P A R T T W O

C H A P T E R O N E

Frederick Fisher -- Convict

The legend of Fisher's ghost tells little or nothing about the man himself. As the hypothetical agent of the famous phenomenon, his personality and achievements are worthy of interest. It may even come as a surprise to many who have almost doubted he really existed, that Frederick George James Fisher has other claims to fame in the colonial beginnings of Australia.

Fisher came from an English family which for generations was identified with the arts of printing, engraving, bookbinding, bookselling, and to some extent, authorship. The activities of early Fisher booksellers and stationers, placed by family tradition in and around London, reached back to the beginning of the 17th. century, when it was customary to combine bookselling with the trades of draper or barber, and sometimes with the esoteric labours of apothecary.

A number of Fishers had been prominent as booksellers before William Fisher, dealer in nautical books, was to be found conducting business at Postern Gate, Tower Hill, London, between 1657 and 1690. A hundred years later, James Fisher appears as a bookbinder and printer at Bull Head Court, Jewin Street. His premises comprised a workshop with retail bookshop adjoining. He resided at 51 Willow Street, St. Leonards, Shoreditch.

James' brother Thomas had similar interests, and another brother, Joseph, conducted one of London's numerous coffee houses, Tom's Coffee House. Joseph had a special sideline, says the family tradition -- that of writing sermons for ministers of religion, many of whom in those days, were too preoccupied with politics or soothing the consciences of the ruling class, to worry about preparing edifying exhortations which would help the poor to starve virtuously. Joseph's advertisments of 'Sermons for Sale' no doubt filled a real want among lazy clergymen, and the profits therefrom would have dulled the pangs of an otherwise inexpedient rectitude.

Their occupations brought the Fishers into close contact with the educated and influential people of the capital. It follows that they themselves were knowledgeable. The times were turbulent; the industrial revolution was gathering momentum, with painful effects upon the labouring poor whose handcrafting methods were outstripped by increasing mechanical aids.

Within the compass of a few years, the intractable American colonists, arrogant in their new-found sense of power and destiny, had declared their independence, a spectacular debacle for England helped along by the frequently insane George III. The French Revolution had made a perilous impact upon the minds of the suffering and cruelly-neglected lower classes, which only a long-cultivated sense of hopeless inferiority prevented them from emulating.

The usual miseries of the working class, always carefully kept under control by chronic undernourishment, sufficient to make them tractable but not revolutionary, were increasingly aggravated by spreading unemployment contrasted with the Hanoverian princes displaying their windfall of luxury and their dubious ladies.

As the eighteenth century expired and Europe was in violent ferment and forces abroad were preparing to annihilate Napoleon and all his works, crime in England increased in pace with the rapacity of the nobility and the rising idustrialists, who were sustained and goaded to greater excesses by the fundamentalistic hoax that God signified his immutable will in the predestination of the rich to be rich and the poor to make the best of it. Who would have the temerity to argue with God, the most senior member of the British civil service?

Politics were as furious and corrupt as institutionalized hypocrisy could make them. The Hanoverian misfits still clung to the delusion of divine right of kings as a refinement of primitive greed.

The struggle with France which was to continue over twenty years in quest of commercial supremacy, kept England in turmoil, with those at the bottom of the heap in despair.

The failure of Britain's First Empire due to the revolt of the American colony created dismay and a savage determination to avoid similar misfortune in the future. Master-race paranoia pervaded the Establishment such as to raise Britain eventually to the position of the greatest colonial power in history -- and which by its own nature in due time would disintegrate.

One effect of the loss of North America was that England would have to find another dumping ground for the hordes whose crimes in the main were of trying to stay alive at the risk of ruling classes' property. The monarchy was a fountain of corrupt 'strength' from which an artificial aristocracy and place-seekers piously imbibed, and from which they gained ever-increasing protection through harsher and more numerous laws against those who were presumptuous enough to menace property in order to preserve life.

James Fisher toiled at his modest, dignified calling in a London full of mild anarchy contrasted with chameleon-like changes in the appearance of the rule of law. London, with its cauldron of ideas had a population of one million. Industrialisation was not only producing exportable goods on a vastly greater scale than previously, but was manufacturing an economic elite which infiltrated the alleged nobility -- those who got there first -- which would quickly become indistinguishable from their traditional betters.

James Fisher rubbed shoulders with prospective explorers and probably unfashionable philosophers, as well as those who wished to equip themselves with the external evidences of erudition. And it is a Fisher tradition that among those who browsed in the family bookshops in London and Greenwich were Surgeon George Bass[1] and naval officer Matthew Flinders[2] who later together and individually carried out epic hydrographic exploits in the Australian region. It is understood that the Bass and Fisher families became linked by marriage.

The present history is concerned more with James Fisher than with his brothers. On June 16, 1789, James married Ann Carter, a cultured young woman, and on August 28, 1792, their first child

was born. The child, a son, was christened at St. Botolph's, Aldersgate, and named Frederick George James. He was the forerunner of a large brood of children. Of the five sons born to James and Ann Fisher, Samuel came in 1794, Robert Henry William in 1797, followed by George and Robert, there being a propensity in the parents to repeat given names in their various children. Robert Henry William was simply called 'Henry', and the younger Robert by his correct name to avoid confusion. The six daughters of James and Ann, in order of birth, were Betsey, Harriet, Marie (sometimes called Maria), Ellen, Jane and Nancy.[3]

The wearying succession of wars with France, the upheavals of industrial revolution and the changing nature of rural employment, made trading for the small shopkeeper and tradesman a train of difficulties not always easy to overcome. His labour had to be ceaseless, his profits small. The prestige of his calling and the exercise of his arts often had to suffice as his compensation for being in business.

But whilst the rewards of his industry might barely keep eleven children adequately fed on plain staple foods, they left nothing towards educating them in the most modest degree beyond the family hearth. And literacy was cherished in the Fisher home. James and Ann were able to give instruction to Frederick, ostensibly to fit him to join the family business in the future. They schooled him well. He acquired a high order of penmanship and ability to express himself more or less elegantly in the prevailing style. In addition he was trained in engraving, bookbinding, printing and bookselling. For all these undertakings he amassed knowledge of the raw materials which they called for.

