In Australia, it’s sort of a path dependency […] This materialistic, statistical kind of understanding of the world. Coghlan developed it, and he was, you know, the great founder of the statistical business.

Christopher Lloyd, June 2019

Sir Timothy Coghlan is a rare example of a celebrity economic historian. Born in Sydney to Irish working-class parents, he attended Sydney Grammar School on a scholarship. He tried his hand at wool-broking and teaching before joining the New South Wales Department of Public Works as a cadet in 1873. Although very successful as an engineer, Coghlan was more passionate about mathematics and statistics, and in 1886 was appointed government statistician. His work sought to understand the colony through quantitative material, elucidating influential theories on the link between economic growth and population in the Australian context. By expanding the work of his office, acting as a consultant on a range of government issues and developing his professional networks, Coghlan earned an enviable national and international reputation as an expert in national income accounting; the first in the world to record and examine the economy’s production, distribution and disposition.

A member of the Royal Statistical Society from the 1890s, in 1914 he was

1 Lloyd interview with author. Unless otherwise specified, interviews cited are those conducted by the author: see Appendix for details.
knighted. From his vantage in London, Coghlan’s earlier statistical efforts culminated in *Labour and Industry in Australia*, which, in 2,449 pages, provides a ‘pullulating Victorian panorama in words and numbers that seemingly capture every person, law, and landmark’. With regards to the accuracy of the material, he argued ‘I am my own authority’.

Australian economic history prior to World War II is usually a footnote. Coghlan looms large, as do E. O. G. Shann and Brian Fitzpatrick. The lack of formal professional structures has led most to discount this era as simply the origin story before the ‘real’ work began in the post–World War II decades. However, this time in the field’s history has an important story to tell, with this chapter focusing on interdisciplinary research conducted in the absence of formal professional structures. The field’s main contributions at this time were produced through formal and informal partnership between governments, universities and the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA), allowing scholars to move between different modes of knowledge production and between disciplines. Although the field lacked strong communicating infrastructures and collective action, the result was a diverse corpus of scholarship with economic history engaged in the interdisciplinary space.

**Colonial writings**

Some have argued that ‘the Australian Commonwealth came into existence in 1901 without an economic history’. Reflecting Walter Scott’s famous assertion of the same, the general understanding has been that an ‘Australian’ economic history tradition waited on the development of a national consciousness. Colonial writers may beg to differ. As Ben Huf

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7 Coleman, ‘Historiography’.
has examined, a literary tradition developed throughout the nineteenth century in which the nature, history and future of Australian economic matters were broadcast to the public. Adopting eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century political economy, administrator and policymakers in the colonies began to write about Australian life through distinctly economic categories such as ‘capitalist’ and ‘labourer’. Colonial writing reflected this transition, with authors gradually defining the ‘economic’ as a sphere of interest throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, and deploying comprehensive evidence to demonstrate the progress of economic matters in the colonies. While there was very little aggregated quantitative material, historical arguments regarding agriculture, exports, import of capital and immigration were developed through smaller samples of data, as well as anecdotes and observation. Authors wrote with political agendas, using historical events to convince colonial masters to boost immigration, invest in agriculture and encourage free trade. These writers began to conceive of economic matters, and their history, as important to policymakers and the public.

Quantitative, data-driven economic history began primarily through government work rather than universities. After writers defined and understood economic matters as separate categories in the colonial project, statistics were then used to provide evidence to govern these categories. Colonial Blue Books were used to report on each colony from 1822, and the first census was conducted shortly after in 1828. The British Government used number-gathering as a way to ensure fiscal responsibility, and as a technique of surveillance and control throughout many of their colonies. Statistics in Britain and other settler colonies had risen to prominence as – depending on who you asked – a political tool or a scientific form of ‘fact’. By the mid to late nineteenth century – at a time when sandstone universities were established as small, Scottish-style teaching institutions – government statisticians had the capacity to conduct extensive primary research into the nature and progress of the economy. Government statisticians, including Coghlan, William Archer, Henry Hayter, George Knibbs, Robert Johnston, James Sutcliffe and Stanley Carver were experts in the management of the colonies, and cultivated an

10 Huf, ‘Making Things Economic’.
international reputation for quality and objective statistics. Others then used these statistics to develop political arguments regarding their view of Australia’s destiny. Although not historians themselves (they were too engrossed in ‘progress’ to turn their lens backwards), this generation of ‘statistician-participant-observers’ developed the quantitative foundation on which historical analysis was built.

