sup> Given the speed with which Australian men flocked to enlist, the cultural weight of 'Waltzing Matilda', as both a patriotic rallying call and a morale-boosting soundtrack, was extraordinary. The immediate reaction to the announcement of war in August 1914 was one of intrepid exuberance.<sup>218</sup> Recruitment offices were overwhelmed by the virtual stampede; by December 1914, over 52 000 men had enlisted.<sup>219</sup> Copies of 'Waltzing Matilda' were handed to soldiers leaving Sydney for battle. A contingent of these troops attended a farewell parade at Randwick Racecourse, where they sang it to an audience that included Banjo Paterson. So moved by this rendition, Paterson said at the time, 'I only got a fiver for the thing, but it's worth everything to hear it sung like that.'<sup>220</sup>

During the war, 'Waltzing Matilda' was imbued with the jovial camaraderie of an army sing-along. Officers controlled song selection and they chose the version in *The Australasian Students' Songbook*, and whatever anti-authoritarianism the ballad once celebrated was conveniently ignored. Subsequently, it was the Inglis-endorsed lyrics that appeared in the soldier's songbook in 1918. By that time, the war had fostered among the soldiers a new sense of nationhood, one less dependent on the fanfare of federation than on the reality of sacrifice. The war had cost Australia around 60 000 deaths, an experience some historians deem responsible for a more heartfelt appreciation of national unity. As L. L. Robson writes, 'Those who went to that war

as New South Welshmen or Victorians or immigrants from Britain came back as Australians.<sup>221</sup> Tales of valour and bravado from the Turkish peninsular (Gallipoli) and the trenches of France and Belgium not only forged a unity among soldiers. They also created another image from which Australians could construct a national identity: the Anzac digger.<sup>222</sup> 'Waltzing Matilda' thus bridged the sentimental nationalism of bush balladry with the conservative patriotism of the Anzac legend. The hero may have relocated from the bush to the battlefield, but his admirable traits were not only preserved, they were strengthened: tenacity, pragmatism, and mateship.

From venerating the bush, to advertising tea, to mobilizing troops, the cumulative effect of 'Waltzing Matilda' was to construct an iconic reference point by which a national identity could be recognised and celebrated. That the verse's cultural biography encompassed such diverse interests did little to undermine its patriotic potential. Instead, the admirable qualities Paterson honoured were reconfigured to suit different situations, so that, by the end of the war, 'Waltzing Matilda' had absorbed those favourable characteristics by which Australians could, by association and by identification, feel proudly distinctive. The fact that it was such an exclusive image, valorising a narrow definition of male accomplishment, said something about the prevailing cultural wisdom. That a tea brand could do so much for such a simple verse – it was after all virtually discarded by the esteemed author – was a measure of both Inglis' advertising skills, as well as the meaning-making breadth of the branding process. So, on the eve of the 1920s, Billy Tea not only enjoyed associations with bush balladry and outback skills, it had also, by way of 'Waltzing Matilda', contributed to a portrait of national identity that was incredibly popular.

The rest of this chapter considers the imagery and associations the Bushells brand used for cultural anchorage. Just as Billy Tea's meanings could best be understood when contextualised, so too will Bushells be examined within specific analytical parameters. The aim is to understand how Bushells arrived at such a different promotional perspective, and how it narrated such a dramatically different story around what was patently the same national beverage. It becomes apparent that, just as Inglis positioned Billy Tea alongside certain ideals and aspirations (such as the nebulous bush-cum-Anzac heroism), Bushells' set of meanings was similarly linked to a deep well of consumer yearnings, but one informed by very different influences

and aspirations. First, though, to see how and why Bushells relied on such different imagery, and the rationale for its markedly sophisticated pursuit of class appeal, some points warrant consideration. Namely: those developments that rendered Australian consumers increasingly sensitive to representations of good taste, modernity and glamour.

### **Repatriation and the Roaring Twenties**

After the war, the Australian government faced a major challenge in the repatriation of the country's service personnel. Employers were largely indifferent to the returnees, and generally ignored any obligation to re-hire those that had served abroad. The parades and cheers that welcomed the diggers' return had all but fizzled out by decade's end. So, to forestall serious unemployment, and inspired by the mythic potential of motherland rhetoric, the Hughes Government<sup>223</sup> introduced the Soldier-Settler Scheme. The idea was to sell the ex-service-people small blocks of rural land on low interest rates, in the hope that they would become productive, prosperous farms. The government's policy mantra was 'Men, Money and Markets': this meant populating rural areas, providing start-up settlement funds, and finding markets for the wool, wheat, dried fruits and other produce it assumed would be bountifully forthcoming. While British immigrants generally snubbed this offer and headed straight to the city centres, 37 000 of Australia's returned soldiers took up the challenge.<sup>224</sup>

The plan was ambitious to the point of fanciful. The scheme saw thousands of (mostly) young men move to remote areas, often in northern Victoria or south-western New South Wales, with negligible farming experience and little instruction from above. Much of the land turned out to be of poor quality, unable to sustain viable crops for lack of fertile soil or a permanent water supply. In turn, as Matthew Williams argues:

...the desperation of the Soldier-Settlers overwhelmed them: they simply took their families and walked off the properties into which they had put so much effort for so little reward.<sup>225</sup>

For many of these would-be farmers, any hope for profit was soon quashed by a reality of extreme hardship, with makeshift accommodation of hessian and galvanized iron, a diet of rabbit and parrot stew, and a backbreaking seven-day workweek. The general failure of the scheme suggested at least two things. Firstly, given the quality of the blocks and the inadequacy of the assistance, the farms were doomed to fail; and secondly, for all its sentimental romanticism, 'the land' was far too taxing for most Australians. The demographic shift over the 1920s attests to this. A census from April 1921 showed that 43 per cent of Australia's population lived in the major cities, 38 per cent lived on the land and 19 per cent in country towns.<sup>226</sup> By 1927, one third of the soldier-settlers had walked off the land.<sup>227</sup>

The stagnation on the land rendered the dynamism of the city all the more dramatic. Throughout the 1920s urban development continued apace and reinforced the nation's ultimate inclination towards city life. Sydney and Melbourne became the nation's pressure points: Sydney's population passed the one million mark in 1922, Melbourne's in 1928. The last chapter discussed how the growth of a relatively affluent urban populace energised consumerist processes. In particular, the middle class became larger and more influential in the latter half of the 1800s. It underwrote the rebirth of shopping as a recreation rather than a chore, the growing prominence of advertising and promotions, and the increasing use of commodities as bearers of status and luxury. In this way, to understand the middle class is, as John Rennie Short argues, 'to understand one of the most important and powerful agents of social evolution and urban change in the twentieth century.'<sup>228</sup> The logistical demands of industrialised capitalism encouraged a cultural literacy that contoured consumption patterns in highly specific and hugely influential ways. Modern shopping, as practiced and perfected by this class, championed this literacy.

In the 1920s this consumerist drive merged with the look and feel of modernity itself: consumption became the primary way Australians bought into modern life. For many, especially the middle class, the tempo of the '20s was marked by the multitude of new technologies. Developments in transport and communications pointed to a bolder and more audacious future. The aeroplane symbolised the spirit of the age. Between 1919 and 1921, the first transcontinental flight from Point Cook to Darwin took place, Bass Strait was crossed, Ross and Keith Smith made the first flight from England to



Australia, and the Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Service (QANTAS) launched its first regular passenger service.<sup>229</sup> Air travel hinted at a world and an era of unprecedented promise; a lot of this optimism seeped into the culture of the day, and gave it a distinctive energy and expression.

### **Suburbs, Cars & the Californian Bungalow**

Advertisements tapped into this mood, and invited householders to access this new world, no matter how tangentially. The family home was offered a cornucopia of goods, most of which were promoted with dream-like imagery that invariably belied their production-line lineage. Advertisers pitched quality, taste and distinction to prospective consumers, and attributed these traits to products as pedestrian as laundry powder, shoe polish, mouthwash and tea. This glossy life was far from the rough and rugged existence of 'the bush'. It owed its cultural debt to a very different ensemble of influences, one that quoted New York and art deco over the *Bulletin* and Banjo Paterson, matinee shows and jazz over ballads and yarns, and worldly experience over make-do pragmatism. The Bushells brand was situated within this shiny new world, and its advertisements beckoned fashionable Australians to follow. The rest of this chapter will look at how Bushells construed this niche, and how it sketched an image of tea that was so dramatically different to the one popularised by Billy Tea.

In the post-federation period, the Bushells operation grew considerably. In 1902 founder Alfred Bushell entered a partnership with his sons Alfred Walter and Philip Howard; this became a public company, Bushells Limited, in 1912, with a paid up capital of £15 000 and Philip as chairperson. As it happened, the brand's growth already owed much to the siblings' efforts as the 'Tea-Men of Australia'. They had travelled the nation to promote their father's brand, so they were informed enough to assume its control. In 1913, the company's headquarters were established on George Street, Sydney, while land was bought on Harrington Street, in Sydney's historic Rocks area, in 1919. The next few years were a time of intense consolidation for the brand, as it expanded into Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania. In 1922, the Victorian operation re-commenced, having been closed in 1904 to allow concentration on the New South Wales market.

The Bushells building in the Rocks became a feature of both the brand and the area. The land itself, which Bushells acquired for £8 000, belonged to a locale once called 'Frog Hollow'. A cluster of terraces and cottages that dated from the 1820s, Frog Hollow had represented all that government authorities were keen to destroy – poor drainage, a stubborn stench, and a scattering of opium dens and brothels.<sup>230</sup> As such, when an outbreak of bubonic plague forced the demolition of Frog Hollow in 1900, few mourned its loss. In fact, it made way for Bushells' arrival and the Rocks' post-plague reinvention. As Grace Karskens points out, it was not until then that there was room for large-scale, long-term, legitimate employment in places like the Bushells tea factory on Harrington Street, and the State Clothing Factory on Gloucester Street.<sup>231</sup> In 1923 Bushells signed a contract to have its headquarters built for £39 455.<sup>232</sup> The company commissioned architects H. E. Ross & Rowe, who were also responsible for the Commonwealth Bank in Martin Place and the Sydney Royal Automobile Club.<sup>233</sup> In 1925, the company moved into these premises, and the Rocks offices remained Bushells' flagship site for the next fifty years.