Later on, Samuel followed Frederick along these lines of instruction. By reason of his seniority, if not also by his intelligence and aptitude, Frederick became assistant to his father; and his youth and early manhood no doubt were passed in diligent pursuit of the evasive farthing at every turn, as the struggle with France moved towards the climax of Waterloo.

Until his twenty-third year, history shows no record of Frederick Fisher's personal adventures where in the most lascivious age England has known, aristocratic vice, mob violence and fearsome poverty were woven into a daily tapestry. Britain's perils during the wars with France did not disturb the routine debauchery of the Court and the 'nobility' in whose interests the conflict ground on. Some benefit flowed to the working people from munition industries, but the accompanying tempo and depth of industrial change wrought social and economic upheavals which made a violent reaction seem inevitable. John Macarthur, who was to become the reputed father of the Australian wool-growing industry, while waiting in London upon an inquiry into his part in the deposition of Commander Bligh (of the Bounty) from his position as Governor of the colony of New South Wales, wrote to his wife, Elizabeth, on May 3, 1810:

> . . . The public mind is very far from being tranquil in this country. Many are of the opinion that a revolution is unavoidable and cannot be long protracted. In such a state of things it would be weak indeed to expect that the affairs of an insignificant colony should create much interest. No man thinks of another's safety when his own house is burning . . . [4]

When Macarthur wrote those words, Frederick Fisher had been only eighteen years old, dividing his time usefully between his father's workshop and the bookshop where the affluent might daily pause to ponder upon some of the period's recognised literary classics. Possibly, Frederick sensed the pulse of the nation in his encounters with the higher strata of London society. He may also have been stirred by contemporary standards of elegance, and awed by the ease of spending which the rich enjoyed demonstrating to the less fortunate. He could not fail to respect the sway of wealth, and he may well have imbibed from his contacts the easy manner of authority he was to show in later years. He was already endowed with a measure of charm from the close attention of parents whose moral integrity upheld them under hard conditions.

Trading for small concerns followed precarious trends and risks multiplied. Proprietors, unfit for any other occupation, may well have despaired at times of making ends meet. It was not a time for confidence, but of mounting danger where it had previously been possible to drudge along on the edge of penury. And the contagion of pessimism would engulf those around them, fearful of failure and the all too familiar picture of destitution.

The great conceit of national phlegmatism was a euphemism for apathy. The elite were managing a war, not so much for survival as for empire, trade; and were fuelling the conflict with the too numerous lower classes. For these everyday dangers were augmented by the fact that at the beginning of George III's reign more than a hundred and seventy offences were punishable with death, to the calendar of which the king, 'during whose reign 'the nation was humbled as it had not been for centuries'[5] and whose presence on the throne was regarded as'a national disaster',[6] added about thirty more. The hangmen were profitably overworked until it was thought necessary to hahg the victims in groups.

Insurrection up and down the country, riots and petty crime on occasion were answered with atrocities by the authorities, so that it was a continuing marvel that the French revolt was not re-enacted in Britain. These conditions held sway while the climax of Waterloo was building up. The nightmare possibility of invasion by Napoleon faded, but the future of those in the land who fought for the privilege of continued want and class oppression that made the nation connoisseurs of drama, was still unpredictable.

The downfall of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815 brought no visible benefits to the mass of people. Nevertheless they cheered, and sank cheering into the tormenting economic aftermath of the glories of victory. Large numbers of people who had been engaged in making munitions of war became redundant. The armies were dispersed, unprepared to swell the ocean of destitute unemployed. Authority was insensible of the suffering caused in the transfer from hostilities to 'peace', as only people who have never been civilised can be.

Empty bellies were impatient, and Wellington's victory aroused a brief hysteria of relief rather than an appreciation of Britannic might and virtue. The upkeep of virtue was quite beyond the means of the unemployed, who had no charities to draw upon.

For Frederick Fisher the year of Waterloo was momentous. Now aged twenty-three and unmarried, he was paying court to a girl named Betsey, of whose identity nothing more is known. Brother Samuel had married at eighteen and already had two children, Elizabeth Ann, aged two years, and few-months-old Samuel. The senior Samuel, although just of age, was set up in business as a bookbinder at 5 Orange Street, Bethnall Green. He evidently pinned his hopes upon a brightening of trade conditions as the nation settled down from the blood-letting, a modicum of luck, and the hint of an opening up of an age of dissemination of knowledge and an upsurge of popular writing. These might guarantee him a respectable living -- if he lived long enough to see the restive philosophers overthrow the past; and besides, he had a natural capacity for drudgery.

Frederick, on the other hand, was impatient, intolerant of a life crowded with worries, exacting obligations and risks, and conspicuously deficient in the rewards which his acquisitive and ambitious nature craved. With the example of upper class profligacy and immorality ever before him, family preference for personal restraints and rectitude lost its edge, at least for him. Neither did the constant reminders that British society was savagely organised against the presumption of the poor to nibble the surfeits of the rich, deter him from an escapade he was intelligent enough to know invited disaster. Frederick's nature was passionate.

It may be assumed that like so many others who would have shunned lawbreaking, otherwise, he succumbed to economic pressure. His knowledge of the engraving and printing crafts facilitated his course of wrong-doing. On July 5, 1815, he appeared before a magistrate, P.Neve, in the parish of St.Mary, Rotherhithe, charged on information by one Mary Fisher and several others, with

'feloniously uttering and putting away in payment, knowing it to be counterfeit /a/ note purporting to be a note of the Governor & Company of the Bank of England for Five Pounds knowing it to be counterfeit with intent to defraud the said Governor & Company'.[7]

This indiscretion had been perpetrated on May 3rd., and was evidence perhaps that he had employed his skill with less efficiency than was desirable in a responsible tradesman. However, what Fred. Fisher lacked in competence as to the quality of the counterfeit, he made up for in the ambitious scale of his operations. One Thomas James swore that Fisher had acted similarly in respect of a note for Two Pounds. Joseph Wheeler and John Mayes swore to having been victimised each with a note for One Pound. Mary Jenkins and John Turner testified they had been imposed upon with counterfeit notes, each for Two Pounds.

