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PART III:

LABOUR, CAPITAL AND SKILL, 1840-1900

INTRODUCTION

The world outside the statistician's office was more complex, and less malleable, than that inside. However, in time here too the artisanal concept of skill would be displaced by the industrial concept of skill. How this displacement occurred - and the evidence of its occurrence - involves an argument of some considerable complexity. Part III traces the extent and nature of that displacement in New South Wales to 1900. It does so by viewing the history of capital and labour in New South Wales through the optic opened up in Part I - the meanings and practices which differentiated the artisanal and industrial concepts of skill. Thus the overall objective of this part is to demonstrate that the artisanal and industrial concepts of skill had historical - rather than simply discursive or semantic - significance.

Chapter 4 connects the artisanal concept of skill with the chronology of capitalist development in the second half of the nineteenth century. It argues that up to 1900 the artisanal concept was the most significant concept through which work was understood in New South Wales. However, during the period this dominance was increasingly contested. The nature of that contestation within the labour movement is examined in Chapter 5. Simultaneously, as is argued in Chapter 6, sections of the colony's employers increasingly adopted an anti-artisanal stance, and began to draw on the industrial understanding of skill. Thus this part demonstrates the complexity of the displacement of one understanding by another.
CHAPTER 4

THE MEANING AND PRACTICE OF ARTISANAL SKILL IN

NEW SOUTH WALES, 1840 -1900

In those days [the 1840s] the standard of labour in England was
the practical test of the condition of the working classes in
Australia, who were thought well off simply because their
earnings enabled them to enjoy comforts beyond the reach of
their fellows in England. Since the gold era this has been
changed, and the standard now made for themselves by
Australian workers has no reference to any other country.

(T.A. Coghlan, Wealth and Progress of New South Wales 1886-7)\(^1\)

I

As the terminological plurality of the 1841 and 1846 censuses suggests,
the admixture in 1840s New South Wales of a convict and a free labouring
population presented census compilers with a complex classificatory
problem. As we have seen, however, the census compilers of the 1840s
abandoned the categories of a penal society in their classifications, and
replaced them with the taxonomy of artisanal skill. In doing so they
adopted the mode of classification which had already starting to emerge as
the dominant scheme of working class classification in the civil, as distinct
from penal, sphere of colonial society prior to the 1840s. As a free working
class developed in the colony during the later 1820s and 1830s, its formation
was accompanied by the dichotomous classificatory scheme of the artisanal
paradigm. Thus when the Masters and Servants Act was introduced in

1828, guaranteeing that employment conditions would be underwritten by the force of the state, its drafters attempted to ensure the universal application of its provisions by listing a proliferation of categories: the Act was to apply to '... any artificer, manufacturer, journeyman, workman, labourer or servant, employed in any manner howsoever ...'. In the remainder of the Act this terminological diversity was abandoned, although the familiar binarism of the artisanal taxonomy was somewhat blunted by the necessity to place female labour in a separate servant class. Nonetheless the classificatory impress of artisanal skill was strongly evident in the resolution of these multiple categories into '... artificer, labourer or servant ...'.

When the Act was modified and consolidated in the 1840s it displayed a similar resolution of occupational diversity into the binary form of the artisanal dichotomy, and this persistence indicates something of the widespread nature and central position of this classificatory practice amongst officialdom in mid-colonial New South Wales.

This taxonomy was also periodically reiterated within the colony's nascent working class of the 1840s. In 1843 when the self-titled 'Distressed Mechanics and Labourers' petitioned the Legislative Council for unemployment relief, they claimed by such a description to encompass the colony's '... working classes'. The salience of that dichotomy in the 1840s

3 The 1828 Act was altered in 1840, and employment law was consolidated in 1845. In the 1840 version there was a tendency to attenuate the classificatory power of the artisanal dichotomy, as throughout it the list '... artificer manufacturer journeyman workman shepherd laborer or other male servant ...' was used. In the 1845 consolidation, however, the artisanal dichotomy was reasserted in the listing '... artificer splitter fencer sheep shearer or person engaged in snowing reaping or getting in hay or corn or in sheep washing and other laborers ...' (emphasis added). Although this list is detailed, its basic division is between 'artificers' and 'labourers', albeit of the specific types nominated. For the 1840 Act, see 'An Act to ensure the fulfilment of Engagements and to provide for the adjustment of Disputes between Masters and Servants in New South Wales and its Dependencies', Public Statutes of New South Wales 1838-1846, Government Printer, Sydney, 1861, pp. 1104-8. For the 1845 consolidation see 'An Act to amend and consolidate the Laws between Masters and Servants in New South Wales', 4 Vic. No. 23; loc. cit., pp. 1584-92.
was borne out in the clarity of the distinctions in both respectability and wages rates between "skilled" and "unskilled".5

The presence of practices deriving from the non-commodified understanding of labour - which were an invariable indicator of the artisanal understanding of skill - also attests to the importance of that understanding among the colony's working class in the 1840s. Connell and Irving have drawn attention to the presence of '... the irregular work habits [characteristic] of a pre-industrial population ...' in 1840s colonial society.6 Although these aspects of working class mentalité have not received significant attention, Hume has detailed some of them in his examination of working class movements before the 1850s.7 His subtle and somewhat under-appreciated article shows that far from acting simply as Friendly or Benefit Societies, an integral part of the purpose of the twenty or so trade societies which existed up to 1850 was to intervene in the relationships between employers and their employees. Of particular importance was the reproduction of the artisanal portrayal of the trade as a community of the equally-skilled through the establishment and enforcement of '... a single standard or scale of payment to workmen in the trade ...'.8 As most of the societies were formed from skilled workers, an accompaniment to this was the reproduction of the artisanal dichotomy, principally in the form of a sharp differentiation in wage rates between "skilled" and "unskilled". In addition, and as Connell and Irving have argued, the stability of the differentials between the rates of pay for "skilled" and "unskilled" despite fluctuations in overall rates of wages, also reflected the importance of

8 Hume comments that '... a number of strikes were fought over the establishment of a common rule ...'; ibid., p. 38.
normative rather than market considerations in the preservation of the differences between the two categories.\textsuperscript{9} From at least 1835 the colony’s employers had run-up against the strength of normative rather than market considerations in working class consciousness about work, when they found that increasing wages had the effect of decreasing the regularity with which workers attended work.\textsuperscript{10}

In all these respects the colony’s working class was adopting a stance in opposition to the practice and philosophy that wage rates should be determined by market considerations. The artisanal concept of skill was suspended within a communitarian rather than market understanding of society and labour, and Hume describes that in the 1840s ‘The workmen and their spokesmen were still influenced by ways of thought that did not fit at all harmoniously …’ with the various strands of utilitarianism and liberalism then being aired in Sydney’s urban political discourse. The rights which they demanded were not those of ‘… man, but the rights belonging to them as workmen …’ - and, we can add, organised in “trades” conceived as socially-biologically defined communities of the equally-skilled. Thus in their conflicts with their employers ‘… they assumed the existence of a whole structure of differing, but harmonious, rights and obligations allocated according to status … , echoes … of radical Toryism …’.\textsuperscript{11} The artisans of the 1840s were thus drawing on that tradition of thought from within which the artisanal concept of skill originated, including that which rejected the ideas and practices of the outlook of political economy, and in particular its conception of labour as a commodity.

