

THE LIFE AND WORK OF WILLIAM REDFERN

The Annual Post-Graduate Oration, delivered on April 29, 1953, in the Great Hall of the University of Sydney. This oration is delivered to commemorate those who have advanced the art and science of medicine in New South Wales.

By EDWARD FORD,

Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Professor of Preventive Medicine in the University of Sydney.

THE LIFE AND WORK OF WILLIAM REDFERN

By EDWARD FORD,

Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Professor of Preventive Medicine, University of Sydney.

WILLIAM REDFERN, one of our most distinguished Australian medical forebears, arrived on these shores, in trial and despair, over a century and a half ago. He came as a convict who suffered in turn the horror of a sentence of death, the misery of life imprisonment and exile, and a bitter residue of disdain and persecution.

Yet William Redfern rose from the depths to an honoured place in our history. He was a pioneer of Australian medicine, agriculture and husbandry, and a citizen who contributed greatly to the welfare of the early colony. He was the first medical practitioner to receive an Australian qualification, and our first teacher of medical students.

It is an honour to recall, in this Sixth Post-Graduate Oration, the work of William Redfern and the debt we owe to him. This is made possible by the records of his day, stored richly in the Mitchell Library, and by the biographical work of the late Dr. Norman Dunlop (1928a, b) and other historians.

THE ROYAL NAVY IN 1797.

William Redfern, a youth of nineteen years, was commissioned as surgeon's mate in the Royal Navy in 1797, one of the bleakest periods in its history. The four-year-old war with France had brought disillusionment, and the war-weary country was shaken by alarms and fears of invasion. The only bright news of the year was of the defeat, on February 14, 1797, of the Spanish fleet by Sir John Jervis at Cape St. Vincent. The nation was overjoyed at the fulfilment of its trust in the Navy, the mainstay of its security.

Then suddenly, on April 16, the crews of the Channel Fleet at Spithead, disaffected by their conditions of service, refused to put to sea until these were rectified. "The situation", wrote one of the Lords of the Admiralty, "forms the most awful crisis that these Kingdoms ever saw." Yet for years the Admiralty had disregarded both the pleas of the seamen and the advice of its best commanders that the efficiency of the fleets was lowered by the degrading treatment of the crews.

The mutiny of the Channel Fleet was conducted with a wisdom that was lacking both at Westminster and Whitehall. For a month the ships rode at anchor while their delegates negotiated with dignity and good sense. Though the most disliked of their officers had been put ashore, their discipline was perfect. At all times they signified their readiness to put to sea if the French Fleet emerged. But otherwise they would hold the ships till the worst of their grievances were satisfied and a general pardon was signed by the King himself. The mutiny was successful and the ships sailed on May 16 with the main aims of their crews achieved.

About this time mutiny spread to the North Sea Fleet, which gathered at the Nore. Though the seamen shared in the gains of the Spithead victory, they sought, by similar methods, redress for their special grievances.

The Nore mutiny was ill-fated by circumstance and leadership, as well as by the tardiness and obstinacy of the Admiralty—now aroused by its reverses at Spithead. The mutiny was conducted with the same good order and declared loyalty to the Crown, but to obtain provisions the mutineers blockaded merchant shipping, violence was used against some defaulting ships, and bloodshed occurred. Ashore there was a cry of revolution, and fear and annoyance were added to official mismanagement. It was determined that the mutiny was to be broken at all costs.

After a month, divided and short of provisions, the crews at the Nore surrendered. The prisons were overcrowded with the principal offenders, and for weeks the naval courts sat continuously.

Of the mutineers of the Nore Fleet, four hundred and twelve were tried by court martial. Fifty-nine were sentenced to death, twenty-nine of whom were finally executed. Of the crew of His Majesty's Ship *Standard*, which had been in the thick of the trouble, twenty-eight men were sent for trial. Their leader had shot himself

before his arrest. Among those tried was the youthful surgeon's first mate, William Redfern, who was one of the ten men of his ship's company to be condemned to death. He had served on the *Standard* for only a few months. Because of Redfern's youth, however, the death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

THE SEAMAN'S LIFE.

In order to estimate the crime of Redfern and his companions, it is necessary to consider the conditions they sought to alleviate. The records of the time show that these were outrageously brutal and a disgrace to the nation.

The sailors' environment was often comparable with the worst slums ashore. The quarters in which the large crews of the fighting ships were herded were damp, unlighted, badly ventilated, filthy and evil-smelling. There was neither hygiene, nor comfort, nor decency.

The usual sea rations were disgusting. The heavily salted meat, the poorest obtainable and largely gristle and bone, was for the most part inedible and practically without nutriment. Sometimes it was years old and of wooden hardness, so that it could be carved by sailors into polished boxes. At other times it was a shredded pulp which was bound round with yarn before cooking. The biscuits were issued even when they became a mixture of rottenness and weevils. Cheese, likely to be foul and maggoty, and rancid butter occasionally formed part of the ration.

Fresh vegetables were rarely issued, even to ships in port, and scurvy, which brought death and suffering to the fleets, was consequently frequent. Though James Lind, a surgeon of the Royal Navy, had indicated in his *Treatise on the Scurvy* (1753) both its treatment and prevention over forty years before, and had dedicated his masterpiece to Anson, the First Lord of the Admiralty, his advice was not yet implemented. The humane experiments of Captain James Cook (1776) for the maintenance of the health of seamen, for which he had been elected to the Fellowship of the Royal Society, had also passed unheeded.

The casked water, usually drawn from rivers, was often foul and in poor supply. The only generous issue was the half-pint of rum a day which formed the seaman's solace in his misery.

As a result of such conditions, ill-health and physical inefficiency were usual, chronic ulcers and sores widespread, wounds healed slowly, and frank deficiency diseases were common.

Misery extended from the fleets to the seamen's dependants. Pay had remained unchanged for over a century, though ashore wages had increased fourfold. The families of sailors frequently starved or were supported by the cold charity of their parishes. As well as this the men were paid with scandalous irregularity and sometimes ships were not paid off for years. A petition of the Nore mutineers stated that many in the fleet had served for the four years of the war without receiving a farthing.

Because of frequent desertions, leave was never given and the crews remained prisoners on their ships. Some had not seen their families for up to twelve years. A petition from two hundred seamen on the *Nymphe* said, "We are kept more like convicts than free-born Britons". Another from the *Repulse* said they were "treated worse than the dregs of the London streets".

The method of recruitment, with its disruption of family life, incensed the crews. Press-gangs seized men in the ports, often with trickery and violence, and forced them into the service. The dregs of the waterfront, jail-birds and wastrels, were crowded together in the ships with decent seamen.

A major grievance was the tyranny and brutality of certain officers, whose removal was demanded by the mutineers. Many were notorious throughout the fleets. James (1837) wrote that there were captains who "were the cruise long enough, would not leave a sailor with an unscarred back". A petition from the *Repulse* described conditions on the ship as "brutalizing, cruel and horrible".

By regulation, the summary flogging of offenders of up to a dozen strokes was allowed, although more serious punishment could be awarded only by court martial sentence. But twenty or thirty lashes were usual, one hundred common, and three hundred not rare. The punishment of flogging round the fleet, imposed for the most serious offences, caused almost certain death. An offender receiving this sentence was frequently allowed the merciful substitute of hanging. The mutineers did not object to flogging as a disciplinary measure, but to its monstrous abuse.

Reports of disgusting cruelty were common. One captain was reported to have stood gleefully by while his victim writhed in agony under the lash, and cried "By God, I'll show them who is captain. I'll see his backbone, by God!"—an exhibition that was often literally true. On one ship a sailor received six dozen lashes for spitting on a deck. On the *Hermione*, the captain, Pigot, threatened that the last man down from the yards would be flogged. Two seamen, hastening to avoid punishment, fell from the mast and broke their limbs. They were ordered to be thrown overboard. The captain and most of his officers were murdered that night. (Manwaring and Dobree, 1937.)

The best commanders, however, knew that it was necessary to temper discipline with humanity, and in consequence were loved and loyally served by their men. This contributed to the greatness of admirals like Howe, Duncan, Collingwood and Nelson, all of whom complained of the treatment of seamen.

On the ships the accommodation for the sick and wounded was insanitary and crowded, medical stores inadequate, and comforts usually absent. The casual nursing was pitiful, as no special sick-berth attendants were provided till 1833. Seamen received no pay at all when off duty—even for wounds received in action.

During battle the dimly-lit cockpits, where the surgeons and their mates worked amongst the groaning wounded, were infernos. Hopeless

cases were thrown overboard. For the injured there were the ever present sepsis, the misery of neglect, and payless convalescence.

In these circumstances, a good surgeon was the seaman's best friend. The general maladministration, however, inevitably allowed inexperience and incompetence to flourish. For instance, the crew of the *Minotaur* accused their surgeon of "inattention and ill-treatment of sick and wounded, and not being qualified, as we can judge of several accidents... and for not visiting the sick for two or three months together, and when visiting has been observed in liquor, and not serving the sick with such nourishments as is allowed by the Government, and for the want of which men have died on this ship. There as been men went down to him for relief when sick and he has told them that a flogging would do them most good".