Frederick Fisher was committed for trial at the Surrey Summer Assizes, Croydon, where on Wednesday, July 26, he appeared before the Chief Justice, Edward, Lord Ellenborough and a justice, Sir Simon Le Blanc. The accused was tried on two indictments. The first, forwarded from magistrate Nevey stating that Fisher

> . . . with force and arms . . . feloniously, knowingly and wittingly and without lawful excuse /having/ in his possession and custody a certain forged and counterfeited Bank Note the tenour of which . . . is as followeth, that is to say+

T W O

B A N K OF E N G L A N D 1815

No. 7096 Promise to Pay Mr. Henry Hase No.7096

on Demand the Sum of TWO POUNDS

1815 Feb 27 LONDON Feb 27 1815

For the Governor & Company of the
BANK OF ENGLAND
J.Butler

+ Text of the Bank Note.

> with intent to defraud the Governor & Company of the Bank of England against the form of the Statute in such case made and provided against the peace of our said Lord the King his Crown and Dignity . . . and feloniously did dispose of and put away a certain forged and counterfeit Bank Note . . .[8]

The witnesses for the prosecution were Thomas Beverly Westwood, Charlotte James, Thomas James, J.Turner, Mary Smith, Mary Jenkins, Joseph Wheeler, John Lees and Mary Ann Mayes. Fisher pleaded guilty.

The second indictment traversed the circumstances of the first one, adding that the jurors

> . . . further present that the said Frederick George James Fisher heretofore, that is to say on the third day of May in the fifty-fifth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Third . . . feloniously did falsely make, forge and counterfeit and cause and procure to be falsely made forged and counterfeited and willingly act and assist in the false making forging and counterfeiting a certain Promissory Note . . .

The imputation of the high-flown legal rigmarole seems to be that Fisher was associated with others, especially as his name in the same proceedings is bracketed with those of Edward Savill, John Cannon, James Jones, Walter Scott and Robert Barnes in the Calendar of Prisoners, with the notation -

> Let them be transported beyond the seas the said Frederick George James Fisher and Edward Savill fourteen years each and the said John Cannon, James Jones, Walter Scott and Robert Barnes seven years, each to such place as His Majesty with the advice of his Privy Council shall think fit to declare and appoint . . .[9]

For the respectable and proud James and Ann Fisher, the affair was a calamity. The repercussions to the repute of their

business could only be grave, and punishing to the innocent. This, added to the discouraging trends of trading already manifest and soon to worsen, was to them too, a heavy sentence. James Fisher himself had now to bear increased responsibility and labour now that his right hand man was lost to him. Ann might deplore the pecuniary misfortune of Frederick's misadventure -- as she chose to express it -- but her personal loss would never lose its pain, for she was deeply devoted to her first child.

The full consequences of his folly seem to have been as bitterly repented by Frederick as they had been quickly realised. Not only was he now to be exiled from his affectionate family, but from Betsey, the girl he was in love with. Whether this girl was known to the Fisher family as yet, remains in doubt. For some months, at least, Frederick would be near at hand in some gaol or hulk, awaiting transportation to Port Jackson, the new penal colony. Rumours about the settlement were not always bad since the colony had been better secured after the famine-beset First and Second Fleets had tamed their alien terrain and penetrated the hinterland some scores of miles.

Frederick, introspective, insular, hypersensitive, would not fail to perceive what injury his actions had inflicted upon his parents and the younger children it was his duty to help feed and protect. But self-condemnation now availed nothing; and his natural reticence denied him the consolation of expression of his remorse.

In due course he was entered in the convict indents as an exportable commodity:

> Frederick George James Fisher; native place, London; calling, shopkeeper; age 23 years; height 5 feet $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches; complexion, pale; hair, brown; eyes, hazle. (SA)

The nature of the convict's offence was never divulged in the indents, as one of the rare instances of benignity in the British penal practice. As omission of this revealing fact was theoretically intended to spare the prisoner from any of the discriminations

against him which publication of his offence in the penal settlement might occasion, it was nullified by the unremitting hostility of officialdom itself and a large part of the 'free' population, towards convicts. In effect, the supposed shield gave only the appearance of magnanimity to laws that were instinct with native cruelty and a perfected form of national hypocrisy.+

For such a little consideration Frederick Fisher might have been grateful. After all, he had been guilty of crime against fellow citizens, and there could be no mitigation of the punishment in the light of the prevailing code. In a sense, he had escaped lightly, owing possibly to occasional reluctance of judges and jurors, notwithstanding the savagery of the times, to impose the extreme penalties laid down. Common as forgery was, it appears to have been visited with less severe penalties than those inflicted even upon children for stealing from the person. A handkerchief valued at upwards of one shilling, if stolen from the person brought sentence of death, and many children were hanged in Georgian England for the offence. The tender years of the culprits offered no appeal to mercy under the notions of justice in force.

Early in 1816, Fisher was shipped aboard the Atlas with a contingent of convicts destined for Port Jackson. With a mixture of 187 other felons he was herded between decks. Sleeping accommodation was provided by two rows of berths against the bulkhead, each berth being six feet square and intended to hold four men. Scuttles in the hull admitted air. Warmth when necessary, was provided by a stove set in the centre of the deck space, for which charcoal

+'Perhaps the most obvious but least recognised feature of English life in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was its love of aggression. Rarely has the world known a more aggressive society, or one in which passion was more openly or violently expressed.' -- Prof. J.H.Plumb in The First Four Georges (Fontana)

fuel was provided.

The daily food ration per man consisted of threequarters of a pound of biscuit and one meal of salt meat or pudding. To every convict was issued one pair of shoes, three shirts, two pairs of 'trowsers', a pillow and a blanket. Bibles were strategically placed in the forlorn hope that the convicts would benefit therefrom, not so as to emulate the morals of their betters, of course, but rather to acquire a humility more appropriate to their predestined place in the British scheme of things.