\textsuperscript{9} Connell and Irving, op. cit., p. 48.
\textsuperscript{10} Coghlan reports the comments of an employer in 1835 who said that although the wages rates for skilled labour were ‘... too high ...’ employers ‘... found it impracticable to reduce them, as rather than take less the men will go out of work, and they can afford to do so, because the wages of three or four days will suffice to maintain them for a week.’; T.A. Coghlan, Wealth and Progress of New South Wales, 1891-2, Government Printer, Sydney, 1892, p. 874.
\textsuperscript{11} Hume, op. cit., pp. 44-5.
During the 1850s skilled workers continued to assert their independence from, or only partial subordination to, wage labour. For example, the observance of St. Monday by skilled workers during the decade suggests that the non-commodified conceptualisation of labour continued to be important.¹² The presence of a non-commodified understanding of labour was also manifest in the continued rejection by at least some workers of market considerations as the basis for establishing wage rates. In this regard it is important to note that wages norms operated against the principle of market determination, not simply against wage reductions. Thus a blacksmith working at a Sydney foundry in 1853, on being paid the very high, but market, rate, of £6 a week remarked to a fellow worker that ‘... I felt ashamed to take my wages.’¹³ These instances were examples of a stance which rejected the principles and the fact of capitalist economic processes. The widespread nature of this rejection throughout the colony’s working class was indicated by the flood of workers leaving waged employment and going to the gold diggings in the 1850s.¹⁴ Later in the decade that same attitude was manifest in the demand for “independence on the land”.¹⁵

If these practices, coherent with the artisanal understanding of labour, continued to predominate among the skilled sections of the working class in the 1850s, other features of working class activity in the decade effected a disruption to the dominance of the artisanal paradigm. The general importance in that period of a populist politics which pivoted on the

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concepts and categories of "diggers", "citizens" and "the people" perhaps encouraged the submersion of the terminology of artisanal skill within 1850s political discourse, from which that terminology is markedly absent.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, in the element of carnival about the 'rushes, the social order which was temporarily inverted and mocked by successful diggers was not simply that of the ruling class.\textsuperscript{17} By connecting prosperity to physical labouring capacities, the gold rushes briefly inverted the established points of differentiation between "skilled" and "unskilled". In Sydney in 1856, 'There was great difficulty in getting navvies for pick and shovel work, as these were the class of men who could do well for themselves on the goldfields.'\textsuperscript{18} If in reality the rewards from digging were meagre, nonetheless in the imagined possibilities which the gold rushes contained there was a certain intrinsic overturning of the rigidities and subordinations of the artisanal dichotomy.\textsuperscript{19} The comment of a boot manufacturer in 1862 that 'They always laugh at tailors, or shoemakers, or shopmen, when they see them going off to the diggings, because it is known that they are not fit for hard work ... ', communicates something of the subversion of artisanal


\textsuperscript{18} T.A. Coghlan, \textit{Labour and Industry in Australia}, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 695; also see his comment that '... gold digging was arduous and continuous labour, and ... only the physically robust were likely to succeed ... '; ibid., p. 688. Also see P. Grimshaw, M. Lake, A. McGrath, M. Quarty, \textit{Creating A Nation}, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1994, p. 100, who comment that 'On the goldfields a strong back counted for more than an educated accent, and a masculine appreciation of manly toil cut across social distinctions.'

\textsuperscript{19} For the meagre nature of the rewards from gold digging see Serle, op. cit., p. 24, pp. 85-88, p. 223. Blainey comments that on the New South Wales diggings 'The strongest men, the common labourer, found most gold. '; Blainey, op. cit., p. 23. Blainey also emphasises the role of luck, which itself helped constitute the imagined possibilities of gold. Loc. cit., p. 49.
order during the gold rushes. Andrew Garran, when still a journalist on
The Herald looked back and described how during the gold rushes:

The clerk deserted his desk, and the professional man his office; the
mechanic and the tradesman threw down the tools to which they were
accustomed, to take up others which were foreign to them, and in the use of
which they soon found they were not adepts. All were too intently
engaged in the wild scramble for gold ... to think of their customary
regular employments.

Similarly a boot manufacturer commented that '... the diggings disturbed
the ordinary labour of the country ...'. This fluid context opened up a
disruption to the established differentiations in work between "skilled" and
"unskilled". House building was one instance in which labourers took over
the work that carpenters would usually do, and similar practices occurred in
printing, and probably also in other trades. Garran referred to the
prevalence during the 'rushes of employing workers in skilled occupations
'... who had even the slightest claim to be denominated tradesmen ...'.

Other facets of artisanal practice were also contradicted by the
experience of the gold rush decade. Strikingly, by the end of the decade the
elevated wage rates of unskilled labour in Sydney combined with a
recession in the skilled trades so that '... it was anticipated that presently
there would be no difference between the rate paid to skilled and unskilled

20 Select Committee on the State of Manufactures and Agriculture in the Colony, New South Wales
Parliamentary Papers, 1862, Vol. 5, Richard Cooke, q. 1221.
21 H. Reed, The Industrial Progress of New South Wales: being a Report of the Intercolonial Exhibition of
1870, At Sydney, Government Printer, Sydney, p. 451; for Garran's authorship, see above, Chapter
2, fn. 50.
22 Select Committee on the State of Manufactures and Agriculture, op. cit., R. Cooke, p. 1091.
23 For the building trades see T.A. Coghlan, A Statistical Account of the Seven Colonies of Australasia
1901-02, Government Printer, Sydney, 1902, p. 390. For the print trade see J. Sutcliffe, A History of
Trade Unionism in Australia, Macmillan of Australia, Melbourne, 1967, pp. 36-7, where he
comments that in the early 1850s in Sydney 'Men were being taken into the [print] trade from other
callings without apprenticeship or training, except such as they could pick up during the time they
were working. He also notes the simultaneous prevalence in Victoria of '... the practice of
employing men who had received no training in the occupation nor served an apprenticeship ...'.
The 1851 Rules of the Typographical Association of Victoria, which Sutcliffe reproduces, reveal
the presence of an undiluted artisanal argument in the Victorian context; loc. cit., pp. 37-8.
labour ...’, as Coghlan recorded. Other disruptions to artisanal order also appeared. At the start of the gold rushes standard rates of wages disappeared, in Melbourne at least, although skilled workers there managed to reclaim some measure of stability by reasserting the standard rate in 1853. However in Sydney at the end of the 1850s the relative stability which had characterised wages rates in the 1840s, including the recognition of a standard rate for individual trades, had been entirely eroded. As the 1860s began ‘... there were no recognised trade rates ...’, and ‘... no little uncertainty as to what should be recognized as a standard wage ...’. Although this was something of an exaggeration, it expressed the degree of disruption to the artisanal paradigm and its logic in the 1850s.

II

The degree of disruption to the artisanal taxonomy and meaning should not be exaggerated; when Henry Parkes supplied information to the New South Wales Emigration Agent in London in 1861 he considered that the condition of the colony’s working class was sufficiently adumbrated in a listing of the ‘Rate of Wages of Mechanics and Labourers’. Similarly, in order to explain the scheme of assisted immigration which he proposed as a remedy to the colony’s unemployment, Parkes hypothesised a colonial employer whose needs would be met by the immigration of ‘... mechanics or

25 Coghlan, Labour and Industry, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 700. A tanner, J. Begg, commented in 1859 that curriers’ earnings of about £3 a week were ‘... very little more than unskilled labourers.’ See Select Committee on the Working Classes, op. cit., q. 1042. In 1862 a boot manufacturer commented that ‘... it used to be the case till lately that an ordinary labourer would earn more than a shoemaker would.’ See Select Committee on the State of Manufactures and Agriculture, op. cit., q. 1344. Connell and Irving similarly identify the gold rushes as a founding decade for the disruption to the established relationships of “skilled” and “unskilled”; Connell and Irving, op. cit., p. 109. However they greatly overstate the depth and breadth of this phenomenon, which - at least in New South Wales - seems to have retreated during the 1860s. See below p. 126.