The crew of another ship, at the Nore, found their surgeon guilty of lying in his cabin drunk for five weeks. For this he was tarred and feathered, and rowed round the fleet to the beating of a drum, before being thrown ashore.

The mastery of the seas was dearly paid for by the seamen. "All we get is honour and salt beef", wrote Nelson to his wife. And later: "I am entirely with the seamen in their first complaint. We are a neglected set, and when peace comes are shamefully neglected."

THE CRIME OF WILLIAM REDFERN.

It is necessary, having indicated the background of the Nore mutiny, to consider the nature of the crime of William Redfern and his shipmates. Were they the "monstrous and heinous insurgents", "the dastardly traitors" that they were termed in the official reports of their day?

The mutinies of 1797 arose directly from the conditions that then existed in the fleets. The desperate stand of the seamen was made only when all other approaches had failed. The ordinary citizen ashore was oblivious of their plight. Politician and high official were alike unmoved, both by the reports of the most efficient commanders or by the petitions of disaffected crews.

There was no question of the basic loyalty of the seamen or of their willingness to fight any enemy fleet that threatened. Four months after the Nore, at the fierce battle of Camperdown, and in the great sea-fights that followed, their gallantry and devotion were proven time after time. Nor is there question of the magnitude of the wrongs that drove them to mutiny. As Mariyat stated, "Doubtless there is a point at which endurance of oppression ceases to be a virtue, and rebellion can no longer be considered as a crime..."

The verdict of modern historians is that the mutinies of 1797 were justified, and that the men of the fleets "deserve to be regarded with honour in the history of the betterment of the Englishman's lot". Their aims were fulfilled, despite the grim aftermath, and there

commenced not only an amelioration of conditions at sea, but also a new era in the organization of the Royal Navy. (Manwaring and Dobree, 1937.)

The statement of Commissioner Bigge, years later, that Redfern was transported for “the most foul and unnatural conspiracy that ever disgraced the page of English history”, and that “altho’ his crime may be forgiven by Englishmen, it Never Can be forgotten by them ...” was not borne out by time.

Various writers have suggested that William Redfern was not deeply implicated in the mutiny of the Nore. But the fact that he was selected for trial from the thousands of seamen in the great fleet, and was one of the fifty-nine men condemned to death by a scrupulously fair court, indicates that he played no minor part.

In his report on the state of the colony of New South Wales (1823), Bigge stated that Redfern had told him that “his offence consisted in having verbally advised the leaders of the mutiny ‘to be more united among themselves’”. This has since been lightly interpreted as “making some injudicious remarks”, for which he was condemned.

But the history of the ill-fated mutiny shows that this was pertinent and dangerous advice. It was obviously given in the days of doubt and division when the mutineers’ hopes of success were dwindling, perhaps when some ships of the fleet were already slipping away. It is unthinkable that Redfern’s advice to the leaders was casual or incidental. For though his name does not appear on the list of ships’ delegates who directed the mutiny, he was condemned with a select band which included the acknowledged leaders.

During the taking of evidence at his inquiry, Commissioner Bigge, who was antagonistic to Redfern, said that it was reported to him that Redfern had been secretary to Parker, the leader of the Nore mutineers. This was vehemently denied by Redfern, who stated that he had written nothing connected with the mutiny and had never seen Parker, who was on another ship. (Bigge, Appendix, Vol. 124, p. 6186.) There appears no reason to doubt the truth of Redfern’s statement, which could be readily checked at the time.

William Redfern, from the evidence of the Nore, stands out as a brave man who was impatient of injustice and ready to support his convictions with his life. He was an adviser of his fellows and was moved by their sufferings. These were characters on which were based his subsequent greatness as a pioneer in New South Wales.

PRISON AND TRANSPORTATION.

After his conviction, William Redfern spent four years in an English prison. The reforms of John Howard were not yet completed and the overcrowded prisons were still places of degradation and pestilence.

Many of the Nore mutineers were cast into the Cold Baths Field Prison at Clerkenwell, or the Marshalsea Prison, and it was perhaps in

one of these that the young Redfern spent the succeeding years. The former prison was notorious even in those days, and Southey later regarded it as exceeding hell itself as a place of punishment.

Redfern was sent to New South Wales on the convict transport *Minorca*, which sailed from England on June 21, 1801. In the passenger list of the vessel, now in the Mitchell Library, his name is bracketed with thirteen others, labelled "Mutineers". The entry records that he was convicted on August 27, 1797, and that his sentence of transportation was for life. During the voyage he assisted the surgeon and kept the journal of treatment of the sick. He arrived at Port Jackson on December 14, 1801.

After a short time in Sydney, Redfern was sent to the convict settlement at Norfolk Island, which shared the hardships of the parent colony in New South Wales. He was set to work in the hospital, where he commenced duty as Assistant Surgeon in May, 1802. Redfern's work and character soon attracted the attention of the Lieutenant-Governor, Colonel Foveaux, and he was granted conditional emancipation at Norfolk Island the same year. This was followed by the granting of a free pardon on June 19, 1803, by Governor King, the third Governor of New South Wales.

Until 1808 Redfern remained as a free man in Norfolk Island, where he worked assiduously and added to his reputation as a doctor. The position of Assistant Surgeon, which he held there, was previously occupied by D'Arcy Wentworth, who later became Principal Colonial Surgeon and Redfern's senior officer at Sydney. The founder of our University, William Charles Wentworth, whose statue stands in this Great Hall, was his son and was born on the island.

Redfern left Norfolk Island for Sydney on May 15, 1808. At that time he held forty-eight acres of land, and possessed two houses and a share in a locally-built vessel. He sailed from Norfolk Island on the schooner *Estramina*, accompanied, according to the vessel's papers, by his wife and servant. Despite the favour in which he was held by the Lieutenant-Governor, the document is endorsed: "He is a dangerous character to Society". (Bigge, Appendix, Vol. 129, p. 152.)

Soon after his arrival in Sydney in 1808, Redfern was appointed acting Assistant Surgeon on the colonial medical staff. This was announced in a Government General Order in the Sydney Gazette of September 25, 1808. Colonel Foveaux, who appointed him, sought the confirmation of his position in a letter to Lord Castlereagh in the following terms:

The distress'd state of the Colony for medical aid and the expression of your Lordship's wish to provide such as could be obtained in this country has induced me to appoint Mr. William Redfern to act as Assistant Surgeon. As his skill and ability in his profession are unquestionable and his conduct has been such as to deserve particular approbation, I beg to solicit for his Confirmation. (Sydney, 6 September, 1808.)

Governor Lachlan Macquarie, who assumed office on January 1, 1810, soon recognized Redfern's ability. In his first official despatch

to Lord Castlereagh, he added his recommendations to those of Foveaux, and strongly urged the confirmation of Redfern's appointment. Mr. Redfern, he wrote, had worked "with great credit to himself and advantage to the public service". (Hist. Rec. N.S.W., VII, 306.) This appeal succeeded and Redfern was appointed Assistant Surgeon to the colony on July 26, 1811, at an annual salary of £136. 17. 6.

During these years Redfern was not forgotten by his relatives at home, for they assisted him with both funds and goods. (Bigge, Appendix.)

EARLY YEARS, EDUCATION AND MEDICAL TRAINING.

William Redfern was nineteen years old at the time of his trial at the Nore having been born in 1778. He possibly came from Wiltshire, though this is uncertain (Dunlop, 1920a). In view of the love he displayed for the land, it seems probable that he came of farming stock.

The details of Redfern's education are obscure. His letters, written in a small, legible hand, show that he had a greater mastery of English than the majority of medical graduates today. He wrote with clearness, sometimes vividly, and with occasional classical allusions. In some of his letters, especially those to his enemy, Commissioner Bigge, which were written in circumstances of rankling injustice, he combines bitter invective with powerful advocacy. His report on the hygiene of the convict ships, one of the most important Australian Public Health documents, could be used as a pattern for such writings.

Redfern studied for the medical profession, and in January, 1797, prior to receiving his commission as surgeon's mate in the Navy, passed the examination of the Company of Surgeons of London, the precursor of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. He did not receive the diploma of the Company, perhaps because of an early appointment to his ship.

His medical training was received in London and almost certainly consisted of some years of apprenticeship to a surgeon, during which he lived with his master and assisted him in his daily tasks. The training of Redfern's own apprentices, James Shears and Henry Cowper, was probably based on his own experience. It has been considered, on slight evidence, that Redfern possibly completed at least part of his medical education in Edinburgh (Dunlop, 1928a), but he stated plainly, in his evidence to Commissioner Bigge, that this was performed in London. (Bigge, Appendix, Vol. 124, 2487.)