For considerable numbers of the cargo, the provisioning and accommodation were a godsend, attained only through crimes to which a good proportion of them had been forced by hunger and exposure. The benefits of crime, therefore, became delightfully obvious; so much so, that among the contingent were undoubtedly those who secured the trip to the antipodes by nicely-calculated infamy, and perhaps repeatedly. It was a way to security not to be found in the homeland, for as long as a man remained a prisoner (and unhung) the Crown had to victual him and lodge him somehow, a state of affairs disagreeable to some bureaucratic minds. A convicted man could not resent the obligation to perform a prescribed measure of labour for these guaranteed advantages.

There was also the adventure of acquiring knowledge, of experiencing a remote world unknown to so many law-abiding compatriots; and if reports were half true, the boon of a kinder climate than the one left behind, was contentedly anticipated. So those might reflect who had become realistic and hardened. Young transportees such as Fisher, distracted with emotions, caught in the full flight of romance and ambition, would see only intolerable exile. Each mile the Atlas traced with its wake across the globe would sharpen the pain of separation and heighten the burden of guilt.

The compulsory voyager inevitably would reach a realisation of some need to prepare for that problematic future in the new land, which a few old lags could illuminate out of their own contact.

Surgeon Patrick Hill, superintending the contingent and had made the journey previously in a similar capacity, a not unkindly man, then only 22, would certainly fill in the picture for any young hopefuls. History, indeed suggests that Surgeon Hill and Frederick Fisher became sufficiently known to each other aboard ship, so that in after years, when Hill had to search the pitiable remnants of a man, he would remember the slight figure of Frederick, the pale complexion and the hazle eyes, in trying to fathom the riddle of a face of whose features there remained 'none distinct'.

In a better favoured part of the ship were free men, travelling as passengers in quest of the promised land, weary of European corruption and strife, asking only peace in which to bring their lives to their full potential.

The [redacted] months of voyaging, whose long idleness made such welcome trifling diversions as the issue of anti-scorbutic lime juice and a speck of sugar to each person during the passage through the tropics, [redacted]. For the law was ever assiduous to keep its victims in the best of condition for the full savouring of their punishment. It was not economical, of course. The humdrum days, the cramped below-decks conditions along with often disagreeable company, wore down morale. It was a relief when the land of exile came into view and the little vessel anchored in Sydney Cove, Port Jackson.

From where the Atlas rode while preparations were finalised for the disembarkation of the few passengers and the mustering of the convicts, the latter would not lack interest in the rambling settlement ashore. Rude hutments vied with tolerable barracks on an eminence west of a small stream emptying into the Cove. The small township clustering around the stream, its vital water supply, was flanked by rocky promontories bearing a scatter of ramshackle and makeshift buildings. This was the perceptible domain of his lunatic majesty, George III, who, since he had addressed an oak tree in Windsor Great Park as his majesty the King of Prussia, had been superseded by George, Prince of Wales, as Prince Regent in 1810, in whom the depressing rottenness of the Hanoverian line was manifest as 'a bad son, a bad husband, a bad subject,

a bad monarch and a bad friend' [11] a creature 'without a single claim on the gratitude of his country or the respect of posterity'.[12]

This raw settlement, which struggled slightly westwards and faded into a vast hinterland of forest and mountains, gave birth to small outposts. In the bustle of the preparations for landing, and the trepidation of the new life about to open for all of them, it was enough to receive a confused image of a town into which no apparent order had yet arrived. A flash of scarlet showed wherever a soldier made his way; a European woman in stale fashion picked a careful course along the gritty track. Here and there could have been seen groups of aboriginals incongruously garbed in unwholesome rags, planted with timeless patience in vigil, under the impression that they had been promised something which was long in coming. About them moved drab-looking pariahs, the grey-clothed convicts, performing their various duties under the vigilant eyes of guards.

From the west, the winter wind, for all its relentless bleakness and almost imperceptible movement, offered a not unwelcome salutation to the newcomers long weary of the fetid 'tween decks confinement. It breathed something akin to liberty from the immensity of the mysterious continent over which it flowed.

In contrast with the ancient atmosphere of the land, the human clutter about the shore possessed an air of impermanence, indecision. But if Frederick Fisher's soul could sense an instantaneous kinship with the ages of the continent at which the nibbling exploits of the more hardened and domesticated exiles went on in seeming futility, the clamour of the ship's unloading commanded him to present reality.

The convicts were mustered and inspected on behalf of the Governor of the colony. Clerks methodically recorded each man's particulars of past employment and his special aptitudes. This procedure, as Frederick had been forewarned, was important. He could then have witnessed fellow prisoners laying false claim to familiarity with various trades, or suppressing the truth of

their real calling, as their knowledge of the colony's economic and developmental demands indicated the direction of their best interests.

After these formalities had been completed, the Governor himself would appear to address them, routinely asking if any man had complaint against his treatment. He would intone the Mother Country's solicitude for them in withholding from public knowledge in the colony, the nature of the crimes for which they had been transported. So might the exile better rehabilitate himself, unhaunted by local official awareness of his failings. Upon his future conduct, each man would be treated, and upon that basis only.

Lachlan Macquarie, the Governor, military officer about whom clung the humour, dourness and hardihood of his Scottish origins, was not one to discourage his new charges with the bitter truth that the most odious of British faults -- artificial class distinctions -- had already been securely planted in the colony by free settlers and officials; and that these were dedicated (in the main) to remorseless and untiring opposition to the notion that any convict, notwithstanding the settlement of his social debt and signal contribution to the colony's welfare, could ever again be acceptable to society -- <u>their</u> society. This unmentioned permanent disability carried with it, according to the warped outlook of its adherents, manifold economic disadvantages. Renovated citizenship was a lost cause.

Macquarie was direct and simple in his speech, too respectful of human dignity to yield to the primitive impulse upon which the British feudal tradition had been raised. He saw the penal settlement as an instinctive Christian would -- as primarily for the rehabilitation of rebels against social conditions in Britain. He was firm in his belief in the possibility and desirability for prisoners of the Crown to rise again to self-respect, to usefulness, and where possible, to prosperity.