Despite the enduring image of the senior Alfred, his youngest son Philip is widely credited as the brand's real force, a tactical, calculating and charismatic figure. Born 14 September 1879 in Liverpool, England, Philip was Alfred and Agnes' youngest child. When Agnes passed away, her brother Alfred Brooke (of the Brooke Bond tea firm) raised Philip. At eleven, Philip joined his father and brothers in Brisbane, Australia, and attended Brisbane Grammar School in the early 1890s. It was as one of the 'Tea-Men', though, that Philip's marketing talent really came to the fore. According to G. P. Walsh, Philip was, from that point, largely responsible for the brand's rapid ascent. For instance, it was Philip's decision to foreground his elderly father's image in the brand's promotions, lest his youth 'alienate the conservative tea-drinker'; and it was his decision to deliver a free half-pound of Bushells tea to every Sydney home in 1924.<sup>234</sup> The promotion was bold, expensive, and utterly suited to Bushells' branding strategy, one that increasingly favoured the elegant gaiety of the 'Roaring Twenties' over the pseudo-egalitarianism of the bush motif, the image so effectively captured by Billy Tea.

Bushells' approach in these years was entirely dependent on specific changes within Australian society in this period, particularly within the middle class. One of the most

consequential developments was the rise of suburbia and the concomitant emergence of the family home, as an economic and political unit of unprecedented cultural significance. Another major development was the growing cultural influence of the United States, especially in advertising. Given the extent to which both these factors surfaced quite explicitly in Bushells' branding, they will be considered briefly.

The rise of suburbia in Australia, the rise of residential zones of garden-set brick-and-tile, freestanding homes, was both an aspect and consequence of urban growth. Before the 1900s, the main residential response to the swelling population was the small terrace. First built in New South Wales in the 1830s, terrace houses had some benefits. As Ian Evans points out in *The Australian Home* (1983), they 'occupied less land than free-standing dwellings and offered substantial economies in materials because of shared walls, fencing, plumbing and drainage.'<sup>235</sup> Terraces shared kerb space with factories, warehouses, hotels, corner stores and rear lanes, so occupants could usually access most sites by foot. However, this arrangement also condensed, and some argued incubated, the problems of urban 'overheating': inner-city congestion, exploitative landlords, and the subsequent fragility of law and stability. Such problems suggested that an alternative was required, for the sake of public order, civic pride, and aesthetic appeal. The 'garden suburb' – so called initially because its purely residential purpose ostensibly left room for lifestyle niceties like greenery – was one such alternative.

There are several reasons why the garden suburb was such a compelling option, so much so that it became, by the 1920s, the most common form of household dwelling. Firstly, concerns about inner-city compression were drawn from a larger discourse about townplanning. This discourse coincided with the nation-building rhetoric of the post-federation decade, as well as the design of the new federal capital in Canberra. This design, the culmination of a worldwide competition, not only spurred interest in the winner's philosophies (Walter Burley Griffith, a 35-year-old American), it oriented Australia's townplanning infrastructure in particular ways. In 1919, for example, the Local Government Act was passed in New South Wales to 'prevent the straggling of suburbs and to ensure development along harmonious lines'. All other states passed similar legislation soon after and made way for the eventual triumph of both the garden suburb as well as general townplanning principles.<sup>236</sup>

The suburb was emblematic of material success, as the middle class was ideally positioned to make use of the growing range of payment options for aspiring homeowners. After the war, government agencies, private building companies, banks and building societies broadened Australians' capacity to obtain and service a home loan. The War Services Homes Scheme permitted loans *only* for separate homes on individually owned blocks, a policy that patently fostered the suburban spread. In the 1920s, then, there was steady acceleration of a process that had started in the late 1800s, a drift of middle class householders to green, clean suburbs like (in Sydney, for example) Haberfield, Waverley, Burwood, Mitchum, and the various other suburbs that were sprouting beyond the nation's urban hubs. Consequently, living away from the terraced areas conveyed a privileged ability to retreat to a leafier, roomier address.

The expansion of a vast and efficient transport system had a major influence on this process. When real-estate entrepreneur Richard Stanton advertised the new garden suburb of Haberfield in 1901, he foreground the speed with which commuters could still access the city centre – Haberfield was 'within 32 minutes from the General Post Office, Sydney, by electric tram', the promotion read. Over the next twenty years, there was an overall improvement and expansion of tram and then train services, and this was an even more persuasive argument. The correlation between transport and suburbia throughout the industrialised world has been widely noted. In his seminal study of the rise of English suburbs, F. M. L Thomson showed that the emergence of modern transport systems, and in particular bus fleets, encouraged middle class workers to consider living some distance outside the city cell.<sup>237</sup> In the early decades of the Industrial Revolution, in the absence of trams, trains, buses and cars, workers *had* to live within walking distance of their work.<sup>238</sup> The cramped terrace block became a function of expedience and economy, since a walk to work was a cheaper option to the horse-drawn cart or carriage.

Like the English precedent, the expansion and improvement of Australia's public transport systems rendered suburbia far more convenient for those that could afford to forfeit such proximity. Whilst low wages confined the working class to cramped terrace blocks, the better off *could* exercise the efficient network of public transport

and settle in the budding suburbs. As in England, buses were especially conducive to Australia's suburban sprawl. Before the war, as Humphrey McQueen explains, trams and trains concentrated housing alongside their tracks, and made suburbs diverge from the inner-city areas like spokes on a wheel. In the 1920s, the empty areas between these spokes were filled following the introduction of buses that could go traverse most roads, as they did not require steel tracks.<sup>239</sup> As a middle class income could accommodate the bus fare far more readily than a working class one, a move to the suburbs was a viable and status-affirming choice for those that could both obtain a home loan, and absorb the extra costs of living farther away from the city nucleus.

Whatever convenience public transport offered middle class Australians multiplied with the gradual increase in car ownership in the 1920s. Early in the decade, only very rich Australians could entertain this notion, since the cars tended to be of the prohibitively expensive, bespoke variety. Once cars *did* become far more affordable, and therefore far more common, the distance between the city and the suburbs seemed far less burdensome. Between 1920 and 1929, for example, the price of a Chevrolet fell from 545 pounds to 210 pounds – for a much better model. By the end of the decade, the number of motor vehicles registered had jumped tenfold to over 650 000 and road construction accounted for over one-quarter of public spending.<sup>240</sup> As Peter Cuffley points out, this too was class-based: 'with the arrival of cheaper, mass produced vehicles [in the 1920s], the middle classes could avail themselves of the status of a private motor-car.'<sup>241</sup> Car ownership not only carried a distinct cachet, it helped design the emergent suburban home, as a garage and driveway had to be factored into the size of the block and the shape of the house.

By the 1920s the architectural style of most Australian homes was the Californian bungalow, and was characterised by wide eaves, a low gabled roof and a generous veranda. The bungalow encouraged the spread of a specific suburban ideal in several ways. Firstly, because it relied on a plan that positioned the house sideways across a block of land, the bungalow required wider allotments, which seemingly confirmed the favourable link between suburbia and space. Secondly, the bungalow's popularity coincided with the creative *marketing* of housing. In numerous magazines and journals, the bungalow was sold as a modern fusion of comfort and convenience. In *The Great Australian Dream* (1996), John Archer writes: 'Articles on the bungalow

began to evoke emotive images of a whole new stress-free lifestyle which would magically suffuse its occupants with a feeling of well-being.<sup>242</sup> Henceforth, the suburban home became a cradle of twentieth-century capitalism, and voraciously consumed an ever-increasing catalogue of products.

The kitchen was a significant aspect of the bungalow's design. As factories attracted female workers that would have once drifted into domestic labour, the middle class could no longer relegate kitchen chores to the hired help. So, the kitchen became a focal point of middle class concerns, especially the pursuit of respectability, efficiency, and taste – a pursuit spectacularly encouraged by advertisers. This idea will be taken up in the next chapter, in a more thorough discussion of the changing role of middle class women. For now, it will be enough to acknowledge that the suburban home was contingent on and accomplice to a new sensibility. Accordingly, as Roger Silverstone explains, the suburb was 'an emergent architectural space, a set of values and a way of life', comprised of a material environment, a range of practices, and a skewed spectrum of images and ideals.<sup>243</sup> It was not only the suburban home that was marketed so rapturously, so too were its various appendages and expectations – from the tram, to the car, to the kitchen, and each one was dependent on a preferred demarcation of labour, gender and technology.

### **Bushells, Modernity & the *Sydney Mail***

Several Bushells advertisements that appeared in the *Sydney Mail* are particularly pertinent to this discussion. These show that, in its appeals to Australian tea-drinkers, Bushells eschewed the rustic charm of bush populism, such as Billy Tea *et al*, and courted the avaricious middle class instead. Bushells integrated the pace and glamour of the Roaring Twenties, and projected an image that was sophisticated, discerning and modern. Bushells attracted the status-seeking suburbanite by incorporating associations that already enjoyed middle class approval. The rest of this chapter will trace how this process emerged in a prominent and influential journal: the *Sydney Mail*. Just as the *Bulletin* stood for specific issues, interests and agendas, the *Sydney Mail* also stemmed from specific processes and was geared towards specific inclinations. As such, these advertisements are a useful reflection (and indeed aspect) of Bushells' branding strategy, and warrant closer analysis.