26 Coghlan, Seven Colonies of Australasia 1901-02, op. cit., p. 388.

27 Coghlan notes that in this period ‘... even in the same year there were occasional variations, sometimes as many as four in the daily wages of artisans.’ ibid., p. 399. For the second quote see Coghlan, Labour and Industry, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 1018.
Yet it is necessary to observe that the confidence with which Parkes applied the artisanal taxonomy was preceded by, and based on, the resolution of a taxonomic uncertainty which had occurred in 1859 - and the necessity for which at precisely that time can hardly have been coincidental to the disrupted taxonomic context of the 1850s. The wage rates which Parkes used in his 1861 communication were compiled, as he acknowledged, from the evidence which had been given before a parliamentary committee inquiring into the high levels of unemployment in Sydney. Chairing the inquiry, Parkes asked its first witness, the New South Wales Inspector General of Police, J. McLerie, whether criminals were ‘... labourers or mechanics ...’. The Inspector’s reply - that ‘The larger proportion [of criminals] is no trade, or labourers.’ - contained an ambiguity. Was the Inspector here referring to two separate categories of worker - the “no trade” and the “labourers”, and in doing so implicitly to a threefold occupational classification (i.e. “trade”, “no trade”, and “labourer”) - or using both terms synonymously? Parkes pressed him to resolve these classificatory possibilities into certainties, asking McLerie ‘The “no trade” are classed as labourers?’ . The Inspector’s reply - ‘We ask what trade they are ... and they say “no trade” ...’ and are thus classed as labourers.’.

The exchange between McLerie and Parkes can be construed as an innocuous preliminary point of clarification; however it should be noticed that Parkes’ response to McLerie’s use of the term “no trade” was not to automatically assume that it was a synonym for “labourer”. In this sense McLerie’s clarification that “no trade” was a synonym for “labourer” had the effect of simultaneously re-asserting the artisanal paradigm, while closing off alternative taxonomic possibilities. The shaping effect of this was

28 Document reproduced in C.M.H. Clark, Select Documents in Australian History, Vol. II, 1851-1900, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1979, p. 242-6, the quotes being found on p. 243 and p. 245 respectively.
demonstrated during the inquiry when the dominance of the artisanal taxonomy operated to set to one side the taxonomic possibilities opened-up in the comment of a builder that bricklayers' labouring and plasterers' labouring was each respectively '... almost a trade of itself.'

Despite this, and with the artisanal taxonomy ascendant, each was consigned to the "unskilled" category.

Such processes of exclusion made it possible for Parkes at the start of the 1860s to confidently render the working class of New South Wales as a dichotomy. On other occasions ambiguities on the other side of the artisanal divide were similarly resolved into the polarities of the artisanal dichotomy. The occupation brickmaking provides an example. Its inclusion among a list of "skilled workers" such as stonemasons and house carpenters was surely tenuous given; that one commentator qualified his mention of the '... trade of brickmaking ...' with a doubting '... if it can be called a trade?'; that it was considered '... easily learnt - there is no difficulty'; that brickmakers were thought to be generally uneducated; and that it was found necessary to inquire whether they were given to '... violent or savage ...' pastimes - a question unthinkable in the case of occupations like carpenters or masons.

Yet despite all these factors, and within the taxonomic possibilities provided by the artisanal dichotomy, there was little option but to designate it "skilled". The comment of one observer that brickmaking required only '... a certain amount of skill ...' indicates that in a different classificatory scheme it might well have occupied a rather different position.

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30 Ibid., T. Spence, q. 976.
31 Ibid., p. 1291. The list, which was given by the pastoralist W.H. Walsh, comprised 'House carpenters, bricklayers, brickmakers, and stonemasons ... blacksmiths...'. It was given in response to the question 'What do you call skilled labour?'
33 Select Committee on the Employment of Children, op. cit., q. 136.
The sorting activity performed by the artisanal dichotomy was one manifestation of its reasserted dominance in the 1860s. In this context careful iterations that the work of labourers was that of assistance to the "tradesman" carried an added consolidating force. In addition, although demand for employment continued to vary during the decade, the colony's skilled and unskilled workers were no longer positioned eccentrically in regard to each other by a manically fluctuating labour market, as they had been in the 1850s. Wage relativities once again became a distinct and meaningful material mark differentiating skilled from unskilled, and solidified at a ratio of around 5:3. Some skilled workers, such as the Operative Plumbers, also attempted to stabilise wage rates and to re-establish the concept of a standard wage. The plumbers' degree of success does not appear to have been great, and it is likely that their experience was that of most other trades in the early 1860s - frequent fluctuations in the wage rates, sometimes as many as four in a year. Although this variation appears to have abated somewhat later in the 1860s, still in the early 1870s wages fluctuated.

The largely recomposed artisanal taxonomy provided a firm basis from which those precise artisanal delineations between the "skilled" and "unskilled" were projected upwards to encapsulate the colony's working class. An engineer commented in 1860 on 'The labouring classes both

34 See for example the comment in regard to '... mechanics ... [and] ... labourers who wait upon them ...', Select Committee on the Unemployed, New South Wales Parliamentary Papers, 1866, Vol. 5, p. 633. Also see the reference to '... the building trades ... and the labourers in connection with those trades ...'; Select Committee on the Condition of the Working Classes, op. cit., q. 1349.
35 Coghlan states that '... the average wages of mechanics began to settle down to about 8s 6d per day, ... while unskilled labourers generally obtained 5s a day;' Labour and Industry, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 1018. This emphasis contradicts that of Connell and Irving, op. cit., p. 109.
36 Operative Plumbers' Trade Society. Rules. Mitchell Library, Ms 334. Rule XVIII stipulated, 'That the lowest rate of wages for all Members of this Society shall be twelve shillings per day; any members proved to be working for less shall be suspended for three months from all Benefits.'
37 Coghlan, Labour and Industry, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 1023, records a wage rate for plumbers in 1866 of 10s a day. The union was probably short lived as Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 48 remarks that 'Several previous attempts had been made to organise the plumbers of New South Wales, but without success.' prior to the establishment of the Operative Plumbers Union of New South Wales in 1880.
skilled and unskilled ...', and in 1866 a petition was presented to Parliament from the ‘... great number of skilled and unskilled workmen ...’ who constituted Sydney’s unemployed workers. Thus Sydney trade union officials could write in 1867 to England of ‘... the great depression existing among all classes of skilled and unskilled labour in the colony’, confident that in their use of the artisanal taxonomy they were encompassing within its categories the colony’s working class. And if they needed to validate this representation they could do so by referring to their 1864 copies of the English working class newspaper The Beehive, finding authoritative support for the artisanal taxonomy in the certainty of its description that, ‘... the working classes are divided into two sections, one comprising the skilled artisan and mechanic, and the other the labourer ...’.  