The spoilers adhered to the principle of unrelieved suffering as an echo of the apocalyptic doctrines which suited their narrow

mentality, from the instant they conceived the possibilities of boundless profits in the new land. Virtue was crying out for reward.

Arrival of each new batch of convicts presented Governor Macquarie with problems, chief of which was that of accommodating them in any reasonable fashion. The rate at which the home government was exporting its felons had increased sharply since he had taken control following the rebellion against Bligh. There was pressing need for barracks and other detention buildings. Macquarie desired to secure for himself, as the government, more men from each shipment who could contribute skills for the erection of public buildings of permanent value. Roadworks needed to be undertaken and clerical assistance was greatly needed. Sawyers and carpenters were in demand, whilst stoneworkers and brickmakers were urgently necessary for the programme of building he envisaged.

Assignment of convicts to settlers had the merit of relieving the establishment of the responsibility for feeding and sheltering them, clothing them and in paying for their labour. This way of disposing of the unskilled was agreeable to the home authorities who never ceased to grumble about the cost of maintaining the gross liability known as Australia. All it could see in the country was its advantage in being many thousands of miles away.

Macquarie overcame the difficulty of housing his surplus convicts by allowing them to find billets for themselves in private residences about the town, from which they were summoned for duty at the tolling of a centrally-placed bell. This meant that convicts enjoyed a fair amount of freedom to perambulate the settlement after their fixed hours of toil, and at weekends to engage with private settlers for brief hours of work at whatever payment could be mutually agreed upon. The apprehensions of the pure and free settlers, as distinct from pardoned or ticket of leave convicts, could only be painful; but on the whole, as the benefits accruing to the

convicts willing to perform extra work constituted the only agony the superior citizenry were called upon to suffer, until government billeting would more agreeably segregate them, the situation was tolerable. For exiles whose fall had been due to inability to obtain employment, so that starvation in the land of the free had only one alternative -- 'force of arms', -- any opportunity to perform honest labour for honest wages seemed like the answer to a prayer.

These circumstances may have surprised, even pleased Frederick Fisher: they showed a way to secure himself financially. If he could curb his self-pity and ease somewhat the ache for his lost Betsey at every reminder that his banishment was for 14 incredible years, he might find heart to admit satisfaction.

Having completed his welcome to the Atlas, and making the acquaintance of the free settlers, Macquarie could return to his other pressing concerns, gratified that now at hand was more power to give substance to his dream of bringing this place of punishment at least some of the lineaments of beauty combined with usefulness.

He could, this tall, bony humanitarian, for a moment be curious as to whether William Howe,[13] who, from being an officer in the British army against Napoleon, could re-establish his life while he was still under forty years old, in this awesome land. Might he prove to be a supporter of a humane policy towards convicts? So many free settlers turned out to be irritable, disloyal, complaining antagonists.

For Frederick Fisher, had he been prescient, the hand of Destiny could have been seen in the meeting of Surgeon Patrick Hill, Lachlan Macquarie and William Howe, with whose lives his own was more closely woven than could be imagined just then.

NOTES

1. Surgeon George Bass, RN (b. 1771 - disappeared at sea, 1803) discoverer of Bass Strait, 1797-8; accompanied Matthew Flinders on the first circumnavigation of Tasmania, 1798.
2. Lieut. Matthew Flinders (1774-1814) famed commander of HMS Investigator in charting the Australian coastline. With Bass he made the first exploration of George's River from Botany Bay, in a tiny boat, Tom Thumb, and other daring journeys.
3. Constructed from private correspondence of Frederick Fisher and his relatives.
4. Australian Historical Records, Vol. VII.
5. J.H.Plumb in The First Four Georges.
6. Ibid.
7. Public Records Office, London.
8. Public Records Office, London.
9. Public Records Office, London. Bracketing of the names together may alternatively have merely indicated they were transportees, not necessarily associated with Fisher's offence.
10. (1794-1852). Appointed Assistant Surgeon at Liverpool (NSW) by Governor Macquarie in 1821. Accompanied Commissioner J.T.Bigge and Surveyor-General John Oxley to Lake Bathurst, 1820, when they were joined by Macquarie and proceeded to Lake George. Hill married a niece of Dr. Charles Throsby; received grants of large tracts of land, especially in the Wingello district. Died aged 58 and is interred Bong Bong cemetery, NSW.
11. Spencer Walpole.
12. Leigh Hunt, English poet and essayist.
13. William Howe (1777-1855) settled at Glenlee, south of Campbell Town to be and farmed 3,000 acres. Had large family and many assigned servants. He became a magistrate in 1818 and later was Superintendent of Police for Campbell Town and districts. He was a member of the incumbent's committee at St. Peter's Church for some time. Interred, Presbyterian cemetery, Campbell Town.

PART TWO

C H A P T E R T W O

The Paper Mill

When Fisher arrived at Port Jackson a year of his servitude had elapsed and no mark of official displeasure, so easily incurred, marked his record. It appears from the fact that there is no allusion in surviving documents to his having been assigned to a private employer, that his first year in the colony was spent in the service of the government, in which, no doubt, his clerical ability would have been put to advantage.

Under the prevailing conditions, which allowed industrious convicts to take gainful employment privately on Saturday afternoons, Fisher would have directed himself to improve his position thereby. He was capable of hard work and was methodical and conscientious, undismayed by unfamiliar tasks. His inclination was primarily towards intellectual pursuits, or where his special skills could have obtained exercise. Above all, he was a business man and an opportunist. Thus no opportunity to earn money would have been neglected merely because of preference. Acquaintance with penury in London had sown in him a keenness to amass the only recognisable material criteria of affluence and respectability. Of course, he was at a disadvantage in being at the bottom of the social scale of the colony; but he had faculties which took no heed, in the life of a virtually primitive settlement, of social distinctions -- they were keenness of intelligence, an air of mastery; a certain self-possession that went well with a native and conscious charm. He had the perception to know that where the guiding hand was the genial and ambitious Macquarie, adaptability and stamina could translate natural acumen into a capital asset.