When Redfern, freed by the Governor's pardon, was appointed to the medical service of the colony in 1808, he was unable to produce documentary evidence of his professional qualifications. By the arrangement of the Lieutenant-Governor, he therefore submitted himself for examination before a special tribunal which

consisted of Thomas Jamison, the Principal Surgeon, John Harris, Surgeon of the New South Wales Corps, and William Bohan, Assistant Surgeon to the Corps. He passed the test and was given a certificate, dated September 1, 1808, and signed by his examiners. They testified that they had examined him in “Medicine, Surgery and other necessary collateral branches of Medical Literature”, and that he was qualified to fill the position of assistant surgeon in any department of His Majesty’s Services. This was the first medical diploma issued in Australia.

Redfern’s examination established a system which persisted for many years. Subsequently all persons contemplating practice in the colony had to pass a similar test before the Board of Surgeons. The names of those who failed in the examination were posted in the *Sydney Gazette*, and they were forbidden to practice medicine in the colony. Redfern later became a member of the examining board.

Commissioner Bigge, during his Inquiry, attempted to belittle Redfern’s medical qualifications. This was bitterly resented by Redfern, who replied sharply to what he termed an “invidious attack”. The Commissioner suggested that a diploma of the Surgeons’ Company was inferior to that of the Royal College of Surgeons. He was advised by Redfern that the Company had been incorporated in the Royal College shortly after he passed its examination, and that the diplomas were therefore similar. Practically all naval surgeons qualified as he had done. He asked how many doctors in the colony had better qualifications. All his examiners in Sydney—Jamison, Harris and Bohan—were similarly qualified. “In those days”, he wrote, “it was not quite so fashionable to be dubbed an M.D. from St. Andrew’s, where I might for the customary fee have procured one for my horse...” (Bigge, Appendix, Vol. 124, 2505.)

REDFERN’S SERVICE AT THE HOSPITAL.

Upon his appointment as Assistant Surgeon in 1808, William Redfern commenced duty at the Hospital at Dawes Point. This was on the site of the first Australian hospital, erected in February, 1788, as one of the first projects of the new settlement. It was rebuilt in 1796 under the direction of Principal Surgeon William Balmain. Its position is now occupied by the police station at George Street North, and is marked by a commemorative tablet of the Royal Australian Historical Society.

In the hardship and isolation of the early years of the colony, the crowded Hospital often fulfilled a desperate function, caring for settlers and convicts, soldiers and sailors. Its patients lacked comforts and even necessities. At times some were without blankets, and their diet consisted of the ordinary salt rations. “More pitiable objects were never seen”, wrote the Principal Surgeon, John White, of its first patients.

The institution of Redfern's time is shown in a contemporary drawing as a collection of sturdy, white-walled buildings, of single storey, with narrow windows and high-pitched shingled roofs. Soldiers were accommodated in separate wards on the hill behind. The assistant surgeons lived in a brick cottage in the grounds. Though conditions had generally improved, the Hospital was grossly overcrowded and short of medical staff.

Three years before Redfern commenced duty at the Hospital, William Balmain had died in England, and Thomas Jamison had become Principal Surgeon of the colony. Redfern's arrival from Norfolk Island closely followed the upheaval resulting from the deposition of Governor Bligh by the New South Wales Corps and a section of disaffected citizens. Many of Redfern's new colleagues were involved in consequent disgrace, including Jamison, James Mileham, John Harris and D'Arcy Wentworth.

The building of a new general hospital, from which was to develop the present Sydney Hospital, was one of the first public works of Governor Lachlan Macquarie. This was recommended on March 8, 1810, in his first despatch to the Minister of the Colonies after he assumed office. He reported that the Hospital was then "in a most ruinous state and very unfit for the reception of the sick...of which there are on an average seldom less than seventy or eighty men, women and children".

Within two months, tenders were called for the construction of an imposing building on a ridge near Government House, where a new street, named after Governor Macquarie, was made. A grossly irregular tender was accepted by which its erection was made possible without drawing on the meagre funds of the Colonial Treasury. As payment for their work, the contractors were to have the right of importing 45,000 gallons of spirits, for disposal in the colony, with the promise that no other import permits would be issued for three years. To this was due the later nickname, "The Rum Hospital". The transaction was open to further grave criticism by the inclusion of the Acting Principal Surgeon, D'Arcy Wentworth, as one of the three contracting parties.

The new General Hospital was opened about the middle of 1816, with William Redfern in charge. He lived with other assistant surgeons in the southern wing, which still persists as the Housing Commission building. The Principal Surgeon, D'Arcy Wentworth, had his quarters in the northern wing, which now forms a part of Parliament House. Wentworth held many public offices and attended the wards only occasionally as consultant.

A lively account of the work of Redfern and his colleagues, in the early days of the Sydney Hospital, is preserved for us, with much else of interest on the life of the colony, in the bulky evidence of Mr. J. T. Bigge's Inquiry into the State of the Colony of New South Wales (1823). Apart from Bigge's printed report,

a hand-written transcript of the whole of the evidence of the Inquiry, and its supporting documents, are available in the Mitchell Library. In its pages of question and answer, the medical characters of the time appear and have their say. These include Redfern, Wentworth, Bland, Owen, Tattersall, Parmentier, Redfern's apprentice Cowper, hospital overseers, and convict clerks and dispensers. The documents vividly display the independent spirit of Redfern, his fearless opposition to injustice, and the high position he had achieved in the colony, as well as something of his daily work. The interesting account of the time in Dr. J. F. Watson's *History of the Sydney Hospital* (1911) is drawn from this material.

Redfern's only professional assistant at the Hospital was his apprentice, Henry Cowper, until the appointment of Assistant Surgeon R. W. Owen in 1817. The non-professional staff of overseer, clerk, matron, attendants and nurses were all convicts. They received no pay and were for the most part uninterested in their work and often badly behaved. The convict nurses followed the pre-Nightingale pattern of their free sisters in English hospitals, and were frequently drunken and dissolute. Though it fulfilled a most useful function, the Convict Hospital must often have been an unhappy place both for its patients and staff.

Redfern appeared in the Hospital each morning at eight o'clock or earlier and worked there till noon. He made a round of all patients, accompanied by his assistant, who acted as his dresser, and by the convict clerk to whom he dictated prescriptions and notes. He then visited the store-room, and personally issued the stores, for stealing was common and there was no member of his staff who could be trusted to do this satisfactorily.

Even his apprentice, Henry Cowper, was several times in trouble for supplying his friends from the store, and was once severely reprimanded for issuing stockings and other articles to a nurse, who was not regarded as a nice girl by his master. The stealing of drugs, which were usually in short supply and thus found a ready market in the town, was a constant worry. To check this, Redfern supervised the making of medicines in bulk, thus ensuring that all the ingredients were added. For instance, when it was time to replenish the stock of Epsom salts solution, the boiling water would be added in his presence, lest, as he said, the water and the salts went to different destinations.

His work at the store finished. Redfern visited the dispensary, where some fifty or sixty out-patients from the convict gangs would attend daily. They were treated by Cowper, or by an assistant surgeon when one was available. Out-patient convicts who appeared too ill to be sent back to work were usually placed in a house in the yard before admission to the wards, till it was shown that they were not malingering.

It was the duty of the assistants to attend all corporal punishment at the jail and the Hyde Park Barracks, to ensure that no man suffering from heart disease or rupture was flogged, and that serious injury was not caused. Such punishment frequently lasted up to two hours and hospital treatment was often required for its victims. The compulsory attendance of a member of the medical staff at these brutal displays was a source of discontent, and from time to time resignations, or charges of disobedience, arose from refusal to attend them.

Dysentery, which regularly occurred in brisk, summer epidemics, was the commonest and most fatal disease in the colony. During such outbreaks the Hospital was overcrowded, two extra rows of beds being placed down the centre of each ward. It is probable that typhoid fever also existed and accounted for many of the deaths ascribed to dysentery. As a result of the poor nursing and sanitary facilities available, misery reigned in the institution at such times. Rheumatism and "the venereal complaint" were common causes of hospital admissions, and diseases of the lungs, including pneumonia and phthisis, were rare. Measles and whooping-cough had not yet made their appearance. Smallpox, which had destroyed a large part of the aboriginal population in the early days of the settlement, had not again appeared. At times sufferers from scurvy were received from the convict transports, and typhus sufferers were also landed, though this disease was not established in the colony.

There is little record of the treatment provided, though purging, cupping and bleeding were freely used. The copious bleedings were very unpopular with the patients, and caused them to call the Hospital the Sydney slaughter-house. Henry Cowper in one day removed about four pints of blood, in two sessions, from a patient suffering from "brain fever". He was allowed to get up directly after the second operation, and died suddenly.

Apart from minor procedures, few surgical operations were performed during Redfern's time at the new Hospital. In the first three years the list consisted of only three amputations and one paracentesis.