A further symptom of the dominance of the artisanal taxonomy was the presence of a range of pejorative terms with which skilled workers and those imbued with the artisanal ethos, referred to occupations which did not fit within the artisanal taxonomy. The thoroughly artisanal Sydney cabinet maker Ninian Melville described the presence in Sydney’s working class of ‘... what we call handy-men...’, a group who were, according to him, neither “labourers” nor “artisans”. Each trade was similarly equipped with an armoury of pejorative terms casting doubt on the legitimacy of occupations which did not fit within the dichotomous artisanal framework. In the 1860s building trades “half-taught” masons were termed “scabblers”, which in its more proper application was a term describing pick workers.

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39 For the engineer’s comments see Select Committee on the Condition of the Working Classes, op. cit., J. G. White, p. 1329. For the terms of the petition see Select Committee on the Unemployed, op. cit., p. 681.
42 N. Melville, Select Committee on the Unemployed, op. cit., q. 63.
43 For the use of the term see the remark of G. Withers, that ‘Plenty call themselves masons who are simply scabblers ...’, Select Committee on Assisted Immigration, op. cit., q. 1847. For the definition of “scabbler” see Coghlan, Labour and Industry, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 711.
In the printing trade unindentured tradesmen were termed ‘Would-be Compositors’, and machine compositors, “typesnatchers”.44

Taxonomic dominance does not necessarily imply semantic dominance, and it is much more difficult to gain access to, and then to gauge the degree of dominance of, particular meanings of skill in the 1860s. However, it is possible at least occasionally to identify instances which reveal the presence of artisanal understandings of skill. These, as few as they are, are important as a backdrop to the much more widely available evidence of practices which are coherent with the non-commodified understanding of labour which lay at the heart of the artisanal concept of skill. Thus the engineer in 1860 who commented that he thought skilled work should be paid for according to its ‘... intrinsic worth ...’ was articulating the classic artisanal reference to ‘skill’ as an internal quality.45 Although such public iterations of that notion were rare in the latter half of the nineteenth century, its presence can also be discerned in the frequency with which contemporaries acted or talked in ways which were cognate with it. The most common instance of this was the ubiquity of the claim made by skilled workers that it was their right to be paid the rates of pay ‘... that are normally paid in the trade.’46 The idea that skilled work had a certain “intrinsic worth” was also reflected in the well-attested practice of skilled workers preferring to “walk about”, or to take up other employments in times of unemployment, rather than take wages for their trade that fell below the established wage-norm. The Select Committee on the Condition of the Working Classes of Sydney in 1859 asked one witness to provide a solution to the question of how it happened that in a time of high unemployment among ‘... artisans ...’, those who did manage to get work

45 Select Committee on the Working Classes of the Metropolis, op. cit., J.G. White, p. 1330.
46 Select Committee on Assisted Immigration, op. cit., q. 1848.
'... maintain such apparently good wages?'. The witness, a rates collector for the Sydney Corporation, explained to the committee that he had '... heard [artisans] refuse less than they have asked, and have said they would not take it, that they would rather walk about and do nothing than work for nothing.'

Significantly, this was not attributed to the activity of trade unions suggesting that the practice was an informal one among skilled workers.

We can add to these insights into artisanal meaning the continued presence during the 1860s of practices which were congruent with its logic, and especially those practical articulations of the typically artisanal non-commodified conceptualisation of labour. The evasion of a growing employer intention to assert control over the time and pace of work was typical of skilled workers throughout the decade, wherever the abundance of work and wages allowed it. Tailors in 1860 were reported to '... like very much to make a holiday of Monday, and good part of Tuesday ...'.

A Sydney woollen factory owner also referred to the strength of these same practices among the weavers he employed, commenting in 1862 that he had '... a great difficulty in keeping men steadily at their work ...'. In 1866 it was reported that cabinet-makers observed St. Monday, an employer noting that only '... some ...' of his employees were '... steady men ... who never lose an hours work, but who are at work from Monday morning till Saturday night ...'. This was in contrast to others whom, he noted, '... work when they please ...'.

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47 Select Committee on the Working Classes of the Metropolis, op. cit., J.R. Clayton, q. 283. Also note the comment of G. Withers that '... First-class [masons] will not take rough work, and will rather walk about than take a job unsuited to their tastes ...', Select Committee on Assisted Immigration, op. cit., q. 1848.


49 Select Committee on the Working Classes of the Metropolis, op. cit., J. Macdonald, q. 737.

50 Select Committee on the State of Manufactures, op. cit., M.M. Campbell, p. 1062.

51 Select Committee on the Unemployed, op. cit., A. Lenehan, q. 576 and p. 653.
If such practices reflected the determination of skilled workers to exercise control over the pace of their work, another important mechanism was the enforcement of customary notions of productivity. Such attitudes are difficult to get at from the workers’ perspective, but employers and their mouthpieces were convinced of the prevalence and effectiveness within trades of informal rules limiting the amount or pace of work which could be done by members. Thus, for instance, in 1868 The Herald referred to the operation of a collective norm when it noted the existence among colonial trade unions of ‘... regulations for making the performance of a second-rate workman the standard of a fair day’s work ...’.52

III

The re-establishment of the artisanal framework in the 1860s was followed by a further strengthening of the artisanal paradigm in the 1870s. During this decade the labour movement developed into a powerful and permanent feature of the colony, and it did so by replicating and extending a style of unionism which revolved around the idea of “the trade” or the “craft”. The adoption of the craft model as the usual form of unionism in the 1870s enhanced the dominance of the artisanal paradigm. In particular, the effect of craft unionism was to re-emphasise the taxonomy of artisanal skill - the clarity of the separation between “skilled” and “unskilled”. While many historians have described the labour movement in mid-nineteenth century New South Wales as one in which the “skilled” and “unskilled” existed harmoniously with each other, this greatly exaggerates the degree of harmony between the two. The formation of a Trades and Labour Council in Sydney in 1871 has frequently been taken to indicate the inclusive nature of the labour movement, as has the assistance given by craft unions to their

52 SMH, 23rd May 1868, p. 4.
“labourers” in forming their own unions.53 Yet what is lacking from those understandings is an appreciation that these features were mechanisms through which the subordination of the “unskilled” to the “skilled” was secured or intensified. If the TLC and craft unions assisted the unskilled to form their own unions, at least part of the motivation for that assistance was to formalise in union rules the clearly defined zones of “skilled” and “unskilled” work.54 As the example of the boilermakers and their labourers in 1876 clearly shows (see Chapter 9), the construction of a “craft” required the construction of “labourers” as a clearly differentiated group.

Yet it is indicative of the continued dominance of the artisanal paradigm in the 1870s and into the 1880s that for the most part the collective organisations developed by workers in the 1870s and 1880s - whether “skilled”, “semi-skilled”, or “unskilled” - took the craft union as their model. Although unions of the “unskilled” were relatively rare in the 1870s, those which were formed adopted the features of craft unions. The Wharf Labourers Union, for instance, had a system of benefits and high entrance fees which reflected the prevalent practices and logic of unions of skilled workers.55 The coal miners unions also adopted many of the features of craft unions, as did early transport unions such as the Trolley and Draymen.56 This habit of organisation outside the ranks of the formally


"skilled" was long-lasting, and still in 1900 the United Labourers' Protective Society had '... craftlike ...' features. Indeed so pervasive was the artisanal idea of the separateness of the "skilled" and the "unskilled" that the initial impulse of those involved in organising shearers was to turn to the model of collective organisation provided in the exclusivist practices of artisans' craft unions. In central Victoria an early attempt at union formation sought to describe shearers in strongly artisanal language as 'Knights of the Blade', and proposed a system of apprenticeship. Thus even here, in this quintessentially anti-craft union, it was the artisanal model which first presented itself to the shearers.

