

## 6. 'Stationed but not sedentary'

In *The People of Perth*, Tom Stannage portrays 1870s Perth as an ordered, conservative and insular community, in which social life emanated from the Governor's establishment and politics was 'the prerogative of the Imperial officialdom, the landed gentry, and the leading town merchants'.<sup>1</sup> Prinsep's place in the colonial society, and his interest in its social institutions and attitudes to those excluded from Perth's elite social life, illuminates the manner by which, to use David Cannadine's terms, settler colonialists sought to 'replicate the layered, ordered, hierarchical society they believed they had left behind at home', establishing and patronizing the same institutions and social relationships as in the mother country.<sup>2</sup> Those who held power in the colony were confident in their prestige, and intent on keeping it that way. The son of Charles Prinsep's first agent in Western Australia, Sir Luke Leake, symbolised 'the decorum of colonial politics' in his behaviour as a Member of the Legislative Council. At election time he would stroll through the streets, 'personally acquainted with almost every elector, (speaking) to each as an old friend, knowing his history, knowing his views, and certain at any rate of a friendly reception'.<sup>3</sup> When Prinsep's younger brother, Jim, visited Perth in 1882, he found a 'very nice quiet little place, where everyone knew everyone else, and no-one had any money':

People were most sociable and constantly had little dances and theatricals for which Harry usually painted the scenery, and often acted and so did I. Everything was done in the simplest fashion, no-one arrived late and only a few dressed even for the evening functions unless for something quite exceptional. No-one ever drove out to entertainment or kept carriages. Only a few people had horses and they lent them freely to anyone wanting a ride.<sup>4</sup>

Perth was still an outpost of Empire with a tiny coloniser population of little more than 6,500, marginally more than its port twin town, Fremantle, in a total colonial population of about 25,000. A census of the settler population in 1870 recorded that the majority was born overseas, mostly in Britain, and that over two-thirds of the immigrant arrivals were male. Of the 9,500 women in the colony, well over half had been born locally over the 42 years since its establishment. Ten years later, a new census showed that the settler population

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1 Stannage, C.T. 1979, *The People of Perth: A social history of Western Australia's capital city*, City of Perth, Perth, p.88.

2 Cannadine, David 2001, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their empire*, Penguin Books, London, p.28.

3 Stannage 1979, *The People of Perth*, p.88.

4 Prinsep, James Charles, 'Autobiography', SLWA Acc. 3859A, Volume 1.

had increased by only 6,000, but the demographic profile had changed significantly. By then, nearly 60 per cent of a non-Aboriginal population of nearly 30,000 was born in Western Australia, although the continuing preponderance of men (nearly 60 per cent) reflects an immigrant population still heavily dominated by male arrivals.<sup>5</sup> The colony continued to be handicapped by a small population and had difficulty retaining settlers, some of whom were abandoning Western Australia for the more populous and economically buoyant eastern colonies, or returning to Britain. But for those who remained, there is a sense of increased belonging to the new colony, of starting to look inwards towards the potential of Western Australia as home. Families such as the Prinseps were in the process of re-adjusting their gaze, from seeing Western Australia as a subservient supplier and service centre, a small link in an Indian Ocean web of imperial influence and power, to a vision of the colony as an independent entity, its future and economic potential no longer dependent on the vagaries of Indian or other regional markets. They were becoming Western Australians, increasingly prepared to view the colony as a permanent project, with its own identity, issues and internal dynamics, a place to stake their future, own land, make a home for themselves and raise their children.