The occupation of the new Hospital did not end the appalling conditions of the old institution. A special hospital diet was still lacking and all patients, whatever their ailments, received an uncooked ration of one pound of meat and one pound of flour a day. Some patients regularly sold their meat issue to the townspeople to purchase tea, sugar and other things, and on ration days the Hospital verandah was crowded with buyers. Neither milk nor vegetables were supplied to patients, though the latter were issued to scorbutic patients from the convict ships. Redfern improved this iniquitous system by arranging for the sale of the meat ration of special patients, including dysentery sufferers, and for the purchase of milk and other items.

To worsen this incredible situation there was no cook on the Hospital establishment, and although two kitchens were erected, one of these was occupied by the overseer, the other being used as a mortuary and store-room. The miserable patients consequently cooked their food on the ward fires. For special patients meals were often brought from Redfern's home.

The general conditions were also disgraceful, and inadequate sanitation and poor nursing were added to the rigors of convict discipline. At sunset the patients were locked in their wards by the overseer and left all night to their own devices, without nursing or other attention. The hygiene and behaviour, as well as the misery of the sick, can be imagined. Such conditions persisted throughout the weak administration of D'Arcy Wentworth.

REDFERN AS A PRIVATE PRACTITIONER.

In addition to his hospital and other official duties as Assistant Surgeon, Redfern conducted an extensive private practice, which was allowed under the terms of his appointment. Prior to 1815, when the first wholly private practice was established by William Bland, government doctors were responsible for the whole medical practice of the colony. William Bland, like Redfern, had been a naval surgeon and a convict. At Bombay he mortally wounded the purser of his ship in a duel with pistols, and was in consequence sentenced to transportation to New South Wales for six years. Upon his arrival he was placed in charge of the mental patients at Castle Hill. In 1815 he was pardoned and commenced practice in Sydney. Bland's long and useful life was spent in the colony, where he became, like his emancipist colleague, one of its most distinguished citizens and one of the most honoured names in Australian medicine.

Bland was later joined by a second private practitioner, Parmentier, which for a time eased the shortage of doctors in Sydney. Earlier, in the absence of a second assistant surgeon, Redfern was at times responsible for the whole of the hospital and private work of the town and the surrounding countryside.

Redfern was the most popular doctor in the settlement, and his services were widely sought by all classes, from the Governor and the leading families to the paupers and unfortunates he saw without fee. His practice was consequently the most extensive in the colony.

He was the family doctor to both Governor Bligh and Governor Macquarie, and attended the birth of Macquarie's son. Apart from their personal friendship with Redfern, the Macquaries had the greatest faith in his skill and never failed to testify to this, both privately and publicly. And when, his colonial days over, the great Governor was on his death-bed, his wife Elizabeth longed for the reliable and friendly presence of Redfern. (Bertie, 1930.)

Redfern also attended the family of John Macarthur, whose grateful tribute to him exists in a letter to his wife, following the successful treatment of his daughter Elizabeth. "...if I had as much power as I have inclination", he wrote, "Mr. Redfern's reward for the services he has rendered Elizabeth should be as great as the skill he has manifested in discovering and applying an efficacious remedy to her extraordinary disease". He added assurances of his help in obtaining the confirmation of Redfern's appointment, which was then a temporary one.

His professional skill was also highly regarded by his medical colleagues, by whom he was frequently consulted. He was esteemed by Bland as well as by D'Arcy Wentworth, the Principal Surgeon, who told Commissioner Bigge that were he dangerously ill, Redfern was the only man in the colony he would consult.

Redfern worked long and hard at his multifarious duties—in the Hospital till noon, visiting his town patients on foot, and frequently making long country journeys on horseback, which sometimes took up to two days. He had little rest and his reputation as the best obstetrician in the country doubtless added to this.

Redfern's bedside manner smacked of fighting ship and bush camp. His approach was brusque and direct, and the same to captain and convict. When he retired from practice the *Sydney Gazette* (September 6, 1826), in a farewell notice, said that "His manner...may not be so winning or seductive as might be wished, but then his experience (and) skill...make ample amends for any apparent absence of overflowing politeness". But Redfern had kindness and integrity, and he inspired confidence. Even those who disdained him as an ex-convict were forced to acknowledge his excellence as a doctor.

WILLIAM REDFERN AND HIS STUDENTS.

Following the practice of surgeons in Britain, Redfern, in 1813, undertook the training of a youthful apprentice, James Shears, who consequently became the first Australian medical student. Shears died a year later and his position was taken by Henry Cowper, the fourteen-year-old son of the first Archdeacon of Sydney. No fees were received by Redfern from his apprentices. (Bigge, Appendix, Vol. 124.)

Henry lived with his master as a member of his family and accompanied and assisted him at his work. As his experience grew he acted as dresser, dispensed medicines, and was left in charge of the hospital during Redfern's absence. For long periods he was Redfern's only professional helper.

Cowper was not without student indiscretions. At various times he was in trouble for his liberality with the hospital stores, for tearing the dispensary books, and for keeping evil company in the hospital

and the town. He was kept in order by his master, who often reprimanded him, and at times even beat him, to his discontent. On one occasion, when he carelessly failed to give a patient his medicine, Redfern was enraged and boxed his ear. This caused him to go home to tell his father, who wisely rebuked him for leaving his duty and sent him back.

Though Henry admitted his fault and said that Redfern never beat him but for his own good, this incident and similar others were later used as evidence of a violence of temper that rendered Redfern unfit to hold the office of magistrate. (Bigge, 1823, p. 87.)

After three years of apprenticeship, Henry Cowper was appointed Assistant at the Hospital, with a salary of £25 a year and rations. He was paid, oddly enough, from the Police and Orphans' Fund, a charity administered by the Principal Surgeon. He was the first holder of such a hospital position, and was consequently the forerunner of Australian resident medical officers. When he had served two years in this post, Redfern regarded him as a well-trained practitioner, and stated that he was far superior in professional attainment to his senior, the new Assistant Surgeon, who held a diploma of the Royal College of Surgeons.

WILLIAM REDFERN AS HYGIENE OFFICER.

Sea travel was extremely hazardous at the time of the early settlement at Port Jackson, and on long voyages the mortality, especially from scurvy and typhus (ship fever), was frequently high. Advances in marine hygiene were made in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and their value brilliantly proven by Captain James Cook, whose fame as a navigator is matched by that as a hygienist. But the humane lessons of James Cook were still largely neglected, both in vessels of the Royal Navy and on the convict transports.

Between 1795 and 1801, 385 convicts died on the voyage out of 3,833 embarked—a mortality rate of one in ten. In the next decade conditions improved, and fifty-two deaths occurred in a total of 2,398 who made the voyage—a loss of one in forty-six. (Ellis, 1947, p. 449.) This state of affairs was regarded as satisfactory by a Parliamentary Select Committee in 1812.

In 1814, however, three convict transports arrived in Sydney after voyages made disastrous by preventable diseases.

On the *Surry*, with two hundred convicts aboard, the typhus had raged in its classical environment of dirt and neglect. Fifty persons succumbed, including the captain, the two mates and the surgeon. It had been necessary to transfer a navigating officer from a vessel which was fortunately encountered. The ship was quarantined in Port Jackson, where, after rigorous hygiene measures, only one more person was infected.

On the *General Hewit*, according to the report of her surgeon, it was “dysentery combined with typhous fever”. Thirty-nine convicts

died of the many affected, and again there was evidence of flagrant neglect and incompetence. On the *Three Bees*, associated with a similar disregard of sanitary rules, “common ship fever” appeared, and was followed by scurvy. Seven men died of scurvy on the voyage and fifty-five were sent to hospital in Sydney in what was described as a “dreadful state”.

Apart from the avoidable death and suffering of such calamitous voyages, the resources of the colony were greatly strained by the influx of large numbers of sick people. Governor Macquarie was greatly concerned, and ordered Redfern to report to him on the probable causes of the epidemics and to recommend measures for preventing similar outbreaks.

Redfern’s lengthy report was addressed to the Governor on September 30, 1814. (Hist. Rec. Aust., Ser. I, VIII, 275.) Apart from its interest as an early Australian medical contribution, it provides us with important evidence in our estimation of his capacity as a doctor and administrator.

The report is plainly written, methodical and eminently practical. Its criticism is sharp and direct, and its advice unequivocal and authoritative. It displays its author as a good observer, a commonsense adviser, and a doctor well grounded in the preventive medicine of his day. It commences with a review of the conditions which pertained on the transports. In each instance there was a tale of ignorance or carelessness, and neglect of established rules.

Redfern then considers his evidence under five headings: clothing, diet, air, cleanliness and medical assistance, setting out the lessons plainly and leading logically to workable recommendations. (See Appendix.)