All around him in Sydney town were to be seen examples of what convict industry could achieve, although these achievements were not known by vulgar ostentation. One of the most progressive and richest citizens, Simeon Lord, persona grata with the Governor to an extent which infuriated the anti-emancipists, had first been transported as a convict, to become merchant and shipowner.

P A G E S

79 -- 83 inclusive

DELETED

The wily Samuel Terry, who himself had been transported in his earlier years and who was destined to gain notoriety as the land's first presumptive millionaire, was piling up wealth by usury, merchandising and land ownership. Indeed, there was no section of the settlement's activities which did not exhibit the spectacle of natural enterprise and ability reaping substantial gains. Opportunity abounded where as yet the genius of the common man had not fallen under the blight of an entrenched 'nobility' perpetuating the pernicious concepts of fuedalism. On the muck-heap of the New South Wales convict settlement the seeds of talent could be fruitfully sown although the convicts were expected to spend their time suffering.

For about eighteen months after his arrival, Frederick scraped and pinched, accepting the frugal ration of the convict as sufficient. His regulation allowance of £10 annually he surely saved, adding thereto such earnings as otherwise came to him. To his industrious temperament, opportunities for work and profit gave savor to living. Better still, exile became bearable in so far as constant employment distracted his passionate mind from preoccupation with speculations about the well-being of his parents and Betsey.

It was too soon yet to have established secure or regular means of communication with them. One needed acquaintance with persons who, voyaging to England, and who were trustworthy, would convey precious letters. By the same token, Frederick's parents would be fortunate indeed to find someone who would be Sydney-bound and willing to carry to the exile a letter.

The anxiety and uncertainty of these passing months were best buried in toil. Many another might have squandered the meagre weekly allowance of a pierced Spanish dollar, then equivalent to 3s9d on a stint of luxury: rank tobacco or a few tots of fiery rum, for the

sake of forgetfulness or as a recompence for what had been lost. But Frederick Fisher seems not to have yielded to these dubious pleasures, rather cleaving to a strict regimen bordering upon privation. From folly he hoped to attain to material consequence and respectability.

In those days it was plain to see to what extent the greed and inhumanity of the ruling classes of Britain were responsible for the incidence of social crime. Few of those who had been transported to the colony where they found work to do and had assurance of the necessities of life ever again resorted to the type of offence for which they had been transported. With the terrible economic pressures relieved, they pursued honest and industrious lives and in many instances became eminent in commerce, culture and charity.

Macquarie followed a sound and humane course, it was admitted throughout the colony except among those in whom primitive rapacity ruled. In 1813, the Governor had felt constrained to inform the Secretary of State in London:

> . . . Free people should consider they are coming to a convict country, and if they are too proud or too delicate in their feelings to associate with the population of the country they should consider it in time and bend their course to some other country. Free settlers . . . sent out from England, are by far the most discontented persons in the country . . .

Emancipated convicts, Macquarie had found, made the best settlers in many instances. Consciousness of opportunity to rehabilitate himself at least materially, and possibly socially under such rule made Fisher determined to forego all personal comfort to gain that end. His first objective, he realized, must be to gain a greater measure of physical liberty than he enjoyed under government supervision. He could hardly hope to receive favorable consideration for an application of Ticket of Leave after so brief a servitude; nevertheless, he applied for that indulgence. He had heard of many surprising acts of encouragement towards convicts by Lachlan Macquarie.

Before 1817 came to its end, Frederick made the acquaintance of one George Duncan, who had been a paper-maker by trade in England. The stimulus under which Fisher conceived the idea of manufacturing paper for the colony must have been the serious scarcity of that commodity from time to time. Supplies had to be brought from the home country, and voluminous documentation of all official events in the settlement for the benefit of Whitehall made great demands upon available supplies. Consumption of paper often exceeded supply. At times the semi-official Sydney Gazette and the Australian, with circulations of a few hundred copies per issue were forced to resort to extraordinary measures to eke out their newsprint. Failure of a cargo to reach port was full of awkward possibilities. These, Fisher saw, were conditions favorable to the creation of a paper manufacturing industry, profit from which one hardly dared conjecture.

By background and training, Frederick Fisher was ideal to instigate such an undertaking. Generations of his family had been printers, engravers, booksellers and so on - not to say, literati - so that he understood the various qualities of paper and the purposes for which they were suitable. However, he was no practitioner in the actual making of paper, but his association with Duncan seems to have fired him with an ambition to add that particular skill to his repertoire. The dream possessed him; the pain of exile from those he loved lost its poignancy in the vision which outshone all the prospects of his former life. Then, he had to meekly follow the traditions of dead generations; he was the apprentice under the watchful eye of the master; for however benevolent his father had always been, strictness was sometimes irksome and conformity to craft traditions inclined to be stifling. Now came the promise which the economic conditions in London, the industrial stringency and change had frustrated.

Duncan's willingness to play his part in the scheme, his evident grasp of the mechanical aspects of production, as well as his professed accomplishment in the supreme art of the feat of paper-making, no doubt raised Fisher to a point of exultation. On Duncan's knowledge the enterprise would be founded; but for himself would be the tasks of organization and selling. Above all, were the practical

realities of financing the manufactory. Firstly, he was restricted by his being under government control, which negatived a need to move at will for the organization of the undertaking. The cost of launching the industry would be for him, formidable, since his own savings and earnings he shuddered to disperse, and Duncan, whatever his likely merits as a paper maker was improvident and quite without capital.

In the face of these major facts, Frederick could only sink from his first exaltation to doubt that the dream could be made true. The streak of native doggedness in him won the day. If there was to be a paper-making industry his little hoard would have to be risked. Even so, Duncan and Fisher could doubt together if those means would suffice to meet all contingencies. Not only would a commodious structure be required with bountiful supply of pure water for the processing, but mill stones, cog wheels, felts, frames, racks and a host of other gear would have to be purchased. Could they find a brass founder, to start with, competent to make the necessary wheels?