**Figure 1: Timothy Augustine Coghlan, early twentieth century**

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12 Meredith and Oxley, ‘Australian Economic History’.
14 Coleman, ‘Historiography’.
Upon his retirement, Coghlan published *Labour and Industry*, a historical chronicle based on his work as the New South Wales government statistician. Coghlan was a social scientist, free of university structures and moving between disciplines such as political economy, sociology, economics and demography with ease. *Labour and Industry* is encyclopaedic in nature, narrating seemingly endless data on different aspects of the continent. His aim was to be a ‘just reasoner’, enumerating a broad range of ‘progress’ indicators and aiming to let the ‘facts’ speak for themselves. However, even under the guise of objectivity, the collection and description of certain material was an ontological choice that betrayed his perception of what economic history should be: numbers were good; theoretical frameworks to explain the numbers were not. Despite his diverse career, Coghlan is primarily remembered as a statistician and economist, contributing to an understanding of Australia’s industrial structure, capital–output ratio and per capita income. Historians have acknowledged Coghlan’s role in Left and Labor intellectual movements, while a more critical strain has targeted his construction of statistics. For economic historians, Coghlan pioneered a sustained, long-run statistical account of Australia’s material development, providing the quantitative infrastructure for future research. *Labour and Industry* maintained its status as one of the ‘standard’ Australian economic history texts throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

**Interwar**

In the interwar period, a diverse set of institutional structures provided the basis for a small community of economic history scholars. Government agencies, particularly statisticians, continued as a hub for the collection and analysis of quantitative material. Universities expanded in size and

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15 Hicks, ‘Coghlan’.
17 Coghlan, *Labour and Industry*.
18 Lloyd, ‘Analytical Frameworks’.
20 See the discussion of feminist scholarship in Chapter 4.
function from the end of World War I, with newly admitted women and returned servicemen expanding the student base and providing employment for many of those working on economic history. The WEA then worked alongside universities to provide practical undergraduate education in a range of subjects, including economic history. These relatively good employment prospects provided stability for some scholars, with cooperation between these three institutions developing the field’s diverse identity.

Shann and Fitzpatrick were both prominent university-based economic historians. Shann was born into a middle-class family in Hobart, who later moved to Melbourne. In 1904 he completed a Bachelor of Arts at Queen’s College, University of Melbourne, graduating with first-class honours in both history and political economy. A ‘smallish, neatly dressed man, who wore round, gold-rimmed spectacles’, Shann held positions in philosophy, politics, history and economics throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century. He settled in Perth in 1912 as the foundation professor of history and economics at the University of Western Australia. During his time in Perth, Shann penned *An Economic History of Australia*, adopting Coghlan’s broad periodisation of Australia’s material progress in the first thorough history of economic events, actions and processes. His central theme was the struggle of good, enterprising men against the controlling forces of government, seen through analysis of the ‘failure’ of land settlement schemes, the inefficiencies of tariffs, the importance of squatters and the wool industry, and the triumph of the exchange economy over the communism of government food production in the early days of Botany Bay. He has been remembered as ‘quick in movement and temperamental in reaction’, characteristics that were reflected in his written work through dramatic generalisations, ‘vivid’, ‘lively’ prose and analyses that included many ‘tasty morsel[s]’ alongside

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2. EARLY ECONOMIC HISTORY IN AUSTRALIA

‘more solid fare’. Shann’s work improved the reach of economic history, and remained on undergraduate reading lists well into the 1960s. On the back of this success, Shann accepted the Chair of Economics at the University of Adelaide in 1933. The appointment was cut short with his tragic death on campus on the evening of 23 May 1935. He fell from an office window – an event that the coroner decided was suicide, but which remains unresolved.

Fitzpatrick, the younger by 20 years, was the other side of Shann’s coin. He was born in Warrnambool, Victoria, before his family moved to suburban Melbourne. Like Shann, he won a scholarship to attend the University of Melbourne, earning his Bachelor of Arts in 1925. Fitzpatrick was an active Labor member from his time at the University of Melbourne, founding both the student newspaper *Farrago* and the Melbourne University Labor Club. He committed to left-leaning writing and politics for the rest of his life, working for a variety of newspapers until he chose to focus on historical research from the late 1930s. Although Fitzpatrick worked outside the tertiary education sector (as a journalist) for much of his career, from 1936 to 1945 his major historical work was funded by a series of research scholarships from the University of Melbourne. Fitzpatrick’s primary contributions to Australian history during this time – *British Imperialism and Australia* and *The British Empire in Australia* – were Marxist responses to Shann’s liberalism. He analysed economic change from the perspective of the division of labour, class struggle, and conflict between imperial policy and the interests of the Australian State, accounting for changes in the structures of social