Fairfax publishers launched the *Sydney Mail* in 1860 as an eight-page weekly compendium of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and it ran until 1937. Read all over Australia, the *Sydney Mail*, like the *Bulletin*, included news, current affairs, photography, fiction, poetry, comics, and caricatures. Where the *Sydney Mail* differed, though, was in look and tone. Printed on high-quality paper with highly stylised photographs and artwork, the *Sydney Mail* suggested a studied refinement that was far from the *Bulletin*'s frank address. Indeed, whereas the *Bulletin* took a somewhat contrived version of 'the bush' around Australia, including the cities, Fairfax saw the *Sydney Mail* as a snapshot for the 'the man in the country',<sup>244</sup> – it took the city to the country. With its modern design, and printed on the advanced Richard Hoe rotary press (imported from New York), what began as a compact, three-penny résumé was what Gavin Souter called 'the first of its kind in New South Wales.'<sup>245</sup> Its quiet conservatism and elegance quickly found a sizeable readership: the *Sydney Mail*'s initial circulation of 1 000 copies had, by 1864, become 10 000 copies a week.

It was argued earlier that the image of Billy Tea was partly attributable to the content and character of the *Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* had a strong editorial stance that maintained an assertive and sometimes aggressive line on what were often highly contentious issues. The *Sydney Mail* had a similar effect on the advertisements that appeared on its pages. While the *Bulletin*'s style was a result of its wide embrace of both the amateur and the established, the *Sydney Mail* took a far more traditional stand, and set a publishing standard that bordered on the quasi-elitist. In Frank S. Greenop's *History of Magazine Publishing in Australia* (1947), this is seen as the *Sydney Mail*'s inadvertent gift to Australian literature. Greenop argues that, in demanding excellence from its writers, a position that was steadfast for its first forty years, the *Sydney Mail* cultivated an appreciation for quality. He writes that, 'at a time when literary craftsmanship within the Colony was haphazard and uncertain, it provided some standard to be attained before the honours of publication could be enjoyed.'<sup>246</sup> While the *Sydney Mail* catered to a very different market to that of the *Bulletin*, it is also apparent that, following the arrival of the *Bulletin* in 1880, the *Sydney Mail* scaled back its political and current affairs content in favour of feature stories and articles.<sup>247</sup> Thereafter, the *Sydney Mail* more closely resembled the polished magazines of the twentieth century. Its lifestyle focus endeared it to the





In several of Bushells' advertisements in the *Sydney Mail*, the product (tea) is almost sidelined by the centrality of a well-groomed and attractive female. Moreover, it is clear from the accompanying text that this female inhabits a specific social arena, the middle class household, and readers are prompted to identify with her. Whether these tableaux position this female looking out into the front garden ('Proud of the Tea You served your Guests?'<sup>248</sup>), beside a table and tea-set ('Are you Critical about the Tea You Drink?'<sup>249</sup>), awaiting a housemaid ('Tired! Languid! After Shopping, Matinee, or Household Duties'<sup>250</sup>), or in a hotel lobby ('Peggy from Sydney has "Pink Tea" with Betty in New York'<sup>251</sup>), the message is the same: Bushells tea befits the elegant, fashionable lady. These women are all suitably coiffed and accessorised, with bob-cuts and pearls, and their elongated, slender figures reflect the period's preference for streamlined form. Still, it is their overriding concern for social propriety that most betrays their acute class-consciousness.

This series might well include another three Bushells advertisements in which this glamorous consumer *seems* absent, but her class sensibility is very much present. All three advertisements make oblique reference to the relatively high price of Bushells tea, but resolve this concern by subsuming it to the more urgent consideration of social respectability. One of these advertisements, for example, has two formally attired men seated at what appears to be a restaurant table – 'My Wife Says Tea is Higher Tom. What Sort of Tea Does Your Wife Buy?'<sup>252</sup> Another involves a 'manageress' from the Wentworth Hotel – 'Mrs Maclurcan's Advice to Housewives on the cost of Tea.'<sup>253</sup> While a third pictures two sets of hands, one is clutching a nameless canister, the other a tin of Bushells – 'Do You guess or do You Know?' The quandary in question is this: 'Decide to make your hands resist that temptation to "guess" at the quantity the teapot needs.'<sup>254</sup>

Alternatively, several of the advertisements reference the Oriental allure of Ceylon, which had become one of Australia's main sources of tea. Some of these figures are male, such as the turbaned tea-curer ('When Rama Swami Smiles His Pleasure – You'll Smile Your Pleasure, Too'<sup>255</sup>) and the bare-chested tea-picker ('Young, tender leaves, picked fresh and cured slowly and gradually, so as to hold their juicy sap'<sup>256</sup>). Others are female, and are discernibly younger, curvier and more nubile than the Anglo-Australian consumers featured in the other series. There is the long-limbed

beauty that peers over her shoulder, and raises a single tea leaf ('Freshly Picked Tea – Slowly Cured - Holds that Delicious Tea-Sap Flavor That You'll Love'<sup>257</sup>); the bejewelled, wide-eyed girl, kneeling beside a small tea plant, baring both her knees and her décolletage ('This Little Tender Leaf Drinks the Sunkissed Dew for its Lovely Flavour'<sup>258</sup>); and the voluptuous 'Napuli', with her back arched and eyes closed ('Come pluck your leaves ere the Sun steals off with the Flavor of the Juicy sap'<sup>259</sup>).



Figure 5.3 Bushells & Ceylon 1920

There is an obvious dichotomy here, between blue-eyed cultivation, and dark-skinned naturalness. On the one hand, Bushells promotes the credentials of its source. Ceylon is defined as a place of exacting and uncompromising standards, and therefore worthy of middle class patronage. On the other hand, its foreignness is overtly sexualised. Bushells effectively reconfigures the tantalizingly taboo into a product that can be respectably incorporated into a suburban setting. The Bushells consumer thus enjoys the best of both worlds. She can rest assured that the tea she serves her guests is comparable to the tea served in New York, is sure to win her husband's approval, and

of a quality that deserves a few extra pence. At the same time, she enjoys the endearing aura of a seductive, 'dark' land, and the sensual mystique of its people.

Bushells' depiction of Ceylonese workers as both obedient and sensual was far from atypical. Between the 1890s and the 1920s, one of the leading tea brands in the United Kingdom, Lipton's, had used a similar montage to advertise its tea – from the serenity and order of idyllic plantations, to the eroticised servility of Ceylonese women. In *Imperial Persuaders* (2003), Anandi Ramamurthy argues that this approach satisfied a range of interests. Firstly, and as noted already, the only country to export tea before 1838 was China. Indeed, until the 1880s, 84 per cent of tea exports still came from China.<sup>260</sup> With the growth of tea cultivation in India and Ceylon, then, there was a need to combat the hold, both commercial and associative, that China had. So, bodies like the Planters' Association of Ceylon and the Indian Tea Association actively foreground their products' country of origin. As Ramamurthy writes:

[T]he image that was constructed was therefore in tune with what the planters wanted to see – a place of rich natural resources, but to a degree wild and therefore productively tamed through European intervention.<sup>261</sup>

It was, in other words, a picture of imperial triumph. By 1900, only 10 per cent of the tea consumed in Britain came from China, while 50 per cent came from India and 33 per cent from Ceylon.<sup>262</sup>

In its normalisation of what were notoriously difficult conditions, this depiction of labour implied more than a hint of racial hierarchy. In turn, the projection of this onto the Ceylonese woman completed the Orientalist logic. She embodied those traits Britons associated with the East (organic, spiritual, decorative and passive) and thus embellished imperialist advertising *perfectly*: 'She is framed and contained in contrast to the European consumer. She is the worker in contrast to the leisured European woman.'<sup>263</sup> As such, this image not only naturalised the labour conditions under which the tea was produced; by affirming a division of the world that was gendered, racial and imperial, it reconfigured its workers in such a way that flattered consumers preoccupied with status. Bushells' advertisements in the *Sydney Mail* present an antipodean extension of this philosophy. Whatever resemblance there was between the Lipton's advertisements and Bushells' shows that, insofar as status is always

relational, Australia's middle class (as that of the United Kingdom) saw in Ceylon a site of appropriate difference.

### **From Madison Avenue to Middle Class Australia**

In their unabashed glamour and ambition, Bushells' advertisements in the 1920s were on par with the kind of advertising that was becoming standard overseas, particularly in the United States. These advertisements directed consumers to an exciting new period. International trade and industrial production had not only revolutionised the manufacturing potential of the modern world, but had also redefined how the modern world was to be understood and appreciated. This redefinition found its most dazzling expression in American advertising. Its industry finessed its techniques to such a degree that it set an advertising benchmark that not only inspired Bushells in the 1920s, but also numerous other brands for decades thereafter.

The influence of American advertising in the 1920s is largely due to specific developments from the 1800s that had radically transformed the entire country. Within just a few decades, at least three features distinguished its economy: the astonishing scale, scope and speed of American manufacturing; the concomitant size and sophistication of the American advertising industry; and the growing prominence of an accommodating media apparatus. Each point will be briefly considered.