It is hardly surprising, given the enhancing impact of craft unionism, to thus find in the 1870s that the dominance of the artisanal paradigm was also manifested in the determination of the "skilled" to maintain a clear differentiation between their conditions of labour and life, and those of the "unskilled". The symbolism of the wage differential was especially important in this, and it speaks volumes for the enduring salience of artisanal logic that in 1875 James Dooley, the Secretary of the Operative

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59 Merritt, op. cit., p. 100. The appellation "Knights" is a signifier of artisanal meaning. Although it is most commonly known as a term describing the American labour federation, "the Knights of Labor" of the 1870s, its usage originates in England much earlier. Paradoxically, the Knights of Labour was an early advocate of "... union of all workers, skill, gender and race notwithstanding"; M. Beard, *A Short History of the American Labour Movement*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1968, p. 117. However, the adoption of this name - despite the tension with the aims of the organisation - reflects the dominance of artisanal discourse in 1870s America. A more cognate connection between artisanal discourse and "Knights" is the English tailors' trade society which in the early nineteenth century was titled "Knights of the Needle" (see E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, 1968, p. 283). Given that there is some connection between Australian shearers and English tailors in mid-nineteenth century - an account of pastoral labour written in the 1850s described that "... some of the best hands have been London tailors ..." - ( *Life in the Australian Backblocks*, quoted in A.D. Fraser (ed.), *This Century of Ours. Being an Account of ... the House of Dangar, Geddyke and Malloch Ltd.*, Sydney, 1938, p. 160) the use of the title "Knights" can hardly be seen as accidental. Moreover, there is a definite homology between the idea of "Knights" and an "aristocracy" of labour, brought together in the artisanal paradigm.
Masons Society, could base his society’s claim for an increase in wage rate on the grounds that it was wrong for masons to be paid so little when bricklayers’ labourers were receiving the same rate as masons were. As a substantive claim that was certainly hyperbole, but what is of interest is the appeal which Dooley made to the breach in the established relations of subordination and domination between skilled and unskilled as justifying the masons’ claims.\(^60\)

But the concern of the skilled to maintain their differentiation from the unskilled was not always as innocuous as this. On occasion the skilled acted to thwart efforts made by the “unskilled” to close the gap between them and the “skilled”. A prominent example of this occurred in the strike of the Sydney Wharf Labourers Union in 1875. The union’s main aim was to secure an increase in the rate of wharf labourers pay from 1s to 1s 3d a day - a typically “aristocratic” rate of pay. This claim induced a response from Sydney’s skilled workers which well revealed their exclusiveness. The presence and remarks of Angus Cameron at a mass meeting of the strikers in Sydney’s Domain indicates the extent of the artisanal attitude of superiority over the “unskilled”. Cameron, a carpenter by trade, as well as the parliamentary representative sponsored by the craft-dominated TLC crystallised the stance of artisanal confidence and domination over the “unskilled” in his remarks from the platform that ‘Every mechanic in Sydney was saying that the rate they [the Wharf Labourers] demanded was an extraordinary high rate of wages for labourers to ask ...’.\(^61\) It is important to note that this attitude of dominance did not go uncontested. Unfortunately the press only recorded that the wharf labourers greeted Cameron’s remarks with ‘Interruptions and dissent’, so that one is left to

\(^60\) Dooley’s claims were made in SMH, 20th August, 1875, p. 5. The hyperbolic nature is indicated by a comparison of the daily wage rates for masons and building trades labourers. In 1875 masons were getting between 10s and 12s a day (New South Wales Statistical Register, 1875), and in 1876, masons 11s and builders’ labourers 8s - Coghlan, Labour and Industry, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 1431.

\(^61\) For Cameron see Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 3, Markey, op. cit., p. 42; Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 83.
imagine the content of the robust phraseology which they undoubtedly deployed.\textsuperscript{62} It is not surprising, given the lack of support from the colony’s skilled workers, that the wharf labourers were defeated.\textsuperscript{63} It is also hard to see in this cameo, support for Nairn’s assertion that in the history of nineteenth century labour in New South Wales ‘... the alleged aristocracy and exclusiveness of the skilled unions are shown to be myths.’\textsuperscript{64}

If the effect of craft union formation was to amplify the taxonomic dominance of the artisanal concept of skill, at the same time other features point to the continuing semantic dominance of the artisanal understanding of skill throughout the 1870s and 1880s. In 1879 William Roylance, a stonemason and the Secretary of the Sydney Trades and Labour Council, drew attention to the continuing significance of non-market considerations amongst Sydney’s skilled workers when he commented that:

\ldots it is a great mistake to suppose that wages rise and fall just as the price of wool or flour according to the state of the market. Demand and supply does not effect the rate of wages as it does commercial commodities.\textsuperscript{65}

From the point of view of craft workers themselves, the artisanal understanding of skill was reflected in the importance which was given in their policies to re-establishing the principle and practice of the standard wage - the monetary recognition of the artisanal idea of the trade as a community of the homogeneously skilled. Established in the 1830s and 1840s, eroded at least in part during the 1850s, partially and unevenly regained in the 1860s and early 1870s, the concept and practice of the standard wage was re-established in many trades as soon as the economically buoyant conditions of the mid-1870s allowed.\textsuperscript{66}

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\textsuperscript{62} SMH, 1st October 1875, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{64} Nairn, op. cit., p. 152.
\textsuperscript{65} Select Committee on Assisted Immigration, op. cit., q. 395.
\textsuperscript{66} For the economic context see N.G. Butlin, Investment in Australian Economic Development 1861-1900, Department of Economic History, Research School of Social Sciences, The Australian National University, 1976, pp. 9-15.
building trades it appeared in 1874 in the weaker form of a standard minimum, with established increments up to a set maximum, and then more firmly in 1875-6, when '... there was a strong tendency for all men belonging to a [building] trade to be paid at uniform rates; ...'.\textsuperscript{67} So strongly had the principle of the standard minimum wage taken hold in the building trades by the end of the 1870s that the Secretary of the Operative Masons, James Dooley, was moved to explain in public that the principle was not designed to '... bring all masons to one dead level' but to '... fix the minimum rate of wage ... for competent workmen, but if an employer finds that he has men better than the average, the society has no objection to the employer paying such men 12s, 14s, or £1 a day ...'.\textsuperscript{68} At the same time other craft unions, such as the tailors, the shipwrights and the typographers, similarly asserted the homogeneous character of their members' abilities.\textsuperscript{69} A shipwright in 1891, gloomily anticipating '... the looming shores of starvation and misery ...', looked back on the achievements of the previous generation of shipwrights [a generation which he artisanally represented as that of 'our fathers'], and specified that the '... glorious privileges ...' they had '... fought and suffered for ...' were '... the eight hours and a standard wage.'\textsuperscript{70}

Not that employers necessarily accepted the establishment of standard wages without demur. The Sydney typographers, for example, had to resort to what they described as '... a turn out ...' in April 1874, the result of which was '... an agreement between the Employers and the [New South Wales Typographers] Association by which the Standard Rate of wages was fixed as £2. 15s. for [a] week.' The following year, however, they had to defend not so much the amount of that wage rate, but the concept and practice of the