He based his hygiene practice on the current theory of the origin and spread of contagious diseases by effluvia, or miasmata, arising either in the body or the environment. He believed that a poison, giving rise to fever and illness, was generated when men were confined under crowded conditions, and was capable of widely spreading disease. This is set out in the report for the instruction of his superiors:

The bodies of men when closely confined in considerable numbers possess a power of generating a most subtle poison, the nature is not cognizable, but in its effects not only injurious and deleterious to the bodies of those by whom it is generated, but spreading baneful influence far and wide among all who come within the sphere of its action is fully evinced by many lamentable instances on record. The case of Mrs. Howitt and others who escaped from the Black Hole of Calcutta and were afterwards seized with the fever which was generated during their confinement and the seeds of which were carried with them is a proof of the first part of this position; the second will be equally certified by the relation of one of the most striking instances of the kind on record, which happened on the 11th May, 1750. At the Old Bailey the prisoners were kept for nearly a whole day in small, ill-ventilated and crowded apartments. Some of them laboured under jail fever; when they were brought into court the windows at the end of the hall opposite to the place where the judges sat were thrown open, the people on the left of the court on whom the wind blew were infected with fever, while those on the opposite side escaped. The Lord Chief Justice and the Recorder who sat on the Lord Mayor’s right hand escaped,

while the Lord Mayor and the rest of the Bench who sat at his left were seized with the distemper. Many of the Middlesex jury on the court died of it, while the London jury who sat opposite no injury.

But why should we go so far back and quote cases in proof of that of which we have got a melancholy instance before our eyes? In the transport *Surry* the poison was generated by the close confinement of the convicts in prison. It diffused through every part of the ship and spared none who came within the sphere of its action.

Despite the inadequacy of this concept of infectious disease, it provided efficient preventive measures. As Redfern put it:

...we possess, even on board ship, the means of preventing the generation and diffusion of contagion with as much certainty as anywhere else. To effect this object, all that is Necessary is Cleanliness and Ventilation.

This was the “Sanitary Idea”, the guiding principle of the pioneers of Public Health long before the rise of bacteriology. With it, from Chadwick to Miss Nightingale, they cleaned cities and hospitals and prisons.

The subject of ventilation is introduced with a note on air, “the great Pabulum of Life”. Redfern attributes the heavy mortality on convict ships mainly to its neglect, drawing heavily upon the theory of contagion in his appeal for its rectification. Proper ventilation alone could “prevent the generation of the subtle, malignant and indescribable poison” causing disease. The three ships under investigation had failed miserably in this.

Whether the failure arose from timidity, ignorance or inattention to their duty, this is certain, that had they intended to have favoured the propagation of the Contagion, and to have given full force to its Virulence, they could not have devised a more effective plan for their purpose.

He complains that in the report of the surgeon of the *Surry* the word “ventilation” was not mentioned, and concludes:

Here is a combination of circumstances favouring the generation of contagion, without one rationally directed effort to counteract it. To have escaped contagion under the circumstances would have been Miraculous. It is only to be wondered at that so few died.

This criticism is followed by practical advice on ventilation, fumigation, the cleaning of quarters, and the diet and care of the convict passengers.

Redfern maintained that most surgeons of convict ships were incompetent. They were either students from the lecture room, or men who had failed in their profession and had taken to drink.

If from the first class, they are without experience. And, however they may be fraught with the instructions conveyed in the various lectures they have Attended, or with the Contents of the Numerous Volumes they have read, they are but ill qualified to take charge of the health of two or three hundred men about to undertake a long Voyage, through various climates, and under particularly distressing circumstances, without a sense of conscious rectitude to support them, dissatisfied with the past, repining at the present, and apprehensive of the future...If from the second, it but too frequently happens that either from the cause or Consequence of their failure, they totally devote themselves to inebriety.

A further disadvantage was that the surgeons, employed by the shipowners, were under command of the captains,

...who, with few exceptions, have little claim to education, refined feeling, or even common decency, generally treat their Surgeons as they do their apprentices and men with rudeness and brutality... They avail themselves of every opportunity to insult and mortify their Surgeons, under this series of treatment, with no means of redress during a long Voyage, the Mind becomes paralysed, they view their situation with disgust... and soon become confirmed drunkards. Hence their duty is neglected, and the poor convicts become the unhappy Victims of the Captain's brutality and the Surgeon's Weakness, want of Skill, or drunkenness.

He states that only now and again was there an exception to this pattern of the surgeons of the convict transports.

Redfern's scheme for overcoming this scandalous state of affairs reformed the sea transport service. He recommended that "approved and skilful" doctors should be appointed by the Government and placed in immediate charge of convicts on every ship. They should act in the double capacity of surgeon and agent of the Government in charge of convicts, and should not be under command of either the captain or the shipowner. The posts should be filled by selected surgeons of the Royal Navy "who have been Accustomed to Sea practice, who know what is due to themselves as Men, and as Officers with full power to exercise their Judgment..." As the surgeon himself was liable to become a victim during an epidemic, and because at such times there was too much work for one person, he also recommended the appointment of assistant surgeons.

From this advice originated the surgeons-superintendent of convict and emigrant ships, whose authority and supervision removed the main abuses.

On October 1, 1814, the report was forwarded by Governor Macquarie to the Commissioners of the Transport Board, who at once adopted the major part of Redfern's advice. As a result a vast improvement was achieved in health and welfare on the convict ships and the voyage to Australia lost much of its terror. This achievement, however, was criticized by Macquarie's detractors, to whom nothing the Governor did was right. Owing to his interference (they maintained) the voyage to Australia was no longer dreaded by wrong-doers; it had ceased to be a punishment, and would therefore lead to increased crime!

In 1823 Commissioner Bigge reported that there had been considerable improvement since the calamitous voyages of 1814. Redfern's recommendations had been "amply justified by the diminished mortality on the voyages of convict ships from England to Australia". From one who still regarded him as a felon and who sought his humiliation, this was the highest praise.

Redfern's report on the convict ships is one of the major Australian contributions to Public Health.

In 1818 D'Arcy Wentworth resigned from the position of Principal Colonial Surgeon, to which he had succeeded Thomas Jamison in 1809, and Redfern had every expectation of promotion to the post. He had served with distinction for eighteen years and had been promised the position by Bathurst and Castlereagh. (Bigge. Appendix, Vol. 124, 6191.) Macquarie was especially anxious for Redfern to be appointed, and recommended him to the Home authorities in the following terms:

In succession to Mr. Wentworth as principal surgeon to the medical establishment of this territory, I beg most respectfully to recommend Mr. Assistant Surgeon William Redfern to be appointed Principal Surgeon, as in every respect perfectly competent and well qualified for executing the duties of that important office, being a man of very eminent talents and an excellent scholar and possessing universal knowledge. Mr. Redfern is at present only second assistant on the medical establishment, Mr. James Mileham being the first senior assistant. But this gentleman, though a very worthy good man, is very defective in medical knowledge; he is very old and very much affected in his eyesight which render him incompetent for the active and important duties of principal surgeon. These are my sole motives for passing over Mr. Mileham and recommending Mr. Redfern the next officer in succession to him, and these reasons, I trust, will have their due weight with your Lordship.

But to the bitter and lasting disappointment of Redfern and the anger of his friends in the colony, the official promises and precedents were broken, and James Bowman, a surgeon of the Royal Navy, was appointed as Principal Surgeon. This was almost certainly due to the influence at Whitehall of the powerful local faction who were opposed to the employment of ex-convicts in high colonial posts.

It was irksome to Redfern that the selection of James Bowman was due to his own magnificent work on the improvement of convict transport. For Bowman was the first surgeon-superintendent of a convict ship to come to Australia under Redfern's scheme, which doubtless brought him to notice.

Upon James Bowman's appointment, Redfern resigned his commission as Assistant Surgeon, signifying his "severe mortifying disappointment—that my most sanguine hopes and best prospects in life are thus utterly blasted". Never silent in the face of a wrong, he wrote to Bathurst expressing his disappointment and reminding him of his broken promise. He also accused Bowman and his friends of depriving him of the post by unfair means.

Bowman, a few days before taking up his duty as Principal Surgeon, inspected the Hospital during Redfern's absence. For this he was attacked in an angry letter, for ungentlemanly and unprofessional conduct, and requested not to repeat the intrusion until he had officially assumed his new post. (See Appendix.)

Redfern severed his connection with the medical service of the colony on October 14, 1819. A few days later, in a Government and General Order, Governor Macquarie publicly expressed his sincere regret at his retirement and testified to "his superior professional skill,

steady attention, and active zealous performance of the numerous important duties entrusted to him". (See Appendix.)

There appears no question that Redfern was unjustly treated and had reason for his disaffection.

REDFERN AS MAGISTRATE.