The Prinseps thus became part of a society increasingly comfortable in its Western Australian environment. Many in their family and social networks had, like Josephine Prinsep, been born in the colony and brought up in the bush, developing and tending the farms and pastoral runs acquired by their immigrant parents. The 'native born' men, such as Josephine's brother-in-law, Edward Brockman, and his five sons, and family friends, such as John and Alexander Forrest, constituted a new generation of muscular colonists, 'strong and robust looking', confident in their ability to survive in the bush and undertake all the duties of managing a farm, familiar with Aboriginal people and often fluent in indigenous languages.<sup>6</sup> All of Josephine's sisters were born in the colony and were proud of their self-sufficiency and capacity to tolerate hardship and deprivation, but at the same time able to manage the domestic sphere and 'act as a young lady should', by learning 'singing, pianoforte and painting in watercolours'.<sup>7</sup> According to Josephine's sister, Caroline, the relative absence of domestic comforts and their distance from 'society' made Australian-born women even more determined to conform to social expectations than their relations in England. 'Mamma and I often say', she wrote to her Aunt Fanny Bussell from her temporary home in London in 1878, 'that girls in Australia have much better opportunities of mixing in society and forming good manners

5 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, 'Australian Historical Population Statistics', Catalogue No. 3105.0.65.001, Table 70: 'Population, sex and country of birth, WA, Census Years 1959–1891', viewed online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3105.0.65.0012006?OpenDocument>.

6 Milward, John, 'Pioneers of the Warren', unpublished manuscript, personal collection, p.26.

7 Ibid., p.90.

than most girls of their station in England. None of [Aunt] Edith's children has a quarter such pleasing manners as their Australian cousins. There is always some reformation wanted in bush houses. People are apt to get careless and one coming back sees what is wanted and works to achieve it.'<sup>8</sup>

Alongside the men and women born in Australia, the Prinsep social circle in Perth included many, like Henry, who had been born and brought up in Britain and the colonies of the Empire. They had arrived in Western Australia as adults, either intent on owning land and raising their families in the colony, or as colonial civil servants to whom Perth represented one of a succession of imperial postings. Prinsep's diaries and letters illustrate his connections with a large circle of friends and colleagues of a broadly similar background to himself, and who had extensive family and social connections throughout the Empire. They included Colonial Secretary, Sir Frederick Palgrave Barlee, who provided introductions to the Governor and other political leaders on Prinsep's arrival in the colony, and later arranged his job in the civil service. Before coming to Western Australia in 1855, Barlee had been in the civil service in Sierra Leone and, on his departure from the colony after a 20-year stint, was appointed Lieutenant Governor of British Honduras.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Chief Justice Sir Archibald Burt and his son Septimus, who became Prinsep's closest friend, had both been born in the West Indies, where the older Burt had been a member of the Legislative Council of St. Christopher and Anguilla, and held the rank of Attorney-General.<sup>10</sup> Malcolm Fraser, born in Scotland and with previous service in New Zealand, came to Western Australia in 1870 as Surveyor-General, and was Prinsep's first supervisor.<sup>11</sup> Fraser lived in Western Australia until his retirement in 1890 and went on to fill the posts of Registrar-General and Colonial Secretary. He continued to correspond with Prinsep after he left the colony, and became friends with Prinsep's sisters, Louisa, May and Annie, on his return to England. Another friend was Henry Hicks Hocking, born and educated in England, who took up the position as Attorney-General in 1873, during the governorship of Frederick Weld. He remained in the colony until 1879, when he was transferred to Jamaica to take up the role of Attorney-General.<sup>12</sup> Alexander Onslow was another lawyer and confidant. He came to Western Australia in 1880 as Attorney-General after a 16-year term in the equivalent post in British Honduras, staying in the colony until just before his death in England

8 Caroline Bussell to Fanny Bussell, 16 March 1878, SLWA Acc. 1972A/50.

9 Honniball, J.H.M. 1969, 'Sir Fredrick Palgrave Barlee, 1827–1884', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 3, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

10 McClemans, Sheila 1969, 'Burt, Sir Archibald Paull (1810–1879)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 3, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

11 Crowley, F.K. 1972, 'Sir Malcolm Fraser, 1834–1900', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 4, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

12 Government of Western Australia 1870/71–1880, *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, SLWA Acc. 328.941 WES.

in 1908.<sup>13</sup> When Onslow was appointed to act as Administrator for a year in 1884, it was to Prinsep that he turned to act in the role of his aide-de-camp and Private Secretary.<sup>14</sup> This cemented the relationship between the families, which revolved around a shared love of music and the arts, as well as business and politics. Music and art was the basis of a friendship with the family of Alfred Hensman, who was born in England and served with the East India Company army in Madras, before qualifying as a lawyer and coming to Western Australia as Attorney-General in 1884.<sup>15</sup>