Firstly, following intense and rapid industrialisation following the Civil War, American industries manufactured products at an extraordinary rate. Investors were encouraged by the introduction of continuous-process machinery; the discovery of new energy sources like coal, steam, gas, oil and electricity; the expansion of telephony, telegraphy, and railroad trunk lines; growth of the labour force; and the emergence of a reliable financial sector. By the 1890s, however, the population of 63 million faced such an exhaustive array of commodities that there was a potential crisis of distribution. So many goods flooded stores that businesses actually *feared* glut, panic, and depression.<sup>264</sup> Between 1899 and 1905, for instance, American food output grew by nearly 40 per cent.<sup>265</sup>

Secondly, and in turn, this situation summonsed increasingly ingenious methods of promotion. Mass investment in mass production necessitated greater skill in mass advertising. The major brands could not rely on amateurism or serendipity; turnover had to be *guaranteed*.<sup>266</sup> Accordingly, from 1888, the weekly trade publication *Printer's Ink* helped tutor American advertisers on market research, copy design, and consumer behaviour. With the formation of the Advertising Federation of America in 1904, the number of reputable copywriters in the country rose from just two in the 1880s to thousands by 1915.<sup>267</sup> The growing number of food brands spearheaded this rise in national advertising, and particularly those that advertised processed convenience foods. Through their advertisements, the production capabilities of industrialised capitalism steadily re-wrote everyday practices. As Richard Ohmann points out in *Selling Culture* (1996), one could prepare all the day's meals 'and draw upon no skills beyond those required to open a can and light a stove.'<sup>268</sup>

Thirdly, this idealised picture, of a lifestyle furnished by the fruits of modern capitalism, was brilliantly captured and encouraged in various magazines. Titles like the *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping* and *House Beautiful* not only offered subscribers decorating tips, needlework patterns, fiction and romance, they were also highly effective advertising vehicles. In fact, in order to lure the big brand advertisers, these magazines *depended* on a middle class readership that could be tempted to buy consumer goods that were advertised appropriately.<sup>269</sup> By virtue of such persuasive force, these magazines privileged new standards of social propriety and domestic culture. Moreover, they helped incubate a system dependent on constant consumption, wherein major investment in consumer goods required the continuous flow of these commodities out of factories and into households. For this, glossy magazines that prioritised middle class concerns proved the perfect conduits.

From the turn of the century, companies like Colgate-Palmolive, Heinz, Coca-Cola, Procter & Gamble, Campbell's Soup, and Carnation were amongst the first to adopt and apply new ideas about design and promotion. The 'soft-sell' approach was especially popular. This saw advertising content progressively weighted towards favourable, 'feel-good' associations.<sup>270</sup> Copywriters overlaid advertisements with the signs and symbols of middle class correctness: good taste, good housekeeping, and good manners. As noted, manufacturers had more than just immediate sales in mind;

they sought a nexus between the demands of modern production (high-speed, conveyor-belt assembly) and the compliant reshaping of people's habits and lives.<sup>271</sup> To this end, advertisers played on consumers' paranoia: like the economy, consumers had to be rationalised. Advertisements for everyday products like processed food increasingly displayed what Jackson Lears called 'an almost panicky reassertion of culture over nature – an anxious impulse to extirpate all signs of biological life from one's immediate personal environment.'<sup>272</sup> Whatever the commodity, the cultural sub-text was the same: social approval *was* possible, but always at a price, and only with the right brand. Of course, advertisements rarely admitted as much explicitly. Rather, inspired by Parisian poster artists like Jules Cheret, Eugene Grasset and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and *le modern style* of Art Nouveau, American copywriters of the 1890s brought a nuanced understatement to advertising. As such, from the early 1900s, American advertising defined the aesthetics of consumption.

By the 1920s, one of the most pronounced ideals in American advertising was modernity itself. Roland Marchand develops this point in *Advertising the American Dream* (1985). Marchand argues that advertising effectively schooled Americans in a new language, one that 'established and disseminated a vocabulary of visual images and verbal patterns that acculturated people into life on a complex urban scale.'<sup>273</sup> Americans had to be eased into the pace and pressure of the modern world, with all its technological innovations. Indeed, they had to be coaxed to embrace these changes with enough enthusiasm to sustain the economy. Advertisers assumed this responsibility with missionary zeal. Copywriters became modernity's 'town criers', and they brought 'good news about progress.'<sup>274</sup>

This 'good news' had an essential class dimension. Commodities were pitched as portals to status, and often positioned within settings of affluence and accomplishment, such as hotels, ballrooms, club verandas, and restaurants. It was the twentieth-century solution to an age-old pursuit: prestige. As Marchand explains, 'the pursuit of modernity offered fulfilment only if it brought secure social status in reasonable proximity to an authentic social aristocracy.'<sup>275</sup> Rather than hard work, perseverance, and diligence, this proximity came via superficial externals. Consumers were encouraged to scrutinize themselves through society's eyes, that is, they were

scared into self-consciousness. In a modern society, people looked for quick clues to one's character. So:

...[if] they found these in the cut of your clothes, the brightness of your teeth, the age and taste of your furniture, your inept choice of silverware, or the closeness of your shave, they judged appropriately in a world of quick decisions.<sup>276</sup>

In other words, advertising promised middle class consumers an irresistible short-cut.

## **Conclusion**

In the opening decades of the 1900s Australian tea merchants enjoyed one of the most robust tea markets in the world. Not only was Australia one of the sub-continent's top export regions for tea, but the nation had become, by 1929, the world's premier tea-drinking nation, with Australia's consumption per capita briefly eclipsing that of the United Kingdom.<sup>277</sup> Given such high stakes, then, the cultural significance of the leading tea brands was extraordinary. This chapter has considered just two of these brands, but it has argued that they were especially effective in reflecting two of the most forceful images in Australia's early history. In the few years following federation, they offered Australians seemingly opposite representations of the 'good life'. One was steeped in the nostalgia of the bush, the other in the mirage of modernity. Both were born of processes and dynamics that had shaped the nation's material environment, as well as the popular imagination. They sprang from the complex web of political-economy, and the effects it had on ideals and aspirations, effects spectacularly captured in the two magazines discussed.

This comparison between the two brands not only highlights the almost hackneyed motif from which Bushells had to be differentiated; it places Bushells at the forefront of modern marketing in Australia. In its pursuit of the fashionable consumers of suburban Australia, Bushells borrowed codes and conventions from Madison Avenue. Just as American advertisers tried to hook consumers with 'scare' copy, empathetic scripts, and a glamorised modernity, so too did Bushells. It enticed Australians with a world of plush restaurants, fancy silverware and sensual exotica – all this in a brand of tea.

***Notes to Chapter Five on pp. 262-265.***



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Thrift, Sacrifice and the Happy Housewife**

#### **Introduction**

In *The Great Crash 1929* (1985), John Kenneth Galbraith chronicles one of the most decisive events of the twentieth century: the collapse of the New York stock market in October 1929. For Galbraith, the panic peaked on the 29<sup>th</sup>, in a rush of frenzied trade that saw great blocks of stock sold for whatever they could get.<sup>278</sup> Around the world, money markets reverberated quickly and critically, and few more so than Australia's. Indeed, it was one of the *most* affected. At its most severe, the crisis saw Australia's city streets lined with the unemployed, the evicted, the hungry and the angry. The fiscal mismanagement of the Roaring Twenties had paved the way for the grey mood of the early 1930s.

In terms of formal indices, Australia's Depression lasted just a few years; by 1933 the worst was over. However, by that time, the amount of hardship and angst that it had caused had summonsed a powerful discourse of thrift and frugality. For many households, it was a time of cutting-back and making-do. Even the relatively affluent were affected. Whilst they were less compelled to compromise their comfort, they were still cognizant of, and worried by, the plight of others. Bushells' advertising in the 1930s can best be seen as a strategic response to this air of glum prudence. This chapter considers how Bushells maintained its media presence in a climate that was so averse to prestige and luxury – even though, in the 1920s, these were the images Bushells had used to entice the middle class.

The early 1930s challenged Bushells to negotiate a consumer climate dampened by reticence and restraint. Bushells met this challenge with a motif that not only helped the brand throughout the Depression, but proved just as effective during the Second World War. Both these epic junctures saw Bushells break from the aesthetic that had defined it for almost a decade, towards a more sensitive (but no less calculated) acknowledgement of consumers' vulnerabilities. This involved a thematic twist in Bushells' marketing, as it transformed its leisured lady of the 1920s, the glamorous patron of hotels and matinees, into a paragon of household competence.

This chapter looks at how Bushells survived two major crises, the recession and rationing, through its strategic manipulation of one major discourse: that of efficiency. This discourse not only helped Bushells rationalise its worth through the most critical years of the Depression; it also helped Bushells contour its brand in ways consistent with interwar trends. With the growing emphasis on proper domestic management, and the widespread idealisation of housewives, efficiency became another way Bushells 'mattered' to middle class women, insofar as *their* efficiency was increasingly determined by specific criteria. Due to its close connection with magazines like the *Australian Woman's Weekly*, Bushells helped both establish and endorse these criteria, and thus stood to gain from their embrace. In turn, and finally, this placed Bushells at an ideal point from which to survive the wartime rationing of tea. Bushells turned the sacrifice of civilians into a quantifiable boost to the Allies' cause, something which was praised for both its efficiency and honour. This rendered Bushells *the* brand for patriotic households. This chapter tracks how Bushells became both implicated and influential throughout these monumental processes, and the degree to which Bushells tweaked its picture of middle-class privilege for a period far less amenable to its attainment.

### **'Prosperity' & Panic**

The style of Bushells' promotions in the 1920s was characteristic of a lot of that decade's imagery. Innovations in design and technology, both in Australia and abroad, inspired a confidence that lent this period a distinctive and modern look. Bushells' advertisements in the *Sydney Mail* exemplified this. They also reflected the market power of the middle class. Scenes of ballrooms and theatres spoke of elegance and accomplishment, and appealed to a social group preoccupied with upward mobility. As contrived as these were, they pointed to the increasingly international direction of the nation's marketplace. The images captured the studied acquisitiveness of middle class consumption, something that marked capitalist systems around the world. As such, they showed just how entwined Australia had become in global economic flows. The epochal events of the early 1930s, then, proved that such engagement had consequences in times of boom *and* bust.