\textsuperscript{68} SMH, 25th August 1877, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{69} Coghlan, Labour and Industry, op. cit., p. 1431; for the typographers see below, Chapter 6, p. 186.
\textsuperscript{70} Robert Dempsey, 'To My Fellow Shipwrights', The Australian Workman, 18th April 1891, p. 4.
standard wage, as in September 1875 they reported that ‘... the Employers had ... shown unmistakable signs of repudiating the agreement ...’ by having ‘... given them notice they would institute a sliding scale of wages from £2.5, £2.12 and £3.00 ...’. The union reported that it ‘... had determined to resist ...’ such a system, and in doing so expressed the importance of the standard wage, rather than the amount of wage, in the craft unions’ practice of artisanal skill.\footnote{Sydney Trades and Labour Council, General Minutes, 30th September, 1875; this dispute, which gets no coverage in the principal secondary source - Hagan op. cit. - suggests a modification of the impression given in that work, that typographers were all paid by the piece. They may have been by the 1880s when Hagan's coverage of the New South Wales Typographers Association begins, but as this dispute indicates, they certainly were being paid day wages, not piece rates, in the 1870s. See Hagan, op. cit., pp. 73-84.}

In generating these practices and techniques the artisanal concept of skill gave an aggressive edge to craft unionism which rather belies its historiographic positioning as the co-partner with capital.\footnote{Examples of this historiographic position are Turner, In Union is Strength, op. cit., p. 26; L.G. Churchward, 'Introduction', N. Ebbels, The Australian Labour Movement 1850-1907: Historical Documents, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1983, p. 12.} The artisanal paradigm provided instead a powerful set of co-ordinates with reference to which the colony’s skilled workers developed their own opposition to the central process of capitalist development - the commodification of labour. But what lay underneath these strategies was the fundamental artisanal conception of skilled work as internal to the human being within which it was borne - the notion of “intrinsic worth”. Yet to characterise such behaviours as “habitual” or in another formulation as “customary” is to position them as anachronistic accretions of the past, latently suspended in an archaic, medieval outlook.\footnote{A perspective implicit in Hobsbawm's 'Artisans and Labour Aristocrats?', where he comments that the persistence of non-market considerations in the approach of English nineteenth century skilled workers to wage rates, was rooted in ‘... congealed memories of the pre-industrial craft world ...’, E.J. Hobsbawm, op. cit., p. 255. It is also implicit in the title of his essay 'Custom, Wages and Workload', Hobsbawm, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1964, and pp. 345, 347, 349, 350. Also see the quote from Connell and Irving, op. cit., p. 62.} Such a perspective, however, loses sight of the fact that it was precisely through such “pre-industrial” attitudes and behaviours that the working class in New South Wales articulated its first
responses to the development of capitalist social and productive relations. It is thus perhaps more useful to see such attitudes as positioning colonial workers in response to the development of the colonial labour market; that is, as a powerful mental framework on the basis of which artisans articulated their opposition to the employment and social conditions shaped by commodity production, and especially to the process of commodification of labour.74 As William Lane in the 1890s was to comment, looking backwards and observing these typical craft strategies, "The Old Unionists who blindly and instinctively organised, and stood together as mates against those who were oppressing their special trades and callings, were so far Socialists, all unconsciously."75

The standard wage and its relationship to the artisanal conceptualisation of a trade as a community of the equally-skilled was only one manifestation of the semantic dominance of the artisanal understanding of skill among skilled workers. The continuation of practices in the 1870s which were coherent with the non-commodified understanding of labour also points to the presence of the artisanal conceptualisation among the colony's skilled workers. Contemporary observers continued to note, but from an increasingly disapproving stance, the prevalence of "irregular" working practices. At the Sydney tobacco manufactory of Cameron, Dunn and Co in 1870 the employers were powerless to enforce their will on the seventy to eighty skilled tobacco twisters they employed. One of the firm's managers described how the men were:

supposed to work ten hours a day, but a good many work only half a day. They come in at all times. We have a sort of rule that if they come in after time they are to be deducted, but it is not often carried out. Many work only four days a week ... and many work only half days.76

74 See the discussion of "pre-industrial" "attitudes", "custom" and "tradition" in E.P. Thompson, 'Custom and Culture' in Thompson, Customs in Common, op. cit., pp. 3-15.
75 The Hummer, 16th January 1892, p. 1.
76 Select Committee on the Employment of Children, op. cit., D. Dixon, q. 269.
These practices were more than just the characteristics of a few isolated trades. In the early 1870s, according to one observer, the practice was widespread throughout Sydney's factories and workshops, where the workers '... persist in absenting themselves two or three days in the week ...'.\textsuperscript{77} In 1872 it was reported that stonemasons '... choose to "knock off" after they have worked four hours in six ...'.\textsuperscript{78} Indeed so prevalent was the practice among Sydney's skilled workers in the early 1870s that The Herald inveighed against '... the irregularity observed by the skilled workmen in the hours of labour ...', and went so far as to suggest that legislation be introduced '... compelling their attendance for a definite number of hours each day.'\textsuperscript{79}

Such fulminations had little impact on the practice, as by the end of the 1870s irregular work patterns were still widespread. Of the two thousand shoemakers in and around Sydney in 1878 it was reckoned that 'Many of them are in the habit of keeping St. Monday most religiously and ... do not feel particularly fit for work on a Tuesday, so that their week's work really does not commence before Wednesday ... they work long hours on the last day or two of the week.'.\textsuperscript{80} The employers Garton and Corner similarly referred to the practice when they commented that those shoemakers '... who work fairly reasonable hours ...' could earn a decent living, and another employer commented that the shoemakers he employed came and went '... when they please.'. A small master in the highly skilled 'bespoke' section of the trade complained of ' ... the "cursed independence" of the men and that they will not work on the Monday.'\textsuperscript{81}

If the shoemaking trade provides many examples this is because it was the subject of unusually intense scrutiny of its conditions at this time.

\textsuperscript{77} SMH, 18th April 1872, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{78} These were the most highly skilled stonemasons, '... carvers of ornamental stonework ...'; ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} SMH, 1st October 1878, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 8th October 1878, p. 7, comments of Garton, T. Bennett and Petrie respectively.
But irregular working practices continued to be a widespread feature across a range of trades. As The Herald pointed out in 1878, ‘... in many other trades, a large number of the men work but few days in the week ....’82 One example was the building trades, an employer noting in 1880 that some building tradesmen ‘... keep in work just long enough to earn a little money, and then remain for some time unemployed.’.83 A building unionist referred to the persistence of such practices of independence by building tradesmen in 1889 when he remarked that ‘There was a recognised task for a day’s work in Sydney ...’.84

Other evidence, albeit less insistently, points to similarly “irregular” practices. Combining drinking with work may have been a prevalent, although diminishing, feature of skilled workers’ behaviour in the mid-colonial period. It was reportedly entrenched in the colonial building trades during the 1870s.85 Other aspects of workplace conviviality were also important. Skilled workers in the tailoring trade were reported to talk and yarn at work, a practice unlikely to have been unique to this occupation.86

The extent to which employers were still caught up in this web of essentially pre-industrial practices and expectations remains uncertain. It should be noted, however, that echoes of their involvement can be found in the continuation of the “wayzagoose” - the traditional celebration for workers that employers were expected to provide annually - as a practice in the print trades of New South Wales in this period.87 Similarly, the