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27 He was awarded the Harbison-Higinbotham prize in 1937 and 1939, a major university research scholarship (£200 per year) from 1940 to 1942, and an annual grant (£500 per year) from 1944 to 1945. See Serle, ‘Fitzpatrick’.

and economic development, and the distribution of wealth and power.\textsuperscript{29} He was dismissive of analysing Australia as an independent economic entity, arguing that ‘New South Wales expanded as Britain expanded’, and that the colony was primarily the ‘scenes of British private capital investment’.\textsuperscript{30} Once this capital entered Australia, it was then controlled by a dominant class who were closely associated with the imperial project and established bourgeois governments to serve their own interests. Capital investment, in Fitzpatrick’s view, was thus not neutral (as it appears in Shann’s work), but determined the character of Australia’s economic, social and political structure.

Contemporaries actively compared Shann and Fitzpatrick, praising the latter for his detail and abstinence from generalisations.\textsuperscript{31} Sydney James ‘Syd’ Butlin, at that point lecturer in economics at the University of Sydney, reviewed \textit{British Imperialism} as having ‘the advantage over Coghlan that it is not a chronicle but a connected story, and it is more detailed, more accurate, and better balanced than Shann’s episodic, romanticized \textit{History}’.\textsuperscript{32} However, Syd later commented that Fitzpatrick’s reliability was uneven, and that the more recent past was treated particularly poorly.\textsuperscript{33} Shann and Fitzpatrick’s scholarship, though of very different analytical and political persuasions, had commonalities. They had a strong underlying theme, a skilled command of the written word and each added spice to Coghlan’s more sober treatment of Australian economic history.

Economic history within universities at this time was a concert between the humanities and social sciences. Both economics and history had relatively porous disciplinary identities and institutional structures,
enabling scholars to move between paradigms with ease.\textsuperscript{34} Interwar economics was characterised by pragmatism and the public–academic nexus, with scholars drawn from different areas to provide advice on a range of economic issues.\textsuperscript{35} In the history discipline, scholars were also preoccupied with tracking Australian colonial ‘progress’, with Mark McKenna arguing that ‘politics, archaeology, classics and literature [were] commonly subsumed in the study of history’.\textsuperscript{36} These conditions allowed economic historians to work across paradigms, with Shann appointed to positions, variously, in economics and history. He mentored John Andrew La Nauze at the University of Western Australia, who went on to hold positions in economics, economic history and history in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra.\textsuperscript{37} Herbert ‘Joe’ Burton trained as a historian, but often wrote on contemporary economic matters and was appointed senior lecturer of economic history at the University of Melbourne as early as 1930.\textsuperscript{38} Sir Robert Madgwick, similarly, trained in both economics and history. After a DPhil at Balliol College, Oxford, Madgwick returned to the University of Sydney in 1935 as an ‘economist who saw the light’ and turned to history, taking up a lectureship in economic history.\textsuperscript{39} A. G. L. Shaw graduated in history and political science at the University of Melbourne in 1935, and in philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford in 1940. Returning to Melbourne, Shaw lectured in economic history before a deepening career in the history discipline.\textsuperscript{40} Garnet Vere ‘Jerry’ Portus was, similarly, depending on who you asked, a historian and an economist (and an industrial relations scholar and a theologian). Portus studied history and economics at Oxford between 1908 and


\textsuperscript{36} McKenna, ‘The History Anxiety’, 568.


1917, acted for George C. Henderson as professor of history and English at the University of Adelaide in 1914, and from 1918 was director of WEA tutorial classes and part-time lecturer in economic history at the University of Sydney. Portus also contributed to early Australian labour studies and was a founding member of the Australian Institute of Political Science, eventually moving to a Chair in History and Political Science at the University of Adelaide from 1934. According to his biographer, Portus ‘opposed the increasing specialization within universities’, and expanded the scope of his lectures on economic history so much so that they ‘became virtually a cultural history of mankind’.41

Social scientists embraced the field, with economic history taught widely in faculties of economics or commerce. Economist Douglas Copland started his professional life through a joint appointment in history and economics at the University of Tasmania, and later held chairs in both commerce and economics at the University of Melbourne.42 Copland emphasised the interdisciplinarity of economic history, arguing it was the ‘halfway house’ between the abstract and the concrete.43 Copland’s successor as professor of commerce, Gordon Leslie Wood, also contributed to Australian economic history with a social sciences perspective. In Sydney, R. C. Mills completed his DPhil at the London School of Economics in 1915, and eventually settled in Sydney as the university’s professor of economics from 1922. The following year Mills recruited economist Frederic Benham from London. Both contributed frequently to economics and economic history.44 Benham left Sydney for the London School of Economics in 1929, but Mills continued as an economist and university administrator, serving as dean of faculty of economics until Syd Butlin relieved him in the mid-1940s.