The effects of the New York crash were widespread and devastating. At the end of an otherwise stunning decade, the epicentre of the United States economy convulsed with panic. The fear was prescient, justified and ironic. By virtue of its incomparable trade in credit and commodities, the United States had, until then, out-muscled the rest of the capitalist world and enjoyed an unparalleled dominance.<sup>279</sup> At the end of the 1920s, numerous economies leaned on and shadowed New York. In turn, the collapse of its overheated stock market triggered a range of ramifications. For Australia, the crisis effectively froze the trade on which its economy depended most: the flow of capital *from* London and the flow of primary products *to* the United States.<sup>280</sup>

The buoyancy of the United States kept most economies afloat, but Australia's vulnerability was especially acute. Either a drop in foreign investment *or* export revenue would have been highly problematic; their coincidence was calamitous. In the late 1920s, Australia relied on primary products like wool, wheat and flour for a staggering 88 per cent of its export income.<sup>281</sup> In the four years from 1928, though, the prices of such commodities actually fell by 43 per cent.<sup>282</sup> In addition, by 1928, 19.5 per cent of this income was required just to service the country's mounting foreign debt. The value of Australia's exports plummeted *just* as this income became more urgent. Without strong export earnings, Australia would struggle to honour its loan commitments; in the wake of Wall Street's turmoil, this was exactly what happened.

Successive Australian governments had done little to prepare for this kind of impasse. If anything, they had ensured the economy's precariousness. In the spirited expansionism of the 1920s, and the hurried provision of infrastructure, authorities relied heavily on overseas capital.<sup>283</sup> Such short-sighted budgeting meant that when Wall Street's bubble finally burst, Australia faced a crippling current account deficit and no capital safety net. The optimism of modernisation, so unabashedly idealised by Bushells, was not only a stark contrast to the recessionary gloom; it had been a significant cause. The fact that the Depression was most disastrous for those who had reaped the *least* from the 1920s, those at the lower end of the income scale, only compounded the pathos and drama.

The economic crisis dominated and radicalised Australian politics in the early 1930s. The issue of loan repayments to London was especially divisive, particularly with the arrival of Sir Otto Niemeyer from the Bank of England in 1930. Aghast at what he deemed years of financial ineptitude, Niemeyer recommended a severe curtailment of all public spending, and the prompt repayment of foreign loans. As politically unpalatable as this course was, Australian economists agreed. With the infamous exception of New South Wales' populist premier, the bellicose Jack Lang, the states sided with Niemeyer and tabled the Premiers' Plan on his dour advice. This took effect from June 1931; it included a 10 per cent cut to all award wages, a 20 per cent cut to all government expenditure, a devaluation of the currency, and increased taxation.<sup>284</sup>

### **Getting By: Improvisation and Appropriation**

The social effects of the Premiers' Plan varied widely, but few Australians were spared altogether. Given the degree of the discretionary cuts, job losses were obviously inevitable, and the unemployed were no doubt worst affected. All the same, the despair was not confined to those that swelled the dole queue. Even the employed feared that, should the economy deteriorate further, they too would suffer. As such, Australia's middle class, the bedrock of Bushells' marketing, was not completely immune. If anything, the severity of some people's hardship only exacerbated the fear across the income divide. Bushells had to factor this fear into its marketing and allay concerns that, to the extent that it stretched the household budget, the brand was wasteful, indulgent or unnecessary.

As it happened, the Depression *did* alter some Australians' capacity to consume tea. To Bushells' benefit, then, there was still a scale of accessibility against which it construed its market position. As such, Bushells' address to its middle class base was a subtle comment on this group's ability to even contemplate the brand at a time of such deep woe – or at least for some. While few Australians were forced to forfeit tea completely, there were very significant differences in how the tea was obtained and utilised. As such, Bushells retained a language of status, but was compelled by the cultural mood to use it more tactfully.

At one end of the spectrum, those most debilitated by the Depression struggled to consume basic items like tea. In the aftershocks of the Premiers' Plan, some Australians lost their entire livelihood: by 1932, 28.1 per cent of Australians were out of work, an unemployment rate second only to Germany's.<sup>285</sup> These households were at the mercy of church handouts and government assistance, and the Depression wrought both physical and emotional havoc. According to the 1933 census, 33 000 Australians had endured the winter 'on the road', and a further 400 000 had scavenged calico, canvas, bark and hessian for accommodation.<sup>286</sup> Some, mostly men, tramped the roads to beg, hawk, and subsist by means that would have once been thought demeaning, if not criminal. For these vagabonds, tea was incumbent on charity. Indeed, at the soup kitchens that provided the destitute some relief, tea was one of the few items offered gratis, alongside soup and bread.<sup>287</sup> Clearly, tea had become such an ingrained habit that its absence in the lives of some induced the altruism of others.

In lots of households, the Depression turned tea into yet another item to monitor and moderate. Many women, in particular, were reluctant to forgo small niceties completely, and discovered an ingenuity for reworking what little they had left. This applied to décor as much as dinner. In *Weevils in the Flour* (1983), for example, Barbara Wawn lists how her mother kept her home pleasant and pretty, with makeshift lampshades, makeshift upholstery, makeshift rugs – even the shelves were lined with newspapers that had been fashioned into frills.<sup>288</sup> Australians' ability to improvise and appropriate became one of the most enduring lessons of the Depression. It was especially apparent in the myriad of ways housewives continued to meet familial expectations. Sugar bags were turned into tea towels, flour bags were turned into underwear, and mince, rabbit, tripe and dripping were rearranged into a variety of dishes.

The Depression often brought about the presumption of a shared fate. Accordingly, communities and neighbourhoods were actively sustained by small acts of grassroots generosity – such as the 'Cash Only' grocers that, although themselves strained, extended credit to local regulars.<sup>289</sup> In many households, above the dole but not by much, tea was less of a struggle than one small way to keep spirits up. For instance, mindful of the paucity of some readers' pantries, *Smiths Weekly* published recipes that

could be made with just a few ingredients. A cheap dessert came in the form of a 'Murrumbidgee sandwich' – a slice of bread dipped in cold tea and sprinkled with brown sugar.<sup>290</sup> In these households, tea was one of the few ways left that, with some creativity, families could still enjoy a humble treat. Other items were dropped from their dwindling shopping lists, but tea remained a reliable staple.

### **Bushells – A Middle Class Compromise**

At the better end of the spectrum, an elite coterie enjoyed life as usual. For these pampered cliques, the Depression failed to dull the lavish parties, expensive gowns and overseas travel.<sup>291</sup> Still, although not *all* Australians experienced the early 1930s as a time of deprivation and denial, there were very few that were not affected at all. Even Australia's middle class, whilst far more cushioned than those that survived on tripe or charity, was at least slightly humbled by the crisis. Middle class workers also had to cope with less income (including lower returns to properties, investments and white-collar services)<sup>292</sup>, as well as the constant fear of job loss, default and bankruptcy. Indeed, in the 1920s, tens of thousands of middle class Australians mortgaged new houses and bought furniture on hire-purchase schemes.<sup>293</sup> In the uncertain economy, the dread of failing these commitments prompted many to arrange all their overheads a little more carefully. For this reason, the early 1930s saw the middle class shield itself with a combination of sensible caution and measured constraint. In terms of consumption, this meant a heightened awareness of value and efficiency. The middle class retained its appreciation for quality and taste, but aligned this trait with a more astute pragmatism.

The tempered mood nudged Bushells away from the imagery that had characterised the brand for almost a decade. In the 1920s Bushells' advertising involved two main scenes: 'high society' and 'exotic Ceylon'. As disparate as they seemed, both settings pictured the Bushells consumer within a glamorised circuit of international trade. The images implied a bountiful and generous modernity. The Depression, however, undercut the naïve promise of this story. World trade could no longer be taken for granted, much less trusted. As the economy reeled, middle class aspirations were either dimmed or in doubt. In turn, for the most part, plans for social ascent were put on hold, if not dashed altogether. This cued a new image for Bushells. Its

advertisements were stripped of their fancy pretensions, and their overt claims to privilege and luxury.

Bushells' response to the Depression was to co-opt the concept of judicious consumption. The Depression forced many Australians to reconsider not only what they bought, but also how they economised their purchases. So, just as the middle class ruled out profligacy, Bushells dimmed all the conventional signifiers of wealth – the silverware, jewellery and gowns that had once ornamented its imagery. Indeed, this look was often replaced with the absolute opposite, a no-frills minimalism that culled everything except for a single box of Bushells tea, and multiples of white ceramic tea cups. The logic was simple and timely: good quality tea went a very long way. Ever so subtly, though, these advertisements still managed to incorporate the one idiosyncrasy this class could not escape: its intransigent fixation with its own peculiar status.

An advertisement from January 1931 showed how Bushells addressed consumers that were rattled by the recession, but still open to flattery. The advertisement's most obvious message was one of value. It stated: 'Seven Cups for one Penny – Good Tea is Cheap!' Lest consumers be tempted by lower priced options, Bushells explained the long-term benefit of its brand: 'Good tea is cheaper to use than common tea, because it makes more cups to the pound.' The arithmetic appealed to consumers' better judgement, since they took the time to think through such purchases at length and in depth. However, while there were no hints of luxury, there were still hints of rank. Bushells was differentiated from 'common' tea because its blend was invested with a wealth of sorts: 'Bushells Blue Label Tea is so rich that it makes two hundred delicious cups to the pound.'<sup>294</sup> Another used an almost identical template (one box of Bushells tea and numerous ceramic cups) with the same logic: 'You get over 200 cups from a pound of Bushells Blue Label, so that it is actually cheaper than ordinary tea, and you have the fine flavour as well.'<sup>295</sup>



Figure 6.1 Judicious Consumption 1933

Even with its vocabulary clipped, Bushells could still communicate to middle class consumers that were torn between status and thrift. Bushells' hook was succinct and straightforward: the comparative advantage of higher standards. The brand's price was warranted as the tea was a superior blend, with only 'tender young' leaf-buds that were 'cured slowly'. For consumers, the initial outlay was rewarded with the long-term savings. One advertisement from June 1931 read: 'Extra Cups of Tea that Cost you Nothing – Here is real economy!'<sup>296</sup> Bushells still spoke of a stratified society, but only tangentially. As this particular advertisement continued, 'With ordinary teas, made from the coarse old tea-leaves, which have gone woody, and contain very little sap, you must put a spoonful in for the pot to get the necessary strength.' Words like 'ordinary' and 'coarse' carried class-based associations. By stealth, these terms connoted the hierarchy that was once encoded into the upmarket imagery. Still, the whiff of continuity was buried deep enough to avoid causing either offence or alienation.