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82 Ibid., 9th July 1878, p. 4.
83 Select Committee on Assisted Immigration, op. cit., J. Farr, q. 1178.
84 Report of Proceedings, Sixth Intercolonial Trades and Labour Union Congress, Hobart, 1889, Mr Lennon, p. 33.
85 A correspondent to The Herald in 1876 commented on the continuing presence of ‘... men who worship St. Monday and other such like saints in the lazy calendar ...’, and particularly singled out the building trades for attention; SMH, 13th May 1876, p. 6.
86 Select Committee on the Working Classes, op. cit., E. James, pp. 1345-50. In this respect see the comments in 1879 that ‘... in a large manufactory there is not exactly silence ... but ... No conversation can be kept up, as order must be preserved ...’; Select Committee on Employment of Children, op. cit., q. 1802.
87 SMH, 7th October 1872, p. 9.
bootmakers in Melbourne who agreed to leave off drinking and return to work only after their employer had provided them with more drink has clear resonances with the admixture of rights claimed and obligations fulfilled of English artisanal practice.88

IV

It was with that sense of obligations to be fulfilled, rights to be maintained, and society to be ordered in particular ways, that skilled workers in the 1870s and 1880s construed the changes in production and society amidst which they were positioned. For when, as it often did, capitalism seemed immoral to the colony's "artisans", it did so not simply because they recognised it as a more exploitative organisation of production, but also because it continually abrogated the rules within the artisanal paradigm through which categories of work were aligned with the categories of socio-biological identity - particularly age, gender and race. The immorality of capitalism thus inhere in its disruptive effects to the social order presupposed in the artisanal paradigm.

For this reason artisanal discourse about capitalist development in New South Wales was frequently suffused with the outraged tone of a moral order violated. That tone can be discerned running through the comments - not just of skilled workers in mid-to-late colonial society, but also of other contemporaries - about new types of work and categories of workers. It can be discerned in the categories used by a colliery inspector in

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1870, who described the youths employed in mines as ‘... dissipated ...’, meaning by this that ‘... after they begin to receive a little money ... they begin to think they are men.’.89 It can also be seen in the confusion of categories used to describe the employment of pre-teenage boys in footwear factories on an “apprenticeship”, which meant, according to one commentator, that they ‘... become journeymen on their own account by the time they are fourteen.’.90 Here the categories of age clashing with those of the categories of work is registered by the counterpoint between fourteen year old boys becoming “journeymen”. More generally, the employment of boys and girls in unregulated factories was seen to produce not only a whole group of unclassifiable labour, but also ‘... premature men and women ...’.91

These several examples indicate something of the presence of the artisanal concern with placing workers as representatives of social and human types. It was only in special circumstances that the operation of artisanal alignments of categories of socio-biology and with those of skill became apparent in a more detailed and conscious fashion. Such a circumstance was the debate which surfaced when Sir Alfred Stephen, the New South Wales Attorney General, introduced a Bill amending the Apprenticeship Act in June 1876. Among its several enactments the Apprenticeship Act laid down the age of twenty-one as the legal maximum age of an apprentice. Stephen’s Bill departed from the Act by allowing the continuation of apprenticeship beyond the age of twenty-one. Under its provisions apprentices could be taken for seven year periods at the ages of sixteen or seventeen, which meant that there could be apprentices of twenty-three or even twenty-four years of age.92

The widespread opposition to these proposals in itself reflected the

89 Select Committee into the Employment of Children, op. cit., p. 911.
90 SMH, 1st October 1878, p. 6.
91 Ibid.
position of dominance occupied by the artisanal paradigm. Somewhat surprisingly, given his opposition to the artisanal concept of skill and its practices, Andrew Garran as Editor of *The Herald*, mounted cogent arguments against the changes which Stephen was proposing. Central to Garran’s argument was a concern that the proposals conflicted with the social and legal understandings of adulthood and childhood. The age of twenty-one marked the point at which a person became an adult, and more importantly an independent citizen, with all the rights and obligations which accompanied that condition. For Garran, to allow a law to exist which provided for the continuation of apprenticeship beyond the threshold of adulthood constituted a denial of the legal status of adulthood.Indentured apprenticeship, he argued, was a civil condition of unfreedom, dependency and irresponsibility, which was suitable for minors, or ‘infants’ as they were graphically termed in law. The proposed changes would have the effect of imposing on those apprentices who came under it an extension of ‘... the period of their minority from twenty-one to twenty-three years ...’.93

Although Garran’s legal training perhaps predisposed him to approach the issue from a legalistic standpoint, he was careful to show how this disruption in the legal sphere would ramify into wider society.94 This was not a minor quibble of constitutional lawyers, but a matter which would redound significantly within society. It was, he thought, ‘... highly objectionable that anyone who has attained his legal majority should continue to be bound as an apprentice ...’; such a situation he claimed ‘... would be productive of much mischief ...’.95 In thus assessing the likely impact of the proposed changes Garran was referring to the disruption in two main areas. The changes ‘... would injuriously disturb the relations of

93 SMH, 23rd June 1876, p. 5.
95 SMH, 29th June 1876, p. 5.
various trades’, because ‘Apprentices of twenty two and twenty three ... [would be] working side by side with journeymen of twenty one’. Garran considered this to be incongruous on a number of counts. It would mean that the younger would be receiving more pay on his journeyman’s wages than his elders with their ‘... apprentice’s pittance ...’. But for Garran the more important consequence was that ‘... it would have an undesirable effect in regard to social relationships ...’, by fostering the development of an anomalous hybrid - ‘... apprentice-men ...’ - which straddled the hitherto clearly-separated artisanal categories “apprentice/boy” and “journeyman/adult”. It is clear from Garran's comments that this confusion in the civil condition brought about by cross-cutting of hitherto separated categories was central to his opposition to the Bill. ‘What could be more humiliating to a man of twenty two or twenty three ...’, he asked ‘... than to be partially dependent upon his parents - to feel that he is a man, and yet to be paid and treated as a youth?’96 But even more importantly, Garran went on to observe that the clashing of fundamental categories of social order would create a situation so contradictory to the principles of social order that Garran feared ‘... what would be said of us if we made the mechanic an infant, as a mechanic at twenty two years and eleven months, and yet, in all other respects liable to the responsibilities of a man!’97

For those who would be most effected by the changes - Sydney’s skilled workers - Garran’s arguments appear to have had a particular salience. The stonemason and trade union officer F.B. Dixon referred to the connections between adult civil condition and being “skilled” when he (Dixon) expressed his opposition to the Bill by noting that ‘A man at home [meaning England] was a citizen at twenty-one ... and there was no reason ... that the period of majority should be delayed.’98

96 Ibid., 26th June 1876, p. 4.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., 19th July 1876, p. 5.
Although the aspects of citizenship were important, of perhaps greater immediate interest to Sydney’s skilled workers were those aspects of Garran’s argument which expressed the connections between skill and age, and which were inscribed in the organisation of the trades along artisanal lines. Especially evocative for those in the trades was the use made of the incongruous pairing of terms in the description of “apprentice-men”. It was thus no accident that one of the principal participants in the debate which took place in The Herald over the measure, signed himself with the conventional artisanal pairing ‘Prentice Boy’, and organised much of his argument around artisanal categories. He self-consciously used the term “apprentice-men” in contrast to “mechanics”, and thereby focused attention on the incongruous effect produced by the intrusion of this category of age into the harmonious pairing of the artisanal categories “apprentice” and “mechanic”. From the other side of the same coin, he referred to the subversion of the correspondence between categories of age and categories of skill by describing aged apprentices as ‘... “boys” ...’.