43 Williams, Balanced Growth, 37.
The field also had institutional ties with the history discipline. For instance, at the University of Adelaide, economic history was housed in a large Department of Economics and History. Sir W. Keith Hancock was one of Australia’s most distinguished historians, and while he mostly held appointments in the history discipline, he worked with Shann in Perth in the early 1920s and maintained interest and research on economic history for the rest of his career. Stephen Henry Roberts similarly wrote his History of Australian Land Settlement, published in 1924, from his Masters thesis in history, and then his vantage as a ‘young lecturer in British History in the University of Melbourne’. He went on to accept the Challis Professorship of History at the University of Sydney in 1929, before writing The Squatting Age in 1935. Also at Melbourne, Fitzpatrick had trained in history, and his contributions to Australian economic history were facilitated by support from Melbourne’s history Chair R. M. ‘Max’ Crawford. La Nauze’s transition from economic history to Melbourne’s Ernest Scott Chair of History was also facilitated by his friendship with Max Crawford.

Coghlan’s work had set a precedent for the field’s integration between government and academic knowledge. In the interwar period, Roland Wilson was a member of ‘Giblin’s Platoon’ of public economists. His Capital Imports was written from his Oxford DPhil thesis, and from 1932 Wilson held positions as an economist in the Commonwealth Statistician’s branch in Hobart, as an economic adviser to the Treasury in Canberra, and as the Commonwealth statistician. In the early 1940s, Shaw lectured in economic history part-time while working for the Commonwealth Departments of Information, Army and Postwar Reconstruction. Mills, similarly, was an active member of government advisory bodies, consulting on wages, monetary and banking systems,

50 Macintyre, ‘La Nauze’.
53 Davison, ‘Shaw’.

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taxation, and education policy throughout his career. Sir Frederic Eggleston alternated between elected politician and appointed public official throughout his career, while also participating in WEA activities and writing for local and British press on Australian politics.  

54  State Socialism in Victoria, published in 1932, was written out of Eggleston’s ‘intense political experience involved in […] occupying several Ministerial posts in Victorian Governments from 1924 to 1927’.  

55  Colin Clark and John G. Crawford were both well-known public economists. Clark was a British-Australian statistician who, after work as a lecturer in statistics at Cambridge, was appointed the Queensland government statistician (among other portfolios) from 1938 to 1952. Crawford worked as an economic adviser for the Rural Bank of New South Wales from 1935 to 1944, and then as the post–World War II director for the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and Department of Commerce and Agriculture.  

56  Although Shann was primarily employed within universities, he also engaged in various government advisory committees, and acted as the Bank of New South Wales’s economic consultant (the first economist to ever hold such a position in Australia) in the early years of the Great Depression. Shann used these platforms to argue for liberal factor markets, flexible exchange rates, free trade and conservative fiscal policies. He was ‘one of the pioneers promoting the status of the economist as an adviser and consultant in a developing country’.  

Complementing universities and public servants, the third branch of interwar economic history knowledge work was the Workers’ Educational Association. The organisation began in Britain, and the Australian offshoot expanded from 1919. It partnered with universities and the trade union movement to provide university extension tutorial studies for part-time students, who were usually full-time blue-collar workers.  

58  Meredith Atkinson was the organisation’s main disciple, arriving in Australia in 1914 to organise tutorial classes for the WEA and, soon after, to lecture in

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57 Snooks, ‘Shann’.
economic history at the universities of Sydney and Melbourne. A number of other scholars who contributed to the field— including Eggleston, Portus, Herbert Heaton and Clarence Northcott— were members of the tutorial class movement across the country. Research in Australian economic history was explicitly motivated by the WEA, with Portus commenting that his edited series of monographs on Australia’s ‘economic, social and political problems’ was prompted by the assembly of material by WEA instructors. Herbert Heaton, the organiser of WEA tutorials and lecturer in history and economics at the University of Tasmania, wrote that his *Economic History*, published in 1921, ‘had its origins in a series of pamphlets published […] by the Workers’ Educational Association of South Australia’. Atkinson’s *New Social Order*, published two years prior, was similarly based on ‘numerous lectures’ and was written to provide the students of the Workers’ Educational Association throughout the Commonwealth with a text book which they can conveniently use in their tutorial classes’. Northcott contributed to economic history from outside the primary parent disciplines. He was a sociologist by trade, and gave the organisation’s first sociology classes in 1915–16.