The magnitude of the gamble brought Frederick to minute consideration of the personal attributes of his proposed partner. Could Duncan be depended upon when the money had been committed, to carry the enterprise through the difficulties it must necessarily face in the early stages? Perhaps it was a question he found impossible to answer - one of the imponderables of life.

Close to the end of the year (1817), Fisher had surrendered to the magic of the paper-making prospect. He felt compelled to seize the opportunity of establishing a monopolistic enterprise which might solve all his material problems and confer distinction upon him as a member of society. He, at least had no illusions as to the great pecuniary struggle he would have to live with, but he was confident.

As though Destiny had a special interest in the affair, Fisher and Duncan came to hear almost immediately upon their mutual resolve, of the existence of a small disused "mill" on the outskirts of Sydney Town. This mill was to prove initially suitable for their purpose.

All paper of that era was handmade and required abundance of water for its manufacture, as indeed it does nowadays. Sydney itself was poorly supplied with streams, but a watercourse emerging from the

the sand hills adjacent to Botany Bay, and in an area newly opened up by a road over the ridge running from Sydney Town towards the South Head of Port Jackson, was sufficiently distant from the population centre to render it safe for industrial use. All this had been perceived already by the proprietor of the mill, who, however, had designed it for other, experimental purposes then in abeyance.

The method of making paper, Duncan would show Frederick, was actually simple in the hands of a skilled operative. The process called for reduction of waste cotton and linen rags to extreme fineness by grinding in water.[1] The crucial 'feat' as the trade called it, was that of skimming the solution in which the lint (particles of fibre) was suspended, so as to leave a layer of it in the gauze frame or mould employed. The layer of substance thus collected had to be evenly spread and calculated with regard to the class of paper to be made.

As the frame was lifted from the tank into which it had been dipped, the surplus water passed through the homogeneous deposit, after which the deposit was covered with a thick felt. A similar felt was placed on the exposed side after the frame was turned over, so that the lint formed a thin sheet between two thick felts. The whole was then placed in a press to remove all possible moisture. The resulting sheet of material when toughened, dried and glazed in the process, was the paper.

Frederick Fisher may have been attracted to the notion of paper manufacture as much by the simplicity of the equipment involved as by the desperate need in the colony of the product. Motive power had to be water wheel, which if not somehow available with the mill as an integral property, would make the enterprise prohibitively costly.

On George Duncan's estimate, backed by experience in the English industry, the mechanical parts - supplementary to the necessary water-wheel would cost in excess of £69. In fact, Frederick costed it in detail, reaching a total of £69.13.0, for cog wheel, pinion, three-stone engine (a very modest plant to be sure), moulds, felts, press, cedar planks and blocks, copper for feat tank and heating of size, and other items. It seems that the estimate at first exceeded Fisher's resources; but the march of events overshadowed any thought of dismissing

the plans as impracticable.

With the discovery that a small mill was in existence at a water source, they were deterred only by the possibility that they would be unable to obtain its use. In trepidation, Fisher and Duncan approached the owner, John Hutchinson about November, 1817, hard upon their first inspiration to make paper. Hutchinson was a man of some prominence, a convicted forger who had come to the colony in 1812. He had received sentence of death, but having a measure of renown in York as an amateur chemist and member of a scientific circle, escaped the gallows through the efforts of patrons.

Macquarie's partiality for men of ability and invention further favored Hutchinson, for he arrived at Port Jackson with commendations to the Governor. Macquarie thought best to second Hutchinson to ex-convict, the shrewd Simeon Lord, who had established the first woollen mill in the colony and was ever alert to explore new avenues of profit.

Lord gave Hutchinson a generous patronage and provided him with materials and instruments with which to experiment, as well as a laboratory. Simeon Lord soon discovered that Hutchinson's scientific pretensions outstripped his talents. However, the amateur chemist did produce a carding machine and a wire-drawing contraption. Thus, he returned something of use to the Manchester man even above the advantages gained from his production of dyestuffs compatible with cotton and wool, derived from the native casuarina stricta.

Hutchinson was a difficult personality by any standards - vain, envious, moody, arrogant and crafty. These failings were aggravated by his addiction to alcohol. His waning popularity with so choice a patron as Simeon Lord did not improve his general temper.

The site of Hutchinson's mill, where he probably ground a variety of substances for use in experiments, had been granted to the chemist by Macquarie, and was an asset of great value. In all likelihood, it was Fisher who directly negotiated with Hutchinson for use of the mill. Consciousness of the slenderness of his resources, and perhaps using that circumstance adroitly with Hutchinson, the outcome of the interview was that Fisher and Duncan received permission to use the

mill for six months - free of charge! At the end of that term the parties were to meet and determine a rental for the future occupancy.

The way was now open for the vital preliminaries in the great pioneering effort. It would be necessary to obtain permission from the government - through the magistracy - to embark upon the project, and then to have the requisite machinery built under Duncan's supervision. [redacted] As a first economy, the two men took up residence in the mill itself, known already as Bank Mill, and doubtless constructed of hewn timber, wattle and daub, on a stone foundation.

Personal comfort could hardly be expected, but for men who had lost acquaintance with it since their transportation - even if they had known it even previously - such a matter was of small concern in the thralldom of the new adventure. Frederick Fisher, perforce, had to respond to duty under the government each usual working day, and therefore could give only limited time to the important initial installation in preparation for the completion of the milling and associated plant. Duncan took charge of these activities. Frederick undoubtedly paid the tradesmen from his personal funds for each piece of equipment fashioned. It was necessary to victual Duncan, who, being free of government control could not carry on any other occupation and at the same time effectively engineer erection of the mill plant.