Upon his resignation from the medical service, Redfern applied to be made a justice of the peace for Airds, the district in which his country property was situated. Governor Macquarie, anxious to make some amends for his disappointment at losing the post of Principal Surgeon, went further in his approval, and appointed him a magistrate for the whole of the colony. In this he disregarded the advice of Deputy Judge-Advocate Wylde, and more seriously, the warnings of Commissioner Bigge, who was then in Sydney and whose recommendations he had been ordered to implement. Bigge strongly opposed the appointment of an ex-convict to the magistracy and urged Macquarie to defer action until approval was received from London. There was an acrimonious exchange of correspondence between the two, but the Governor, having promised the appointment to Redfern, refused to change his decision. (See Appendix.) Notice of Redfern's appointment appeared in the *Sydney Gazette* on November 13, 1819.

Bigge lost no time in communicating with the Secretary of State for the Colonies. He attacked Redfern's appointment on the grounds of personal unsuitability and indirectly, through this, the Governor and his emancipist policy. Redfern, he claimed, "displays an irritability, or rather a violence of temper, both towards his inferiors and superiors", which was dangerous in a magistrate. (Bigge, 1823, p. 87.)

As evidence of this he mentioned Henry Cowper's box on the ear, and an occasion when, angry at his convict servant, Redfern had thrown a log of wood and a boot-jack at him. This tender concern of the Commissioner reads strangely from one who found nothing wrong in the brutal lashings that were daily affairs, or the soul-killing hardships of the chain-gangs. As further evidence Bigge quoted the vehement and insulting letters of Redfern to Bowman, the new Principal Surgeon, and to the Commissioner himself, accusing him of injustice and bias. Bigge also accused Redfern of misappropriating hospital stores, since he had followed the practice, accepted in the service, of supplying private patients from the hospital dispensary.

The Commissioner admitted that Redfern was the most successful doctor in the colony, praised his agricultural methods and acclaimed his work in reforming the transport service. Nevertheless he was unsuitable for the magistracy.

The authorities in London accepted their Commissioner's recommendations and Governor Macquarie was ordered to remove Redfern from office. He had occupied the position for scarcely a

year. At one stroke an emancipist was humiliated, the sympathetic Governor reprimanded, and his policy of rehabilitating emancipists checked.

MACQUARIE'S FRIENDSHIP AND BIGGE'S ENMITY.

Redfern's personal attributes and his services as a doctor, which had appealed strongly to Colonel Foveaux on Norfolk Island, were appreciated by Governor Macquarie from his earliest days in the settlement. Redfern had his fullest support and there grew between the two a warm and enduring friendship.

Redfern was physician to the Governor's household and constantly visited Government House as a family friend. He also accompanied the Governor on many official visits to the outlying parts of his territory. In deed and word he showed devotion and loyalty to his great sponsor.

Macquarie's friendship with Redfern was maintained in the face of opposition from that part of local society which detested the rise of ex-convicts. The attitude of this faction is indicated in a speech by Robert Lowe to the Legislative Council as late as 1849, when he opposed the appointment of Redfern's emancipist colleague, William Bland, to the first Senate of this University. "It mattered not", he said, "whether the individual was steeped to the lips in crime, or innocent altogether." (*Sydney Morning Herald*, October 11, 1849.)

The appointment of Redfern as a magistrate also involved the Governor in serious trouble with the home authorities and bitter conflict with Commissioner Bigge. This jeopardized his official future and brought much disappointment in his later days.

John Thomas Bigge was appointed in 1818 as a Commissioner to inquire into the state of the colony. He arrived in Sydney the following year and until 1821 busily conducted his broad and detailed investigation into local conditions. He was invested with wide powers and Governor Macquarie was instructed to adopt any recommendations made by him. Failure to do so would be regarded as a heavy responsibility, for which the Governor's reasons must be furnished without delay.

The great divergence between the views of Macquarie and the home authorities made a clash with Bigge inevitable. The latter regarded New South Wales as a prison, where law-breakers were to be punished with a severity that would reform them and strike fear into others. Macquarie, from his experience, believed that reform was more effectively achieved by kindness and opportunity for good citizenship. "My principle is", he wrote, "that when once a man is free, his former state should no longer be remembered, or allowed to act against him; let him then feel himself eligible for any situation he has, by a term of upright conduct, proved himself worthy of filling." Not only should the ex-convict be rehabilitated,

but if he deserved it, he should be returned “to that rank in society which he had forfeited”. The aim of the Governor’s policy as expressed by him, was that “...this country should be made the home and a happy home to every emancipated convict who deserves it. Here according to my system, they feel themselves encouraged and protected, if they deserve it, and are on a footing of equality with the general population...” (Letter to Lord Sidmouth.)

Macquarie’s policy and action, based on these principles, were staunchly maintained, both in the face of the contrary ideas of the home government, and the opposition of the local faction to whom ex-convicts were outcasts. Like his great predecessor, Arthur Phillip, Macquarie saw beyond the grim penal settlement he governed to a flourishing and free colony, and he regarded the emancipists as necessary to its development. This, too, contravened the principles of his superiors, to whom colonial development was a secondary consideration.

Redfern was a provocative symbol of the Governor’s emancipist policy. He occupied a high place in the community, he was unashamed of his history, and was a forceful and uncompromising opponent. He consequently formed an obvious target for indirect attacks on Macquarie and his policy. Bigge, to further the aims of the home government, and perhaps to please the rabid anti-emancipists who formed his closest associates here, relentlessly sought his humiliation. Redfern’s dismissal from the magistracy and the associated reprimand of the Governor were the opening blows in the struggle between the two concepts.

Bigge found in Redfern a proud and inflexible opponent who fearlessly resisted what he considered to be biased and unjust in his proceedings. He said that Redfern was the only person in the colony to resist his authority. (Bigge, Appendix, Vol. 124, 6186.)

Redfern’s evidence for the Inquiry was taken at nine o’clock on a winter night, and the scene was marked by acrimony and hostility. Bigge adopted an overbearing and browbeating manner. He dragged up Redfern’s convict history, made charges regarding the hospital stores and threatened penalties. Redfern was bitterly roused. He refused to answer certain questions or to produce his books for examination. Only his respect for the King’s Commission, he said, prevented him from walking out.

In an angry letter Redfern accused the Commissioner of “hostility, severity and unfairness”. He criticized Bigge’s procedure, and held that pertinent evidence had been omitted from the record. He also complained of notice being taken of evidence, not under oath, from unreliable sources:

You have examined every person, however mean and contemptible, from whom you might have been able to extract any information injurious to my character... and indeed report says you even descended to question the common strumpets in the streets of Sydney respecting the character of Mr. Wentworth and myself. (Bigge, Appendix, Vol. 124, 6191.)

Redfern's hostility was further expressed in correspondence which was much resented by Bigge, and later, on his return to England by the preparation of an indictment against him for statements included in his Report. The incensed doctor also contemplated publishing a book, criticizing Bigge and his methods. This was indicated in a communication from Redfern to the English journal *John Bull*. His letter, containing an attack on Bigge, was described as "unrestrained, personal and unequivocal". It was not published, though its content was commented upon in the issue of August 25, 1822. It was realized, they said, that Bigge's inquiry "would not fail to make enemies of that class of the Colonial population to which Mr. Redfern unfortunately belongs". But they would deal fairly with Mr. Redfern's book when it appeared... Unfortunately, nothing further is known of the book or its manuscript. (Dunlop, 1928a.)

COMMUNITY LIFE.

William Redfern played a full part in the life of the growing community of Sydney. He became a leading citizen and was actively associated with many social, philanthropic and business activities. As well, he was a natural leader of the emancipist class.

The position of the emancipists greatly improved under the benign rule of Macquarie. Under his wise direction, after the withdrawal of the iniquitous New South Wales Corps, they played an increasing role in the development of the colony. But in 1817 their status as citizens received a severe blow when the King's Court Bench gave a decision that persons freed by the Governor's pardon were legally without power to maintain personal action at law, or to acquire, retain or transmit property. Till that time the Governor's pardon had been held to restore all the rights of citizenship in the same way as a pardon issued in London. In April, 1820, a decision given at Sydney under this ruling caused great apprehension to the many persons concerned.

A meeting was held on January 27, 1821, to discuss the situation. Redfern was elected chairman and Edward Eager secretary. It was determined that Redfern and Eager should be sent to England to present a petition to the King on behalf of those affected. For this purpose Redfern returned home after an absence of twenty years. The delegation achieved success and the position was rectified by a provision in the *New South Wales Act* of 1823.

Redfern took an active part in the work of the first Australian charitable institution, the Benevolent Society of New South Wales, from its commencement in 1813 until he retired from practice in 1824. The Society was formed to assist the numerous cases of distress for which other alleviation was not available. Until 1818 it was known as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and Benevolence. It was then reformed under its present name and has continued to flourish. Redfern was elected to its Committee in 1814. For many years he attended the sick of the Society as honorary medical officer

and also subscribed generously to its funds, he was also a member, of the Aborigines' School Committee, and other philanthropic bodies.