There was substantial professional crossover between these three institutions. Scholars were often employed by a combination of universities, the WEA and the public service throughout their career, and brought these contacts into their published research. While some—such as Roberts and Heaton—were professionally embedded in a single sector, they were the exceptions. For example, Sydney’s WEA leader Portus informally collaborated with university colleagues Mills, Shann and

60 Garnet Vere Portus, *Australia: An Economic Interpretation* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1933).
Hancock.\(^{64}\) Melbourne’s WEA leader Atkinson edited a volume on the economic and political life of Australia, with chapters by his WEA contacts as well as those at several different universities.\(^{65}\) Northcott, another WEA advocate, acknowledged Atkinson for encouraging him to publish *Australian Social Development*, in addition to Commonwealth Statistician G. H. Knibbs, and scholars at Sydney and Columbia universities.\(^{66}\) Clark and Crawford moved between universities, the government and, in Crawford’s case, private industry. They acknowledged university workers – including Syd Butlin, economist Trevor Swan and cartographer Joyce Wood – those with connections to the public service such as Professor Jim Brigden, as well as Crawford’s colleagues at the Rural Bank of New South Wales.\(^{67}\) Eggleston, similarly, acknowledged assistance from colleagues in the public service alongside university scholars.\(^{68}\) Fitzpatrick noted diverse contacts, including those from universities, the WEA, the public service, and leaders of the trade union movement.\(^{69}\)

The field’s relatively weak professional structures, and movement of scholars between disciplines and organisations enabled a broad intellectual tradition in the interwar period. International trade of goods and money became an important explainer of Australia’s progress. In *The Prosperity of Australia*, published in 1928, Benham examined protectionism and trade, evaluating the efficiency with which European Australians had exploited resources.\(^{70}\) He found Australia’s record wanting, particularly regarding tariff protection, arguing that only an unobstructed price mechanism could allocate resources ‘ideally’.\(^{71}\) Wilson and Wood both explored the role of international capital imports in the Australian economy.\(^{72}\) Wilson examined Australia’s capital borrowings and the terms of trade, finding that – although economic theory would suggest otherwise – the Australian evidence exhibited no robust relationship between the

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64 Shann, *An Economic History*, xi.
71 Cain, ‘Benham’.
two. Wood also interrogated the link between borrowing and inflation relative to Australia’s business cycle from the 1840s to 1929. He argued cheap loan money had contributed to speculation, disadvantage in trade, reduced private sector efficiency and, ultimately, reduced prosperity for Australia. Excessive capital imports were touted as the chief reason for the instance and relative magnitude of Australia’s economic downturns. Fitzpatrick examined international flows – particularly trade and capital – from the perspective of colonial dependence and imperial exploitation.73 Similarly, during his time in economics at the University of Sydney, La Nauze examined imperial dependence and the Australian tariff.74 Wool was seen as a major vehicle of Australia’s international trade, with Shann, for example, arguing the ‘big sheep men’ were the ‘most characteristic and economically important Australians’.75 Portus’s and Shaw’s generalist textbooks both featured the wool trade, and Hancock commented that wool ‘made Australia a solvent nation, and in the end, a free one’.76

Land settlement was another key theme, drawing together a focus on the wool trade, migration and interest in Australia as a net capital importer. Squatters formed a substantial portion of Shann’s work, and he examined their bonds of legislature, and political dramas with the imperial government. As an individualist, Shann was on the side of the squatters, bemoaning their lack of representation in government and inefficiencies of the land legislation system.77 Mills evaluated colonist Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s theory of ‘systematic colonisation’ in Australia for his DPhil at the London School of Economics in 1915. He argued that although the system was sensible at the time, it was only so at a certain stage of colonial development.78 Roberts, a wide-ranging historian, also contributed to Australian economic history on the issue of land settlement and pioneers. His History of Australian Land Settlement did what it said on the tin, synthesising the development of land settlement from European invasion to 1920, as written by Coghlan, Mills and so on. It was necessarily a survey