What work Fisher performed for the government has not been ascertained; but it is reasonable to suppose that as Macquarie always sought to place his charges in trades or crafts in which they were trained, it is likely that Fisher was given clerical work to do. The strain on his funds could have made him apprehensive, since it is on record that he sought and obtained some financial assistance from one John Walker, resident of Sydney Town, in consideration of which it was proposed Walker should become a partner with the others. To that end, the following proposed agreement was drawn up, possibly by Frederick himself:+

> Memorandum of Agreement entered into - - - - 1818 between Frederick Fisher of Bank Mill, near Botany, George Duncan of

+Redundant phrases have been omitted.

the same place and John Walker, of Sydney.
Whereas
[redacted] the abovenamed parties are about to commence the business of paper manufacturing at Bank Mill aforesaid. And it is agreed by and between the said parties that the business is to be carried on in the sole name of the said Frederick Fisher whose name alone is to appear in the Water Mark of the paper and that the said Fredk. Fisher is to pay and receive all monies for paper and other articles at the said mill, and that the said F.Fisher shall have sole charge and management, selling the paper, and that in consideration of the said F.Fisher having procured the Articles for making the machinery - paid the carpenter and other workmen - found provision during the time the machinery was making and rendered all other assistance in his power to promote the concern, it is further agreed . . . that the whole of the machinery (excepting the Water Wheel, Feat Mill and Sluices) used and prepared for Manufacturing of paper, shall be and remain the whole and sole property of the said F. Fisher (alone). And it is likewise agreed . . . that the said George Duncan is to have one half the neat /nett/ and clear profits of the business after paying the Expences of the Articles &c. used to make paper and attending the manufacture of paper in consideration for his work and instruction and planning of the machinery and it is further agreed that the said John Walker is to have one half of the said George Duncan's share of the business in consideration for provisions &c. furnished by the said Jno. Walker to . . . George Duncan and to secure the said J. Walker it is further agreed . . . that the Water Wheel, Feat Mill and Sluices are to be . . . the sole property of the said John Walker to the end that the said F.Fisher and J. Walker may be secured and to prevent the said George Duncan from quitting his co-partnership after they have been at the Expence of completing the Machinery &c.

And it is further agreed that each party shall give and devote the whole of their time knowledge and interest for the good

> of the business, and it is agreed that the said George Duncan shall instruct the said F. Fisher and John Walker in the art or mistery of making paper . . .

The agreement proceeds to treat more precisely the division of the prospective profits. Duncan and Walker are to receive one share each of the four shares; the third share is "to the man [unnamed] who is to be employed with George Duncan and who is likewise a paper manufacturer by trade for his knowledge and giving the whole of his time to promote the trade or business . . . the remaining quarter or fourth share is to be the property of the said F. Fisher."

The document then binds the parties to be diligent in discharging all debts and demands then and thereafter as may become due, and

> . . . it is agreed that all parties shall use all economy in living untill such said debts amounting to between £15 and £20 are paid and it is further agreed that at the expiration of three months from the date of this Instrument in writing, the said George Duncan's name is to appear in the water mark of the paper with the said F. Fisher's, and for the true performance of this agreement each bindeth himself to the others as witness our hand the day and year before written. (SA)

Whether or not George Duncan felt himself insufficiently rewarded by the terms, or was temperamentally unable to enter into an undertaking which portended a period of austerity perhaps of longer duration than he could endure, or for some now unfathomable reason on the part of any other of the participants to that point, the surviving document was neither dated nor signed. John Walker disappeared from the picture and in due course, Fisher and Duncan together formed the ensuing partnership.

It has to be conjectured that Walker would have been paid for what support he had already given, if indeed Fisher had not deemed it wiser to placate Duncan by liquidating his indebtedness to Walker for 'provisions'. If Fisher felt some financial strain from this adjustment, he seems to have overcome it.

The assent of the magistracy to the setting up of the manufactory

was obtained. Preparations moved apace during the early months of 1818. In March of that year, Fisher had the satisfaction of being granted Ticket of Leave. This meant he was now free to employ himself in any lawful way he chose - to enter commerce or other employment for which he had aptitude; but henceforward he would be responsible for his own food and lodging. Removal of restrictions upon his movements was a great advantage during the crucial stages of the paper project. But it also imposed additional strain upon his finances. All haste had to be made to get the manufacture of paper under way.

Sufficient progree had been made by mid-April for the following advertisement to appear in the Sydney Gazette of the 18th:

> PAPER MANUFACTORY
>
> Warren and Duncan respectfully beg leave to inform the public that having, by permission, erected a Paper Mill at a short distance East of the New Road to Botany Bay; they solicit the support of a Public who are always willing to aid exertion, and to promote the interest of the Colony by favouring its own especial Manufactures. The articles they will most stand in need of will be Linen and Cotton rags, for which a satisfactory price will be given; and it is hoped that quantities which have been hitherto thrown away as unserviceable, will be taken care of, to be applied to the Manufacture of a Paper which will be made fit for all purposes, and at as cheap a rate as in Great Britain.
>
> In the next Gazette places will be named whereat Rags will be received and paid for.

The name Warren was mentioned in the advertisement in error. In each of the three succeeding weekly issues of the Gazette it was replaced by that of Fisher and the townspeople were requested to dispose of their rags through Mr. Vickers at 29 Clarence Street and at Olivers', 22 Phillip Street, Sydney.

John Hutchinson who had himself nurtured hopes of achieving success as a manufacturer, and who later was credited on uncertain authority with having produced white paper, glass and soap in his many experiments, observed the partners' progress from his nearby dwelling, not without

some envy in concluding that the implication of Fisher and Duncan's advertisement was that the experimental stage had been passed successfully and the production phase was imminent.

With his envy was a tinge of malicious pleasure in the thought that in their success would lie - well, whatever benefit he might choose to squeeze from it. Water-driven mills were a rarity, he would have to remind himself, because streams were few. Fisher and his partner had no real tenure of his Bank Mill and their period of grace was almost at an end. Surely the terms of future occupancy should be substantial.

Hutchinson waited a few weeks and then wrote a letter.

N O T E

1. Pulping of wood for paper-making was as yet unknown. Many vegetable substances were tried as alternatives to the orthodox cotton and flax fibres reduced from discarded rags. One specimen of paper made from maize husks was exhibited as a curiosity in a Sydney newspaper office during the 1820s.