For all its sensitivity, Bushells was far from invisible. For example, its advertisements in the *Australian Woman's Mirror*, which sold a reported 168 000 copies a week, were more frequent than most.<sup>297</sup> Even as readers were revising their priorities, Bushells fought any chance that it would disappear altogether. If anything, it positioned itself as a bridge of sorts to brighter days. One advertisement, for instance read: 'Consider this Cup of Tea – Happier hours to come'<sup>298</sup>; and another: 'Some Leaves spell Happiness'.<sup>299</sup> For all its salience, then, Bushells still strived for tact. Advertisers obviously needed to encourage consumption, but they had to work *with*, not against, the buying mood. Many advertisers shared Bushells' conservatism, to the point that others actually *abstained*: between 1921 and 1934 the amount of money spent annually on advertising more than halved to just 8 million pounds.<sup>300</sup> Advertisers were limited by the dearth of disposable income; the industry depended on the freedom of product choice and brand variety. In the middle of a protracted recession, though, the importance of such considerations was questionable. As such, major brands like Bushells tried doubly hard to keep consumers that may have been swayed by cheaper options.

Besides advertisements, there was another way Bushells circumvented consumers' resistance. The company devised a scheme that rewarded loyalty with 'gifts'. The offer sweetened whatever expenses were incurred by those on already diminished means. Introduced in 1933, the promotion invited consumers to exchange Bushells labels for catalogue items, or 'gifts'. These were mostly household wares, the stuff of kitchens, parlours and dining rooms. The more expensive the 'gift' would have been to purchase normally, the more labels were required to obtain it. For instance, a pair of Grecian Vases needed either forty-five one-pound or ninety half-pound Bushells labels.<sup>301</sup> From crystal marmalade jars to aluminium canisters, the catalogues showcased the breadth of domestic culture, and placed Bushells as the benevolent intermediary. Consumers could stock up on table linen, saucepans, bone china, and so on, but the only monetary commitment was to Bushells. Like the advertisements, the scheme offered middle class Australians a well-timed compromise, financially shrewd but tangibly satisfying.



Figure 6.2 Gift Catalogue Cover 1933

From the discreetly-worded advertisements to the catalogue 'gifts', Bushells' initiatives in the early 1930s show how the brand asserted its relevance in a difficult period. Put simply, Bushells turned its much-vaunted quality into a testament of value, rather than privilege. Given Bushells' reliance on middle class consumers, this was a smart approach. The worst years challenged the financial acumen of most Australians, even the relatively comfortable. These initiatives therefore rewarded consumers that stayed with the brand throughout. Both the advertisements and the catalogues stressed the benefits of this long-term relationship – the Bushells consumer enjoyed both the savings and the gift.

### **A Woman's Place**

From 1933, the Australian economy began to show signs of recovery. As the nation inched towards a balanced budget, Bushells was no longer muted by market pessimism. All the same, Bushells kept its focus on efficiency, but with one major difference. Rather than efficiency as a function of thrift, Bushells began to show

efficiency as a function of gender. Specifically, efficiency in the home was increasingly depicted as something that women, especially middle class women, were particularly good at (if not good *for*). Bushells was not alone in this bias; it was one of the most salient representations of the interwar years. As it surfaced in Bushells' advertisements, though, it also contained one of the period's most striking makeovers: the cultural transformation of housekeeping. In turn, this convergence staked a strong symbolic overlap, as both the housekeeping and the brand shared powerful assumptions about women, class and identity.



Figure 6.3 Happy Housewife 1940

Just as Bushells' advertisements of the early 1930s were best seen through the context of the Depression, those of the mid to late 1930s were similarly tied to specific discourses and trends. That said, it is noted here that one of the strongest cultural currents of the decade was the drift of middle class women towards a particular domestic role. This was due more to a concerted effort than a historical quirk. The process was overseen and encouraged by a vast apparatus of experts, from scientists and researchers to editors and advertisers. Their qualifications varied, and their credentials were often questionable, yet they effectively orchestrated a discourse of immense cultural consequence. In short, their work amounted to a 'how-to' guide for

housewives, and they helped entrench the idea that women were uniquely suited to this role.

At its most formal, the study and instruction of household management was codified and called 'Domestic Science', a discipline which flourished in the United States. Through their work in fields such as nutrition, hygiene, and natal care, experts' 'findings' ingeniously legitimated new and improved methods of housekeeping.<sup>302</sup> Practitioners promoted their work to people that were both personally affected by the research, and had the means to incorporate the advice. At the time, this mostly meant the growing number of middle class women that found themselves responsible for the very same tasks that these experts seemed so keen to improve: meal preparation, household cleaning, and child care.

Despite its veneer of objectivity, domestic science was simply the most professionalised point of a very broad consensus. It designated for women a very specific place and purpose: in the home, cooking, cleaning and mothering. While its language ranged from the sterile exactitude of doctors to the amiable reassurance of advertisers, the logic was fixed: domestic science offered middle class women a blueprint that had been stamped by so-called experts. While the term was certainly in use in Australia in the 1890s, it was a few decades before its 'findings' had meshed with the expectations and assumptions of the middle class. By then, institutions like the Victorian College of Domestic Economy were seen by some middle class families as a useful bridge between school and marriage – such was this discipline's appeal to a social group sensitive to order and respectability.<sup>303</sup> At the same time, though, domestic science gave a range of institutions a compelling lexicon that was tailored to a variety of ends, scientific or otherwise. Indeed, from as early as 1894, one Sydney retailer, Anthony Hordern's (discussed in Chapter Four), had presciently incorporated domestic science into its advertising: 'By all means', the advertisement exclaimed, 'study this great and glorious science of social life, because its due and proper observance cannot fail to make poor people rich, and rich ones richer'.<sup>304</sup> Practically from the start, then, what began as a specialised patois ultimately thrived as an ideological panacea. Any interest that benefited from women's embrace of domestic life borrowed liberally from this 'science', none more so than advertising.

In its fusion of research, education and advice, the way domestic science esteemed housework was unprecedented. Indeed, this was one of the most stunning ironies of this phenomenon: its happy promulgation of housekeeping to women who were once deemed above such work. Essentially, domestic science dignified the sorts of tasks once consigned to servants – tasks which were either, as Beverley Kingston notes, ‘physically onerous’ or ‘merely tiresome, unpleasant, and repetitive’.<sup>305</sup> Advertisements for household appliances were especially oblivious to this irony. More often than not, these appliances were promoted as ‘labour-saving’, which echoed the discipline’s fascination with efficiency. In truth, though, middle class housewives of the 1930s assumed responsibilities that were once either delegated to the hired help, or shared by other family members. Vacuum cleaners and washing machines may have reduced the drudgery of these chores, but they also claimed the time and created work for the woman who would have once relied on a servant or a laundress.<sup>306</sup>

The fact that middle class women were relatively new to household labour gave vested interests a chance to pose as benign guides. The potential for profit was as huge as the pool of women that would ‘benefit’ from such input. As more working class women chose factory work over domestic work, middle class women were increasingly open to experts’ advice. Whereas Australia’s 1901 census found that almost 22 000 private households employed at least one servant, by the 1930s, such assistance, as Colin Bannerman writes, ‘belonged to another age as far as most families were concerned.’<sup>307</sup> As it happened, there was a lucky affinity between the advice of these specialists and the interests of commerce. Advertisers taught women how to use new and often interrelated products (the range of cleaning agents was especially fecund) and phrased these appeals in terms of ‘home economics’.<sup>308</sup> Bushells’ increasingly educative tone from the 1930s can be seen as part of this desire to teach women not just what to consume but *how* to consume. For the most part, they were wildly successful. The growing appeal of galvanised-iron dustbins from the 1930s<sup>309</sup>, for instance, reflected a new type of waste: the packaging of goods that once were either made at home, stored in bulk, or not bought at all.

What work middle class women *did* take up was overlaid with a prim correctness. This was to Bushells’ advantage as it complemented the elegance that had been part

of the brand. However, whereas advertisers like Bushells once attributed this elegance to wealth and privilege, from the 1930s it was associated with a more understated, well-mannered propriety. This could be seen in the way otherwise ordinary tasks allowed middle class women to showcase both their domestic aptitude *and* their ladylike demeanour. For example, Miss Nell Rapley, from Melbourne's Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy, designed a range of afternoon tea menus, each of no fewer than six plates, with an array of small, discreet 'dainties'. This included Bridge Tea, Marigold Tea, and Pink Tea – so-named because of the salmon, carmine, and crystallised cherries with which the tea was served.<sup>310</sup>

Every domestic exercise could accommodate a class-conscious sub-text, even a degree of daintiness. Afternoon tea, once the servant's responsibility, was upgraded with the right selection of store-bought accruelements. For many Australian women, though, housework and food preparation *remained* arduous. In some working class areas (like Blacktown and Penrith in Sydney's west), few households had either a washing machine or vacuum cleaner until the 1950s and 1960s, and many housewives continued to make their own foods and sew their own clothes.<sup>311</sup> As such, 'daintiness', as captured by Bushells *et al*, largely depended on those appliances and groceries that cancelled out the grubbier aspects of household labour.