The episode appears unique, but it casts light into the deep interior workings of the artisanal paradigm. It reveals that in the artisanal paradigm to refer to an “apprentice” was to refer unambiguously to someone who was a child because to refer to a “mechanic” or a “journeyman” was to refer unambiguously to someone who was an adult. Moreover, it also is an instance of the artisanal alignments being used by contemporaries as a basis on which to normatively assess a particular set of changes.

It took highly unusual circumstances to reveal the pulse of the artisanal concept of skill. More usually, its classificatory reach and dominance was manifest in more prosaic, less convoluted form, which none-the-less similarly sought to cast doubt on the legitimacy of social and industrial changes accompanying the development of industrial capitalism.

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99 Ibid., 15th July 1876, p. 8.
That development spawned new types of work and new groups of workers as, throughout the 1870s and especially the 1880s, old occupations were transformed by machinery and division of labour, and new occupations were brought into being. The responses of skilled workers to those changes in the late 1880s demonstrates the continuing dominance of the artisanal paradigm and its taxonomy. Its continuing importance can be glimpsed most clearly by examining the description given by William Trenwith - an archetypal craft worker - of the type of workers that were produced in the footwear factories which had developed during the 1880s. They were, he said, ‘... incompetent tradesmen and handicraftsmen without the necessary knowledge to enable them to fill the position [i.e. of ‘handicraftsmen’] but yet removed from the position of labourers’.

It is not only the use of the craftsman/labourer dichotomy which marks this description as a product of the artisanal classificatory schema. The dominance of that way of thinking about labour in this period is reflected in the verbose and clumsy language that Trenwith resorts to in describing these workers. As they did not fall within the framework of understanding provided by the artisanal concept of skill, so this was registered in the lack of a special term of description. Such a term would have indicated their acceptance as a legitimate category of labour. However, neither “craftworker” nor “simple labourer”; neither “skilled” nor “unskilled”; Trenwith’s description is completely reliant on trying to locate these workers by reference to the categories present in the artisanal paradigm.

Trenwith’s description seems today to be an unnecessarily elliptical way of describing an everyday phenomenon, the “semi-skilled” - the category of worker between “craftsman” and “labourer”. But in this

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100 For a detailed account of these changes see R. Markey, The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales 1880-1900, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1988, pp. 17-117.

Verbosity Trenwith draws our attention to the importance placed by colonial craftworkers on maintaining the coherence of the distinct categories "skilled" and "unskilled". For Trenwith's description of these intermediate workers was produced by the central place of the artisanal paradigm in the thought of colonial workers, not by his lack of verbal acumen. It was a typical reflex of those imbued with the artisanal understanding during the 1870s and 1880s when confronted by the implications of industrial production, and the new types of worker it produced. It was a reflex which was revealed in the discussion that surfaced at the 1889 Intercolonial Trades Union Congress in Hobart. A policy on apprenticeship was presented to the Congress which among other things recommended certain measures relating to "improvers". Although some delegates were in favour of the policy, those who spoke in opposition to the policy were not simply against the policy itself, but were opposed to the use of the term "improver". One delegate said that ‘... he took exception to the word “improver”; he had never heard of it in the Old Country and hoped it would be abolished in the colonies. Another noted that ‘The term “improver” was a new term to him ...’, and yet another that in Scotland ‘... improvers were not recognised’.

Another described these workers as ‘... the fifth class ...’, remarking that if after an apprenticeship of five years a man ‘... was not a good workman, he should improve himself off to something else.’. This was echoed by a print tradesman, who commented that he ‘... saw no need for them ["improvers"] at all; every society had a minimum, and if he was not worth that when he had completed his apprenticeship he would never be worth anything if he stayed at his trade all his lifetime.’.102

And if those artisanal appreciations of their own abilities remained vital in 1889, so too did their lack of appreciation of the "unskilled". At the 1888 Intercolonial Trades Union Congress, a seaman spoke of the

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102 The debate from which these quotes are taken can be found in Report of Proceedings, Sixth Intercolonial Trades and Labour Union Congress, op. cit., pp. 29-31.
prevalence of '... certain notions that existed with regard to tradesmen occupying a position superior to labourers.' 103 So ingrained was the habit of marginalisation of the "unskilled" that the terms in which the labour movement addressed itself were strongly slanted towards the "skilled". It was both characteristic of the persistence of this habit of thought, as well as a sign of the challenges to it that were starting to occur in the 1880s, that a delegate to the 1886 Intercolonial Trades Union Congress from the Corporation Labourers of Victoria found it necessary on one hand, and was able on the other, to chastise those taking part in a debate on protection for '... talking only at their individual crafts ...', and for not carrying out the discussion in terms that included other sections, not just crafts. 104 At the same Congress another delegate complained that the tradesmen who made up the majority of the delegates '... forgot all about the unskilled labour ...', suggesting that the attitudes which produced the marginalisation of the "unskilled" were a habitual and unconscious reflex of the "skilled". 105 The colonial labour movement at the end of the 1880s was dominated by the marginalising attitudes, the taxonomy and the institutions which were generated by - and acted as supports for - the artisanal concept of skill. At the same time it is important to recognise that the same matrix of ideas and understandings which marginalised the 'unskilled' - the artisanal concept of skill - contained within it the critical connections through which the skilled construed and opposed the trajectory of capitalist development. The continuing salience of these connections at the end of the nineteenth century - those between the taxonomy of artisanal skill, the artisanal conception of a trade as a community of the equally skilled, and the practice

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103 Report of Proceedings, Fifth Intercolonial Trades Union Congress, Brisbane, 1888, p. 107. The speaker was the Seamen's Union delegate to the Congress, Charles Seymour, whose attitudes are explored in more detail below, Chapter 5, p. 151, p. 154.


of the standard wage - was demonstrated in a large strike in the building trade in 1888, in which the members of the two carpenters' unions fought to regain the standard wage which they had been unable to retain during the poor economic condition in New South Wales in the mid-eighties.\textsuperscript{106} The case the union officials put to their members:

\textit{Did they think 10s enough for a skilled mechanic? (Cries of "No"). They found wharf labourers getting their 10s. per day, but when the carpenters asked for 10s. the employers grumbled, and said they were not worth it. The employers wanted to make a distinction between carpenters and joiners, but were they not of equal value to the employers? (Hear, hear.)}\textsuperscript{107}

- with its reference to the reduced differential between "skilled" and "unskilled", and its assertion that all members of the union were worth the same, was rooted in the fundamental logic of the artisanal paradigm. And finally, the Secretary of the Operative Stonemasons, Mr Anderson, drew out those connections which had been expressed in the discourse and practices of skilled workers in New South Wales since at least the 1840s, when he commented that:

\textit{with regard to the law of supply and demand, it was not proper to look upon the men as one would regard a bale of flock, so that which way the market went he would have to go with it. ... The men's labour could never deteriorate in value.}\textsuperscript{108}

This expressed the artisanal conviction that skill - with its "intrinsic worth" - remained outside the reach of the commodifying tendencies of capitalism.

\textsuperscript{106} For the strike and its economic context see A. Coolican, 'Master Builders and the beginnings of arbitration in New South Wales', Macintyre and Mitchell, op. cit., pp. 253-4.

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{SMH}, 17th October 1888, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 20th October 1888, p. 15.