In 1817 the first Australian banking institution, the Bank of New South Wales, was established by a group of prominent citizens. Redfern was chosen as one of its first directors, together with two other medical men, D'Arcy Wentworth and John Harris. Within ten years of its foundation the affairs of the Bank reached a critical state and cessation of business was considered. The time was chosen by Robert Howe, the editor and printer of the *Sydney Gazette*, to publish a criticism of the direction of the Bank, in which Redfern was adversely mentioned. Howe had shown constant antagonism to Redfern as an emancipist and was responsible for a series of attacks on him. Redfern was incensed. Within a short time of the paper's appearance, he rode to Howe's home in Charlotte Place and, chasing him inside, laid upon him severely with his horsewhip. During his beating the printer retaliated with a sword-stick, which was broken, and an iron pot, and finally grappled with his assailant. Now the tide of battle turned. The whip was seized by Howe, who, reinforced by his wife with a broomstick, dealt severe punishment to the rapidly retreating doctor. The enemy beaten off, Howe rushed to the police station and laid a charge against him. (*The Monitor*, Nov. 26, 1827.) On January 21, 1828, the case came to court, where Redfern was defended by W. C. Wentworth. It was pleaded in defence Redfern was aggravated by a series of aspersions published by Howe. He was fined thirty shillings. (*The Australian*, Jan. 23, 1828.)

Shortly after, Redfern met Mrs. Howe in George Street apologized for the occurrence. But his regrets were ill-received, and Mrs. Howe attacked him with her umbrella, breaking it upon him before he could escape.

REDFERN'S AGRICULTURAL PURSUITS.

An interest in farming, which Redfern displayed during his early days at Norfolk Island, was maintained throughout his life and he earned a reputation as one of the best agriculturalists in the colony.

In 1816 he was granted seventy acres of land by Macquarie, for cultivation, on the outskirts of Sydney town. An adjoining farm of thirty acres, the property of his wife, was added to this on his marriage. This estate gave the name of Redfern to the suburb which afterwards developed in the area.

He later obtained another grant of 2,620 acres in the Airs district, which he called Campbell Fields in honour of Mrs. Macquarie. This was developed by what was termed "the improved system of English husbandry". Redfern used methods which were apparently in advance of his time and went to great trouble and expense to adapt these to local conditions. He imported English cattle and merino sheep, and during a visit to Madeira procured vines and engaged vinedressers to come to Australia to look after them. Campbell Fields

received special praise in Commissioner Bigge's report, in which it was named as being among the best developed properties in New South Wales.

Redfern also acquired large tracts at Bathurst, Cowra and the Port Phillip district, though Campbell Fields was his country home.

After his return from England in 1824 his farming pursuits occupied increasingly more of his time, and he gradually relinquished his medical practice in Macquarie Place. Redfern left it finally for his farm at Campbell Fields in 1826, two years before he sailed for England, never to return.

MARRIAGE AND DEATH.

According to the list of passengers embarked on the schooner *Estramina* on May 15, 1808, William Redfern was accompanied by his wife on his departure from Norfolk Island. (Norfolk Island Returns, Bigge's Appendix, Vol. 129, p. 152.) No further record of the first Mrs. Redfern is known.

In 1811 Redfern married Miss Sarah Wills, of Sydney, and lived a happy married life. His friend, Captain (afterwards Major) Henry Colden Antill, aide-de-camp to Governor Macquarie and his comrade in arms in India, married Mrs. Redfern's sister. A historical drama, *The Emancipist*, with Redfern as its central figure, written by his descendants, Major-General John Antill and his daughter, was published at Sydney in 1936.

Two sons were born to the Redferns—William Lachlan Macquarie Redfern in 1819, and Joseph Foveaux Redfern in 1823. Joseph died at the age of seven years, but his elder brother survived to live in Edinburgh and rear a family there.

In 1828 Redfern left Australia to take his son William to Edinburgh to be educated. He regarded Australia as his home and intended to return. But in July, 1833, at the age of fifty-five years, he died at Edinburgh. He was buried there at the New Calton Burying Ground.

In 1928 Dr. Archie Scot Skirving, F.R.C.S., of Edinburgh, was not able to find the exact site of his grave or any stone bearing his name. (Dunlop, 1928b.)

CONCLUSION.

It was not long ago, measured in the span of useful lives, that William Redfern rode by this University hill, to his scattered patients or to his nearby farm.

Dr. George Bennett, one of the greatest of Australian doctor-naturalists, and a member of our Faculty of Medicine, came to Sydney the year after Redfern left it, and Dr. Robert Scot Skirving, who is happily still with us, knew Bennett and consulted with him. So the overlapping lives of two of the most distinguished of our medical teachers take us to Redfern's days and the beginnings of Australian medicine.

The proud and rugged figure of William Redfern stands out in added importance as the years pass. He was rich in the attributes that men admire. He was stalwart in adversity, a helper of the weak, a spokesman for the oppressed, a great citizen, and a good doctor.

His name is perpetuated not only in part of the city he helped to build, but in the fabric of our history.

REFERENCES.

- ANTILL, J. M., and ANTILL-DE WARREN, R. (1936): *The Emancipist. An Historical Drama*. Sydney.
- BARTON, G. B. (1889): *History of New South Wales from the Records*, Volume 1. Sydney.
- BERTIE, C. H. (1930): "Governor Macquarie", *Roy. Aus. Hist. Soc., J. & Proc.*, 16, No. 1: 22.
- BIGGE, J. T. (1823): *Report of the Commissioner of Inquiry into the State of the Colony of New South Wales*. London.
- BIGGE, J. T.: Appendix to Report. Ms. transcript of evidence and documents. Mitchell Library.
- BROWN, K. M. (1951): "Surgeons in Exile at Botany Bay, 1770 to 1816". Annual Post-Graduate Oration, *Bull. Post-Grad. Comm. Med., Univ. Syd.*, 7, No. 1: 1.
- BURKE, P. (1876): *Celebrated Naval and Military Trials*. London.
- COOK, J. (1776): "A Method for Preserving the Health of the Crew of H.M.'s Ship the Resolution...", *Phil. Trans. R.S.*, 66: 402.
- DUNLOP, N. J. (1924): "Peeps into the Past: William Bland", *M. J. Australia*, 1: 471.
- (1928a): "William Redfern, the First Australian Medical Graduate, and His Times", *Roy. Aus. Hist. Soc., J. & Proc.*, 14, No. 2: 57. Published concurrently in *M. J. Australia*, 1: 294.
- (1928b): "William Redfern, the First Australian Medical Graduate. A Postscriptum", *Roy. Aus. Hist. Soc., J. & Proc.*, 14, No. 5: 299.
- ELLIS, M. H. (1947): *Lachlan Macquarie, His Life, Adventures and Times*. Sydney.
- HERBERT, D. (1875): *Great Historical Mutinies*. London.
- Historical Records of Australia, Series I*; Volumes 1, 6, 7, 8, 10.
- Historical Records of New South Wales*, Volumes 1, 6, 7.
- JAMES, W. (1837): *The Naval History of Great Britain*, Volume 2. London.
- MACKANESS, G. (1951): *The Life of Vice-Admiral William Bligh, R.N., F.R.S.* Revised Edition, Sydney.
- MANWARING, G. E., AND DOBREE, B. (1937): *The Floating Republic. An Account of the Mutinies at Spithead and The Nore in 1797*. Pelican Edition, London.
- MASEFIELD, J. (1905): *Sea Life in Nelson's Time*. London.
- WATSON, J. F. (1911): *History of the Sydney Hospital*. Sydney.
- WHITE, J. (1790): *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*. London.

APPENDIX.

The Royal Navy in 1797.

The following report from the surgeon of His Majesty's Ship *Sandwich*, one of the ships in the mutiny of 1797, to his commander, indicates conditions which commonly pertained at the time. It was written shortly before the outbreak of the mutiny. (Manwaring and Dobree, 1937.)

Sir,

The infection which has existed for some time in His Majesty's Ship *Sandwich* under your command having of late become more virulent, and resisted the methods that have been taken to check it, which is solely owing to the ship being so crowded, I beg leave to acquaint you that it is absolutely necessary to reduce the numbers of men already on board. Those men that are at first seized with the contagious fever, which has so alarmingly shown itself, are in general very dirty, almost naked, and in general without beds (having lost them either by their own indolence or the villainy of their companions)...

I feel myself peculiarly called upon to point out the little avail of prescribing medicines to unhappy sufferers, who are so bare of common necessaries and compelled to mix with the throng by laying on the decks. The number of sores, scalds, and other unavoidable accidents, which the awkward landsmen are liable to, often degenerate into bad ulcers, which cannot be readily cured on board, owing sometimes to their own bad habits, but oftener to the foul air they breathe between decks; besides being frequently trod upon in the night from their crowded state.

Sir, it is my professional opinion, that there is no effective remedy, but by considerably reducing the number that have been usually kept for months in the *Sandwich*, for sickness and contagion cannot be prevented by any physical means where fifteen or sixteen hundred men are confined in the small compass of a ship, many of whom are vitiated in their habits (as) well as filthy in their dispositions. The circumambient air is so impregnated with human effluvia that contagious fevers must inevitably be the consequence.