As more middle class women became responsible for domestic work, there was a significant change in its popular representation. More often, it was depicted as a labour of love rather than the unfortunate burden consigned to others. Whatever servility this work once implied was replaced with a portrait of housewifely pride. As Ruth Schwartz Cowan explains, cooking, laundering, changing nappies, and cleaning became expressions of a mother's natural, protective instincts.<sup>312</sup> Advertisers seized this emotional connection, and exploited it with aplomb. Makers of processed convenience foods were especially prone to do this. They routinely used the language of domestic science to assuage whatever guilt or doubt women had about store-bought goods. The mass-produced sameness of products like Campbell's Soup was turned into a fool-proof defence against domestic failure.<sup>313</sup>

### From 'Pink Tea' to Practical Advice

From the 1930s, Bushells' advertising not only encompassed this narrow definition of female success; it regularly appeared in a forum that was to champion it for decades, the *Australian Woman's Weekly* (hereafter abridged to the *Weekly*). Indeed, from its inception in June 1933, the *Weekly* became Bushells' primary advertising medium. In its pages, women were addressed explicitly as wives and mothers (or would-be wives and mothers), and all its content naturalised this conflation. This approach had immediate success: in its first week, the *Weekly* sold over 120 000 copies.<sup>314</sup> Within months the Sydney-based publication was joined by Victorian and Queensland editions.

Bushells' association with the *Weekly* rested on a common vision for Australian housewives. This, however, was not so clear in the beginning. Although the *Weekly* became a beacon of matronly lore, early issues were actually infused with a progressive spirit. Its founding editor George Warnecke aimed for a periodical that took women's interests beyond matters of deportment and dress. The launch issue even boasted the headline: 'Equal Social Rights for Sexes'. Warnecke also tried to broaden the scope of female journalists, whose work had previously been what he called 'pink tea' journalism – 'reports which almost invariably began with words like "Pink carnations decorated the tables at Lady So-and-So's reception"'.<sup>315</sup> Clearly, Warnecke wanted a periodical that eschewed the apparent trivialities of 'society' journals. So, before the close of 1933, the *Weekly* had criticised Canberra's neglect of indigenous Australians, protested against Hitler's persecution of Jews, and promoted the study of psychology.

This dalliance with liberal politics did not last long. For all of Warnecke's ambition, it was his successor, Alice Jackson, who gave the magazine a lasting focus. As Denis O'Brien argues, it was Jackson who successfully steered the publication with 'comfortable middle-class respectability and that air of placid matriarchal authority'.<sup>316</sup> In contrast to Warnecke, Jackson slewed the magazine to just a few considerations, but they had major implications – marriage, motherhood and good housekeeping. This stand framed almost every subject in terms consistent with a specific ideal, housewifery, and thus helped it blossom. Jackson's time at the

*Weekly's* helm coincided with both the immediate aftermath of the Depression, and the duration of the Second World War. This period spanned several years of fear and anxiety for many Australians, and the *Weekly* was a powerful guide throughout. That Jackson consistently referred readers back to a given role reflected not just her personality, but also the best interests of the magazine's sponsors, which included Bushells. As such, the *Weekly's* significance lies not just in its representation of a particular ideology (gendered, suburban consumerism), but in its active mobilisation of it, and the benefits this reaped for advertisers.

The *Weekly* was not alone in this orientation, and nor was it a specifically Australian development. As Ros Ballaster *et al* argue in *Women's Worlds* (1991), a number of British titles emerged in the 1930s that were similarly driven. Like the *Weekly*, magazines such as *Woman's Own* (1932), *Woman's Illustrated* (1936) and *Woman* (1937) exemplified a new genre, the 'service' weekly, which not only responded to demographic changes but also 'played a significant part in shaping some of them.'<sup>317</sup> Fuelled by a firm belief in proper household management, these magazines submitted the gamut of household duties to certain standards. As such, they insinuated the habits and inclinations of a given ideal into everyday domestic life. Within just a few years, new tasks and new technologies were considered both normal and necessary. These magazines could lay claim to at least some of this regularity, as they had so successfully lassoed a growing middle class readership into a realm with very clear assumptions, expectations, and preferences.

The cultural consonance of 'service' magazines was a direct by-product of modern capitalism. They presupposed a readership that required a certain type of 'service': part escape, part manual and part map. As already noted, industrialisation spawned a very particular individual – the middle class woman that not only lacked the assistance of domestic servants, but was caught up in the atomising forces of twentieth-century suburban life.<sup>318</sup> This period demanded middle class women take on new responsibilities at the very same time that they were severed from traditional sources of support. 'Service' magazines were therefore ideally placed to initiate these women into a new type of lifestyle. To this end, they achieved at least three things: they comforted the lonely, instructed the 'novices', and, last but certainly not least, they imbued housework with the right amount of respectability.



In their unbridled advocacy of domestic life, these magazines served their sponsors' interests extraordinarily well. Like domestic science, magazines such as the *Weekly* elevated housework to a craft, but their tone more closely resembled that of a friendly sorority than any white-coated condescension. Still, their assumption of this role was far from selfless. They undoubtedly addressed their readers as agents of incomparable value – in as much as they kept houses clean, children healthy and husbands happy. However, having established the significance of such tasks, editors argued that their proper execution could not be compromised, and hence what appeared an almost endless stream of advice. As such, they created what Cynthia L. White called 'the perfect buying climate for every kind of household commodity which advertisers began to exploit.'<sup>319</sup> So, it was no accident that the *Weekly's* content harmonised so well with its sponsors' aims. It was a clear example of compatible forces working towards a mutually beneficial goal: both the magazine and its advertisers depended on the burgeoning corps of houseproud middle class women.

Bushells' advertisements from the mid-1930s illustrated just how tight this nexus was. They represented both Jackson's idea of the consummate reader; and Bushells' strategic synthesis of feminine glamour and household competence: as one from 1938 put it, 'She knows – what tea to use! Bushells'.<sup>320</sup> The end of the recession saw the return of the beautiful woman to Bushells' advertisements. However, her beauty was not in the service of fashionable society, but a decidedly more circumscribed domain: she was the picture of *Weekly*-style perfection, in the home but impeccably groomed. Often to the exclusion of background detail, these images featured just one woman (on her own, like her real-life counterpart) clutching either a box of Bushells tea or a cup of the same. Moreover, she was scaled to fill the frame, so her place in the world was seemingly so self-evident that it required little explanation or illustration. The setting was anchored by little more than just one piece of crockery, and this was enough to mark a suite of assumptions.

One particular advertisement showed just how seamlessly Bushells meshed with the *Weekly*. It featured a beaming woman and the short caption: 'Young leaf buds give Bushells Tea that rich flavour you enjoy'.<sup>321</sup> Its brevity was revealing. Within a more robust economy, Bushells' worth no longer needed to be rationalised in terms of its

savings. Instead, the housewife appeared smiling and self-assured, with her preference for Bushells determined by nothing more serious than its winning flavour – which, in the absence of a recession, *did* assume greater significance. This showed the malleability of Bushells' brand; the interplay of social processes and promotional interests inevitably brought about variations in what its advertisements emphasised. The range of associations was plastic enough for Bushells to manipulate as circumstances changed. So, as the economy brightened, this housewife was free to consider factors other than the family budget.



Figure 6.4 Bushells & the *Weekly*

Every one of this housewife's attributes endorsed not only Bushells' best interests but also the *Weekly*'s definition of good housekeeping. Her personal style was a triumph of heterosexual norms, with red lips and rosy cheeks, and a pink housedress that was the sartorial embodiment of at-home femininity. In this way, she obeyed the *Weekly*'s insistence that readers be both houseproud *and* attractive. Tellingly, this woman's only accompaniment was a shiny silver teapot. Its gleam was both in contrast to the dull white ceramic that she would have used a few years earlier, as well as evidence of her own superior standards. In short, colour, joy and status had returned to

Bushells' world, and this ultimate suburban housewife was at the centre of it all. Alongside articles that were similarly composed and inclined, this advertisement effectively reproduced the *Weekly's* version of proper domestic life.

Bushells' idealisation of middle class housewives was so comprehensive that it even included private, individual overtures. For example, the company often posted personal, congratulatory letters to newly married women. These letters invariably included a complimentary offer, as well as a subtle script for the rest of the recipient's life. One, for example, addressed to a Mrs Lane, opened with: 'Now that you are beginning housekeeping would you like an attractive Caddy, free of charge, in which to keep your tea fresh?'<sup>322</sup> Bushells even assured Mrs Lane that the caddy was 'printed in bright colors and will look very attractive on your shelf.' Pleasantries to one side, Bushells defined Mrs Lane as a homemaker, hence the letter in the first place, and foreclosed the possibility that her marriage could entail anything other than household duties. Then, having listed the brand's by-then familiar advantages (young leaf tea buds, delicious flavour and over 200 cups from a pound), Bushells informed Mrs Lane that, for these reasons, 'more than half the women in Australia are now using Bushells Tea daily.' The statistic spoke to Mrs Lane's conservatism, as if the wide embrace of the brand by her contemporaries was enough proof that she too would be impressed.

By the end of the 1930s, Bushells had effectively projected the discourse of efficiency onto a particular class of women. Drawing from both the discipline of domestic science, as well as the editorial support of the *Weekly*, Bushells courted that band of women that not only faced a range of relatively new responsibilities, but were famously sensitive to images of order and respectability. Bushells effectively wrote these traits into its advertisements: 'And they say she spends pounds on a special blend. No she doesn't...it's Bushells.'<sup>323</sup> Bushells promised to impress, without compromising the hostess' efficiency:

Because you serve tea of fine flavour people compliment you on your skill. When they ask you what tea you use, invite them to guess...the wise ones pick Bushells at once.<sup>324</sup>

Insofar as successful household management depended on both the fruits of modern industry (with its constant flow of appliances, groceries and gadgets), *and* a socially attractive veneer, this was a highly lucrative turn.

### **The Weekly, the war & tea**

In September 1939, close to a decade after the Wall Street crash and just a few years into the economy's improvement, Australians were drawn into another monumental event. Soon after Britain and France had declared war on Nazi Germany, Robert Menzies, Australia's newly elected prime minister, assumed his 'melancholy duty' and committed the country to the Second World War.<sup>325</sup> Before long, the *Weekly* was wholly dedicated to the Allied effort. The discourses of thrift, efficiency and femininity merged, and the *Weekly* turned wartime sacrifice into a patriotic duty, a challenge to be met with a can-do spirit and some housewifely nous.