73 Fitzpatrick, British Imperialism; Fitzpatrick, The British Empire.
77 Shann, An Economic History.
of parts of the story woven elsewhere, but in true interwar style was written with the panache that was missing from Coghlan. In *The Squatting Age* a decade later, Roberts focused on the squatting period, describing with vibrant detail the lives of early pastoralists, and their impressions of political, economic and social events in New South Wales.\(^79\) Land settlement also provided a link between migration and material progress, with Madgwick’s *Immigration into Eastern Australia* examining, as Mills did, Wakefield’s systematic colonisation.\(^80\) Madgwick emphasised the human capital dimensions of immigrants, characterising them as deceitful, fraudulent and disreputable, and arguing that Australia’s development was hampered by its use for the disposal of British poorhouses and prisons. Migration and land settlement was also crucial for Fitzpatrick’s account of dependence between Australia and Britain, arguing that free immigration supplied cheap labour for pastoralism, which in turn provided cheap wool for English textiles.\(^81\)

The role of government was woven throughout these themes. The *laissez faire* scholars held the balance of power, with most critical of past interventions by the State in the economy.\(^82\) Shann, trained in the individualism of the classical school of economics, reported on the triumph of market-based activities over State monopolies.\(^83\) Benham’s *Prosperity* adopted a similar classical economic model to Shann, advocating for an unobstructed, market-based price mechanism.\(^84\) Although not as explicitly ‘classical’ as Shann and Benham, the WEA group were generally critical of State intervention. Portus disapproved of the ‘autocratic communism’ of the early years of European invasion.\(^85\) Northcott’s *Australian Social Development* examined the different functions of the State, arguing that public enterprises were ‘invading’ capitalism, that Labor’s social ideals were short-sighted and that they ignored that ‘private enterprise […] can perform its function more efficiently than the state’.\(^86\)

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81 Fitzpatrick, *The British Empire*.
83 Snooks, ‘Orthodox and Radical Interpretations’.
84 Cain, ‘Benham’.
85 Portus, *Australia*.
Order supported Northcott’s argument that State socialism had ‘failed’ and advocated a corporatist approach to solving problems in each industry.\textsuperscript{87} Eggleston also critiqued government intervention in the economy, with his \textit{State Socialism in Victoria} examining the colony that had ‘possibly the largest and most comprehensive use of State power outside Russia’.\textsuperscript{88} He traced the history of Victoria’s use of public enterprises in social and economic infrastructure, the development of local manufacturing and the alleviation of depressions. Although he acknowledged that sometimes the dominance of State enterprise was for practical reasons, he ultimately concluded that publicly owned essential services, taken from the Victorian case, were not economically or politically sound.\textsuperscript{89} Hancock’s \textit{Australia} included a chapter on ‘State Socialism’, and although it narrowly preceded Eggleston’s work, Hancock acknowledged his debt to Eggleston ‘who ha[d] for several years been collecting, with great industry and skill, a vast mass of facts’ on the issue.\textsuperscript{90} While Hancock saw state socialism as holding the nation back throughout its history, he was more sympathetic, arguing that the State’s role was to provide public utility and ‘collective power at the service of individualistic rights’.\textsuperscript{91}

Others wrote from the Left. Fitzpatrick linked, pejoratively, market economics and political exploitation, using a Marxist lens to argue that the economic utilisation of the colonies was entirely to meet the needs of the imperial country.\textsuperscript{92} Heaton’s discussion of the development of Australian capitalism came from his position as a socialist. Although he did not necessarily want to overthrow capitalism – instead he argued for an ethical capitalism in which capital worked alongside unions and government – Heaton certainly advocated for greater tempering of the market economy by collective action.\textsuperscript{93}

The field’s porous professional boundaries manifested in a body of work that demonstrated a range of approaches. Most were comfortable using the vast statistical material that had been built by Coghlan and the colonial statisticians. They were also, on balance, engaged with the humanities, fashioning published work with a narrative style that added ‘spice’ to

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{87} Atkinson, \textit{The New Social Order}, 216.
\bibitem{88} Eggleston, \textit{State Socialism}, 1.
\bibitem{89} Moore and Walter, ‘State Socialism’.
\bibitem{90} W. Keith Hancock, \textit{Australia} (London: Ernest Benn, 1930), 107–8.
\bibitem{91} Hancock, \textit{Australia}, 55.
\bibitem{92} Fitzpatrick, \textit{The British Empire}.
\bibitem{93} Heaton, \textit{Economic History}.
\end{thebibliography}
Coghlan’s quite sober and impersonal treatment of the economy. The use of a range of sources, and the engagement of economic history alongside social, political and geographic history, were key features of the interwar approach. Shann’s training in both history and classical economics created a story based on Coghlan’s quantitative material, but with the flair of a master storyteller. Similarly, Fitzpatrick’s approach to understanding economic matters combined statistical material with the literary edge of a journalist trained in history and sensitive to social and political context. Heaton’s *Modern Economic History*, released and updated a number of times throughout the 1920s, integrated social and political themes with a disposition towards quantitative chronicle. Heaton argued that the ‘best approach to the study of Economics lies in a *historical and descriptive survey* of modern economic life and organisation’. Roberts’s work on land settlement described historical economic and geographic matters, incorporating a range of quantitative, government, personal and family historical sources to paint a vibrant picture of life on the land. Roberts walked the line between ‘history and the arts as civilising morally uplifting agents’, and an empirical historian who ‘aimed to train professionals for work’. Madgwick’s *Immigration* similarly bridged social science and humanities paradigms, incorporating analysis of economic theory and the labour market, with discussion of the personalities and political machinery of the British Colonial Office. Hancock’s *Australia* blended economics, history and politics in his study of Australian population, soil, political institutions, foreign policy, tariffs, literature and art. His work was praised for its integration of economic matters with the skills of a humanities scholar:

> Life had fashioned him as a scholar, but happily, experience or chance or the fates, or the gods had lavished on him the gifts and burden of the artist.

Social science approaches were also present, with Clark and Crawford continuing Coghlan’s legacy of national income accounting by compiling longitudinal national data from the 1890s to the 1930s. Their work was an

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95 Coleman, ‘Historiography’.
97 Schreuder, ‘Roberts’.
exercise in Keynesian business cycle specification, on par with the trend in economics elsewhere towards national income accounting. Wilson also used an economist’s lens to discuss capital imports and the terms of trade. *Capital Imports* progressed in three parts: Wilson estimated Australian borrowing between 1871 and 1930, developed a theory of international capital movements, and then tested the theoretical conclusions against the Australian evidence. His approach was deductive, and his use of economic theory was world class. The book was reviewed primarily for economics outlets (for example, *Economic Record, Journal of Political Economy, The Economic Journal*) and was praised for its contribution to international trade theory rather than its historical material. Benham’s approach was also deductive. His *Prosperity* was based on national income measurement, and used formal economic ideas to ‘test’ Australia’s economic success. Wood’s work was less deductive, but still used the tools of economics to integrate economic history and economic theory. Wood assembled substantial quantitative material on borrowing, inflation and the business cycle, and used economic theory to interpret this evidence. While scholars such as Benham were sceptical about Wood’s conclusions, his work was praised for the same reason as most of the field’s heroes – for assembling valuable estimates of key economic indicators. Mills, although sympathetic to both history and economics, favoured the latter. His work on systematic colonisation was an exercise in the history of economic policy, examining the genesis and implementation of Wakefield’s views within his context of contemporary political economy.

Encouraged, perhaps, by the relative infancy of the field within universities, the balance between these three ‘arms’ of interwar economic history was distinctive for the field globally. The interwar period was a time of consolidation for many other communities of economic historians, such as in Britain where the period culminated in the foundation of the Economic History Society in 1926, the first issue of the *Economic History Review* in 1927, and the first chair in the subject established at Cambridge in 1928. In the US, although independent specialist departments of economic history never materialised, the interwar period saw the foundation of the

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100 Wilson, *Capital Imports*.
101 Benham, *Prosperity*.
102 Wood, *Borrowing*.
103 Mills, *Colonisation*.
National Bureau of Economic Research to integrate economics, statistics and historical research, and the establishment of both the Economic History Association and its flagship journal the *Journal of Economic History*. The professionalisation of the field occurred at a similar time elsewhere, with chairs established in Germany, Italy, Poland and Hungary in the 1920s. The French journal *Annales d’histoire économique et sociale* – the model for research in the *Annales* school – was established in 1929; the Italian specialist journal *Rivista di Storia Economica* first appeared in 1936; professional journals on Chinese economic history were established in the 1930s; and in Japan, seminars, journals, institutes and a nationwide association were established between 1929 and 1931.

Compared to the development of economic history elsewhere, Australia was a late starter.

The relative infancy of Australian economic history was a boon for the field’s interdisciplinary connections, allowing communication across the disciplinary divide. However, it also reinforced a dependence on the metropole. Australian society was, of course, established on a British model, and work in economic history began as part the colonial project. The description of the economy and the collection of statistics was used as a way for London to rationalise, understand and govern the colonies. Colonial economic historical writers spent some time visiting Australia, but then wrote, published and distributed their research in Britain. Even Sydney-born Coghlan facilitated this intellectual imperialism. While his research was based on his time on the ground as the New South Wales government statistician, *Labour and Industry* was written and distributed from London during Coghlan’s time there in various diplomatic roles from 1904.

Coghlan had been back and forth to London since the 1890s, and was well received into London society, including a fellowship

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107 Huf, ‘Making Things Economic’.