Untoward fortune has often placed me in situations where I could not practise my profession agreeable to its principles, or the feelings of my conscience, but I never was in a situation more replete with anxiety than the present as Surgeon of the *Sandwich*. I have only to add that the whole of the evil herein stated originated from the ship being crowded with supernumeraries, and those men permitted to remain such a length of time on board to the very great detriment (both physically and morally) of His Majesty's Service.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient and humble servant,

JOHN SNIPE.

Report on the Health of Transports, 1814.

The report ends with the following summary of the recommendations:

- (1) That more warm clothing be provided for the winter passage.
- (2) That more regard be directed towards personal cleanliness by facilitating the means of washing and cleaning their persons and dress.
- (3) That cold affusions be employed as largely as possible.
- (4) That the masters of transports be prohibited from purchasing or exchanging, unless by direct instructions from the Transport Board, any part of the rations of the convicts.
- (5) That a different distribution or rather an increase of the quantity of the convicts' wine be provided for.

- (6) That no reduction, unless under peculiar circumstances, of the regulated allowance of water be suffered.
- (7) That no part of their rations or articles of comfort be surreptitiously or fraudently withheld.
- (8) That in order to prevent the generation of contagion it is absolutely necessary that the convicts with their bedding should be admitted every day, when the weather will permit, on deck for a certain time; the longer the better.
- (9) That the prison hospital be regularly cleaned and fumigated with nitric or muriatic acid in a gaseous state; that the fumigation be as perfect and as general over the ship as possible; well airing and drying the prison before the convicts are sent below.
- (10) That for the better preservation of the health of the convicts more eligible medical attendants and on a different establishment be provided.
- (11) That an agent for transports be sent out in whose person might be combined the two offices of agent and principal medical officer, invested with powers to cause the necessary regulations to be carried into effect.

(Hist. Rec. Aust., Ser. 1, VIII, 292.)

Redfern Examined by Commissioner Bigge, 1820.

Redfern was called to give evidence at the inquiry “at nine o’clock at night, on June 26, 1820, in the depth of winter”. The following description of the interview is from one of Redfern’s bitter letters of comment to Bigge:

The appearance of the Room, the piles of books, the demeanour of yourself and secretary, the gravity of your countenance, the awful solemnity with which you made your opening speech, the threatenings you denounced, the dreadful charges you had exhibited against me, not forgetting the stale trick in imitation of Banquo’s ghost, forcibly impressed on my mind (the similarity of the scene to) the introduction of some unhappy victim clothed in his San Benito, with his own picture portrayed thereon surrounded by figures of flames and devils, to the inquisitorial hall at Madrid preparatory to the *auto-da-fe*... That memorable speech, conversation and questions,—so artfully calculated to wound and insult my feelings, have made too deep an impression on my mind ever to be forgotten. The quiver of your lip,—the curl of your nose,—the expression of your eye—in short your *tout ensemble*—revealed to me your very thoughts and intentions, as a mirror exhibits the person of him who stands before it. I clearly perceived your intention was to alarm and intimidate and in the event of failure in that object, to irritate me to a breach of good manners... Nothing, Sir, but the high respect I entertain for H.M.’s commission... could possibly have induced me to listen for a moment to such insulting language.

(Bigge, Appendix, Vol. 124, p. 6199.)

William Redfern to James Bowman.

On his failure to obtain the promised position of Principal Colonial Surgeon, Redfern accused Bowman, the new appointee, of using unfair influence to obtain the post. The following letter is one of a number in which Redfern showed his angry disappointment:

Mr. Redfern presents his compliments to Mr. Bowman, begging to state that he has learned with astonishment that he went round the Hospital yesterday, unattended by Mr. Wentworth, and asked a number of questions of Mr. Redfern’s apprentice, related to the treatment of Patients. Such conduct from one Gentleman towards another, he was about to say, but on reconsideration he will

decline the use of that term, lest it might be prostitution, he will however say from one Medical Man towards another— requires no comment. Mr. Redfern begs Mr. Bowman to be, in future, a little more delicate in his conduct Hospital patients are at present under Mr. Redfern's charge and he will not allow Mr. Bowman or any other person to visit his patients, save in the presence of Mr. Wentworth or himself.

Mr. Redfern begs further to observe that a few days, he trusts, will Mr. Bowman in the full Meridian of all the powers and honors of the situation to obtain which he has pursued so gentlemanlike and honorable a course. Till then, as Mr. Redfern cannot recognize Mr. Bowman, he begs he will not the intrusion of yesterday.

South Wing of the General Hospital, Wednesday morning, 29 September, 1819.

(Bigge, Appendix, Vol. 124, 2929.)

Governor Macquarie on Redfern's Resignation from the Medical Service.

Extract from Government and General Order, October 23, 1819:

William Redfern Esquire, Assistant Surgeon on the Civil Medical Establishment of this Territory having tendered his resignation...

His Excellency the Governor in receiving the Resignation of Mr. Redfern, cannot help expressing his sincere regret that any circumstance should have occurred to induce him to retire from the Medical Service of that Colony, to which he has been so great and valuable an acquisition, and has to express that he feels particular pleasure in thus publicly bearing testimony, at once to his superior professional skill, steady attention, and active zealous performance of the numerous important duties entrusted to him in different departments of the Civil Medical Establishment in this Territory, and its dependencies.

With these impressions and the strongest sense of his superior talents and merits, His Excellency desires Mr. Redfern to accept the assurance that he will carry into his retirement His Excellency's best wishes for his future happiness and prosperity.

J. T. CAMPBELL, Secretary.

(Bigge, Appendix, p. 7008.)

Redfern's Dismissal from the Magistracy.

The following letter, from Governor Macquarie to Commissioner Bigge, was dated at Government House, Sydney, on November 6, 1819. The original is in the Mitchell Library. (Reprinted in *The Medical Journal of Australia* (1952), Volume 1, page 457.)

Sir,

...You say you consider the appointment of Mr. Redfern to the magistracy as replete with Danger to the Community & with Mischief to Myself.

Where the Danger Can Arise from Availing Myself of the Services of a Man of the first Talents in this Country, whose Conduct as a Public Servant of the Crown Since his Arrival in it, has been irreproachable, is to me incomprehensible, in as much as it relates to himself personally, and to his Qualifications for the important Trust of a magistrate.

In regard to Mr. Redfern's having been transported to this Colony, as I have availed Myself of the Services of Persons in a Similar Predicament for Nine Years past, without any Evil having resulted but on the Contrary Much Good, I am at a loss to discover the Grounds on which you have formed so decided an Opinion. Had you expressed a Wish to Me even thus early in the progress of your Investigation and before this Subject had been brought before

you in any Official Way, that I should suspend this System for the present and that this Communication had been made to Me Antecedent to My Promise to Mr. Redfern, I should most assuredly have deferred Nominating him to the Magistracy, until this important point to the future Prosperity of this Colony had been further discussed at Home.

I am willing to make every reasonable Sacrifice of My own Feelings to the Wishes and Views of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent and His Majesty's Ministers: but I feel that I should be no longer worthy of the Situation I hold in this Colony, were I to make so Complete an Abandonment of my Authority, Honor and Principle as to Cancel an Appointment after the Precept had been made out and actually signed by Me in Conformity to a Promise made before Your Arrival in this Colony.

I have hitherto omitted to lead Your Attention to the Consideration of the feelings of the Man, thus singled out as it would Seem for Persecution! a man who for the last Seventeen Years has been actively employed for the Benefit of his Fellow Creatures: who has during that time been One of the Most Loyal and Useful Subjects to the Government in this Country: a Man, who, while the persons, who have been principally instrumental in Exciting the Bias felt by You and Others against him and All those in his Unfortunate State, were treating His Majesty's Representative with every Indignity and Violence Short of that of taking his life, Exerted himself in preserving an Existence most dear to him, that of his own Daughter, the Governor's only Companion in that Hour of Horror & Misery.

...You already know that above nine-tenths of the Population of this Colony are or have been Convicts or the children of Convicts. You have Yet perhaps to learn that these are the people who have Quietly Submitted to the Laws and Regulations of the Colony altho' informed by the Free Settlers that they were Illegal! these are the Men who have tilled the Ground, who have built Houses and Ships, who have made wonderful efforts, considering the Disadvantages under which they have acted in Agriculture, in maritime Speculations and Manufactures: these are the men, who, placed in the balance as Character, both moral and political (at least since their arrival here) in the opposite Scale to those Free Settlers (who struggle for their Depression) whom you will find to preponderate.

I have, &c.,

L. MACQUARIE.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

My grateful acknowledgements are due to the Mitchell Library, Sydney. To the members of the Library staff, and especially Mr. L. Walters, I am greatly indebted for their help and many courtesies.