For Bushells, the greatest wartime challenge was the introduction of rationing. As the nation's commitment to the Allied effort deepened, basic supplies were tested. This worsened with the United States' decision to use Australia as its base in the Pacific. The need to feed two armies involved a massive redistribution of foodstuffs. As a result, civilians not only suffered intermittent shortages of potatoes, pork, vegetables, and citrus fruit; from May 1942, the Rationing Commission regulated their allocation of sugar, butter, meat and tea. The tea coupons allowed individuals half a pound of tea for every five weeks – although some living in very remote areas were allowed 50 per cent more.<sup>326</sup> By 1943 there were some 120 000 American troops stationed in Australia. Their presence stirred both the scorn of Australian men, as well as fears that supplies would run dry.

Just as the Depression inspired a range of household compromises, so too did rationing. Against the pleas of the Commonwealth Food Control, a black market flourished, and those with enough cash could buy petrol, cigarettes, alcohol, as well as everyday groceries. Often enough, though, family and friends simply pooled, swapped or donated coupons amongst themselves. Many also experimented with culinary short-cuts, the so-called 'austerity recipes'. These proved very popular and there were competitions to find the best examples. Austerity Fruit Cake, for instance, replaced

butter with dripping and left out eggs; Austerity Potatoes were padded with breadcrumbs for bulk. Across the home front, authorities urged Australians to simply 'Do Without'. Editorially, the *Weekly* did the same: it published austerity dress patterns from the British Board of Trade; encouraged readers to grow their own vegetables; and preached the cosmetic benefits of exercise over 'unnecessary' make-up.<sup>327</sup>

Major brands honoured Canberra's wishes and urged customers to bear the shortages with good grace. Like Arnott's<sup>328</sup> and Kraft<sup>329</sup>, Bushells issued a simple-looking press release. It pictured a Bushells package, positioned centrally, atop a short paragraph. The two-tone image was sparse, and the message direct. Its marketing freedom restricted by the rations, Bushells projected a solemn dignity instead: 'In War or Peacetime Tea is a public necessity.' With its civilian consumers bound by the Rationing Commission, Bushells focused its attention on the uniformed personnel: 'Tea is one of the favourite beverages of Allied Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors and Marines, who are seeing action on many distant fronts, under strange and varied climatic conditions.' The brand turned the sacrifice of its usual customers into a measurable contribution to the greater good: 'Nearly 600, 000, 000 cups of Tea are brewed each month.'

This press statement illustrated Bushells' delicate negotiation of a compromising position. Not only was Bushells forced to acknowledge a difficult intervention (rationing), but, in terms of emotional engagement and national significance, the Allies' cause trumped that of commerce. Bushells' response was discreet, but effective. Ostensibly free of any commercialism, the paragraph did not cite the brand name directly. Nonetheless, for all its gravitas, the central position of the package made the (soft) sell. By parlaying its brand onto the war effort, Bushells radiated patriotism, even though this was not an advertisement in the usual sense. It was a public announcement, but with private benefits. In the long-run, Bushells would enjoy the favourable associations. The statement suggested an august and righteous honour and, in place of either peace or a free market, this served the brand well enough. Tea was rationed until 1950, but it did not take that long for Bushells to revert to its usual marketing. Until then, this wartime initiative ensured that consumers kept the brand in high regard.



Figure 6.5 Bushells & Rationing

In its need to manoeuvre an unlikely angle, Bushells was not alone. Despite the *Weekly's* ideological inertia, the war required more women to enter the workforce and occupy positions once considered contrary to their gender. With the widespread movement of men from the economy and into uniform, employers *had* to consider alternative arrangements. The Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force, for example, advertised thus:

Wants Clerks Urgently – Why don't you get out of the rut of peace-time life and...do something worthwhile for your country? It's women with office experience that the W.A.A.A.F. wants so urgently.<sup>330</sup>

This proved to be a revelatory process. As Frank G. Clarke points out, women 'took jobs in all sectors that had hitherto been the province of men and performed extremely well.'<sup>331</sup> The Women's Land Army, for instance, met the physical challenge of agricultural work exceptionally well. Similarly, the *Weekly* was full of praise for the women at a Commonwealth ordinance factory, whose work with munitions saw them 'doing things that no one dreamed that they could do.'<sup>332</sup> Still, whatever impression such women made did not last long, and demobilisation saw most of them resume domestic roles. This was not just an implied expectation either: married women were

actively barred from public service careers such as nursing and teaching until the late 1960s.<sup>333</sup>

As it moved people and parties into unusual positions, the war inevitably upset the codes and conventions of cultural interaction. Indeed, this tension even implicated the role of tea in Australia, and the set of assumptions that had crystallized around its preparation. This surfaced most dramatically with the influx of American soldiers. As much as it vexed local males, the American personnel showed off what seemed like a modern and worldly glamour. Often, this allure came courtesy of their seemingly more exciting palate. As Unice Atwell remembers, with 'about twice the spending power of the Australian troops, plus such wonders as Coca-Cola and American cigarettes',<sup>334</sup> these 'Yankee' soldiers charmed Australian women with an ease that local men clearly envied. At the same time, though, and as Michael Symons argues, the relative sophistication of the American men lent a certain crudity to Australian tastes. Symons writes, 'American authorities didn't want mutton and tea for their troops, but beef, pork, sweetcorn, orange juice, tomatoes and chili (sic) con carne.'<sup>335</sup> Differences in taste reflected differences in both culinary heritage as well as industrial development. Despite Bushells' depiction of tea as a necessity amongst all Allies, this was not the case.

For Australian soldiers, the Americans' indifference to tea became a sore point. It was reconfigured as yet more proof that American men were, despite their success with local women, ill-mannered and duplicitous. As far as Australian men were concerned, 'when an American got on a friendly footing with an Australian family he was usually found in the kitchen, teaching the Mrs how to make coffee, or washing the dishes.'<sup>336</sup> This opinion was obviously intended to belittle and deride. Significantly, though, not only did it encapsulate disdain (and probable jealousy), but the extent to which gender politics had hardened around the making of tea. That 'washing the dishes' was something for which American men were mocked suggested that their intrusion into the kitchen offended not only local tastes but Australian norms. These would have had the 'Mrs' making the tea (not coffee) and washing the dishes. If nothing else, this showed just how successful the *Weekly*, Bushells, *et al* had been in structuring mainstream Australian culture around some fairly inflexible ideas.



## Conclusion

By the time the war ended in 1945, the *Weekly* had demonstrated an almost peerless capacity to counsel and comfort Australian women. As its circulation climbed up to 650 000, it tackled home-front weariness with its peculiar blend of warm encouragement, and moralising didacticism. For their part, the *Weekly*'s advertisers (like Bushells) submitted their interests to the Allies' cause – but cleverly maintained a media presence through discreetly-worded statements. Throughout, both the magazine and its sponsors stressed the importance of sacrifice and compromise, and effectively invoked the discourse of (domestic) efficiency for wartime conditions.



Figure 6.6 Bushells advertisement 1946

The *Weekly* welcomed peace with its customary sexism. That is, it failed to recognise readers' successful management of the home front as proof that their competence exceeded housework. Rather, the *Weekly* argued that, after six years of anxiety and stress, the man of the house could finally relax with 'an armchair by the fire and clean sheets...tea in the kitchen and a woman's tenderness no longer edged by unspoken fears.'<sup>337</sup> This proved a profitable stand, and within a year the magazine's circulation of 700 000 confirmed its place as advertisers' most prized portal to middle class



housewives.<sup>338</sup> For this reason, Bushells continued its close association with the *Weekly*.

Of the changes and hurdles that Bushells had to deal with in the post-war decades, many of which will be considered in the next chapter, one is mentioned here: the growing popularity of coffee. However much it had annoyed Australian men during the war, its post-war appeal pointed to a radical shift in Australians' drinking habits. At the close of the last chapter, it was noted that, in 1928, Australian consumption of tea was the highest in the world, at 3.6 kilograms per person annually. At the close of this chapter, it is noted that, after the Second World War, the 1936-39 consumption figure of 3.1 kilograms was not regained.<sup>339</sup> In 1950, the final year of tea rationing, over half the population had yet to try coffee. Yet within just a few decades, Australians' consumption of it would exceed that of tea. Indeed, straight after the war, even the *Weekly* promoted coffee as a novel alternative to tea at the end of a meal.<sup>340</sup> Thereafter, Bushells had to confront this competition directly; the next few chapters will look at how the brand did this.

The period between the onset of the Depression and the end of the Second World War presented Bushells with two major challenges. In the early 1930s, Bushells was faced with the nervous hesitation of middle class Australians. Having designated this group as its target in the 1920s, Bushells was forced to rethink its marketing approach. This saw the brand focus on that concept which, in the middle of a recession, was most likely to interest it: the efficiency of a quality product. With this, Bushells sustained its appeal to those consumers that were mindful of (and perhaps worried about) the economic crisis, but were still sensitive to complimentary marketing, in the sense that Bushells complimented their superior judgement.

Through the discourse of efficiency, Bushells refined its most compelling image of the 1930s: the middle class housewife. This image not only suited the popular discipline of domestic science; it also endeared the brand to one of the nation's most successful publications, the *Australian Woman's Weekly*. In turn, Bushells supported this magazine's particular mix of advice and instruction, and the brand became a part of the 'proper' housewife's ensemble. Indeed, even rationing could not sway this course: Bushells simply turned sacrifice into a show of patriotism. Effectively,

though, Bushells established itself as *the* brand to return to once the soldiers were home, in accordance with the *Weekly's* advice. The next chapter will look at how Bushells realised this vision, and how shifts in taste became yet more challenges to overcome.

*Notes to Chapter Six on pp. 265-267.*