108 Hicks, ‘Coghlan’.
of the Royal Statistical Society from 1893. Knowledge about Australia was thus produced at home but its legitimacy, distribution and use was controlled by the metropole.\textsuperscript{109}

The expansion of economic history within universities reinforced the degree to which scholars looked to Britain. Sandstone universities were established with Eurocentric systems of learning in mind, primarily Scottish logics of training in discrete areas of inquiry.\textsuperscript{110} The WEA was similarly imported, with Atkinson emigrating to Australia from Durham in 1914 specifically for the purpose of promoting working-class education. In addition to the use of the metropole’s curriculum, the Australian academy prioritised recruitment and training from Britain.\textsuperscript{111} This was the form in which both imperialism and cultural cringe manifested, with overseas training seen as increasingly important to establish the scholar’s pedigree. The model was simple, and very common at this time: the bright young man (yes, mostly men) would complete an undergraduate degree at an Australian university, would then be selected for either a Rhodes or Rockefeller scholarship to attend Oxford, Cambridge or the London School of Economics, where he would complete another Bachelors degree, and then either a Masters or DPhil. With small variation, the majority of interwar economic historians took this path. Roberts, for example, earned no less than three degrees at the University of Melbourne in the 1920s, though British legitimacy was still required. He won a scholarship to study for his DSc at the University of London.\textsuperscript{112} Heaton, Benham and Atkinson were born in the UK, and trained there before recruitment to Australia.\textsuperscript{113} Crawford and Wilson both studied in the US, at Harvard and Chicago, respectively.\textsuperscript{114} The only true exceptions to this pattern were Fitzpatrick and Eggleston. Fitzpatrick studied at the University of Melbourne, and although he went to England intending further study, he spent a year in London as a journalist before working his passage home.

\textsuperscript{109} This is consistent with Raewyn Connell, \textit{Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science} (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2007).
\textsuperscript{112} Schreuder, ‘Roberts’.
\textsuperscript{114} Farquharson, ‘Wilson’; Miller, ‘Crawford’.
as a steward.\textsuperscript{115} Eggleston’s family were not able to afford his university education at either Melbourne or Cambridge, so he trained as a lawyer before his career in politics.\textsuperscript{116}

**Wartime transition**

World War II ‘galvanised’ university campuses.\textsuperscript{117} Students enlisted in staggering numbers, campus grounds and facilities were used for training, research funds were funneled towards relevant work, and academics were seconded to public service roles planning for the war effort and recovery.\textsuperscript{118} Several Australian economic historians were temporarily moved from their university posts to various departments focused on education, training and managing resources during the war effort. Hancock was overseas at the time and was recruited into British home front service, including as editor of the civil series on the official history of Britain in World War II. Roberts remained within the university, but was focused on public communication, writing an almost-daily column for the *Sydney Morning Herald* called ‘Our War Correspondent’.\textsuperscript{119} Some, like Crawford, transitioned into the Department of Postwar Reconstruction, developing strategies for rebuilding Australia’s society after the war.\textsuperscript{120} This was also a training ground for prominent postwar economic historian Noel Butlin, with his integration with the public reconstruction effort crucial for his intellectual and professional development.

The total war developed a partnership between public and academic work, as well as the imperative for integrated, ‘useful’ knowledge. University silos, already porous, were almost entirely dismantled during the war. Academics were not only removed from the university space, but worked alongside policymakers and across paradigms to ‘equip and maintain armed forces fighting in the tropics, make good the shortages of advanced manufactures that could no longer be imported, and expand primary production to sustain the Allies’.\textsuperscript{121} These were life-or-death

\textsuperscript{115} Serle, ‘Fitzpatrick’.
\textsuperscript{116} Osmond, ‘Eggleston’.
\textsuperscript{117} Forsyth, *Modern Australian University*.
\textsuperscript{119} Davidson, ‘Hancock’; Schreuder, ‘Roberts’.
\textsuperscript{120} Miller, ‘Crawford’.
\textsuperscript{121} Macintyre, *The Poor Relation*, 19.
problems that required an interdisciplinary effort to resolve. When it came to reconstruction, the problems were equally complex – refitting munitions factories, re-establishing and finding new patterns of trade and production, and finding employment for thousands of ex-service men and women. The challenges of war made most Western societies not only want to return to ‘normal’, but also to make the new world better. Universities and the development of ‘useful’ knowledge was seen as an important source of renewed equality and prosperity, reflecting and reinforcing postwar optimism.122

122 Macintyre, The Poor Relation; Forsyth, Modern Australian University.