It was people such as these who formed the Prinsep social circle, a group styling itself as a colonial elite and rigorously maintaining the boundaries between the 'shop girls and slaves', as Henry once referred to them, and the gentlemen and ladies of the colony. In such a society, people without property, those who laboured for the gentry, or were former convicts, 'were socially inhibited and legally intimidated by the Master and Servant Act; to the casual observer they seemed to reflect uncritically their "ordained" position in colonial society'.<sup>16</sup> Occasionally, some of the powerless, non-indigenous others of colonial society appear in the Prinsep papers, illuminating the ways in which social barriers in this small community were maintained and reinforced by the British elite. In his encounters with British men and women of low status, Prinsep used terms little different from those used to describe the savagery and unknowability of other races. When, in 1880, he went to Fremantle to visit John Forrest, at that time Comptroller of Convicts, he attended Sunday service at Fremantle Prison and was intrigued and horrified by what he saw:

The ranks of unfortunate men, some sullen, others joining in a mechanical way but all still and disciplined to the utmost. A collection of bad, very bad faces and heads as a lot, low foreheads, evasive eyes, prognathous jaws with very few exceptions. I was struck at the number of very bald heads among them, even in middle aged men, and put it down to the small caps and hot hats they use in the summer and the caps being probably worn as night caps in the winter.<sup>17</sup>

Later that day, Prinsep visited the pensioner's quarters and was shocked by the 'dirty, lazy, diseased looking men crowded in each room', each 'room apparently full and each man thinking only of himself, utterly regardless of the condition of those around him. Several blind, some palsied, some lame and all degraded.'<sup>18</sup>

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13 Braybrooke, E.K. 1974, 'Sir Alexander Campbell Onslow, 1842–1908', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 5, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

14 Government of Western Australia 1884, *Government Gazette*, 27 November.

15 Birman, Wendy 1972, 'Hensman, Alfred Peach (1834–1902)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 4, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp.380–81.

16 Stannage 1979, *The People of Perth*, p.87.

17 Prinsep, Henry C., 'Diaries 1866–1922', SLWA Acc. 499A, 6 June 1880.

18 Ibid.

His observations show another side of a relaxed and harmonious community, a population existing in the background, mistrusted by the citizens of Perth and controlled as rigidly as possible. By the time Prinsep visited in 1880, the cessation of transportation in 1868 had left a remnant convict establishment of former inmates, most of them free, and ex-officials, most of them pensioners. 'Many men', wrote Stannage, 'eked out semi-pauperised existences in an inhospitable physical and social environment'. Some died as official paupers, others went insane and were locked in 'barbarous and inhuman places', but all have tended to be 'suppressed in folk memory and edited out of W.A. historical writing'.<sup>19</sup> Stannage suggests that it was the desire to control this 'enormous social disequilibrium' and protect the citizenry from its possible consequences that underwrote the prevailing ideologies of internal peace and harmony of a society modeled on that of the mother country. Colonisers such as Prinsep might do all they could to portray Perth as a harmonious replica of Britain, but its discords at times became very much evident to those who lived there.

As prominent members of the Church of England congregation in Perth, Henry and Josephine Prinsep responded to the needs of the underprivileged by joining and becoming active in the Bishop's relief and child protection programs, helping to raise money and food, and taking in the children of paupers. Sometimes, as in the case of Mary Anne and Louisa Currie, whose mother had died and whose 'drunken stepfather' was unable to look after them, these arrangements lasted almost for life. Mary Anne lived with the family and worked as a domestic, and Louisa went to the Bussells at Cattle Chosen.<sup>20</sup> The Noongar traditional landowners, meanwhile, had experienced a process of colonisation that left them with few choices of where to live, who they worked for, or how they cared for their children. By the time the Prinseps moved to Perth, Noongar traditional landowners were at the margins of the social and political structures of the colony. Those who had survived the violence of initial contact, the measles and whooping cough epidemics in the 1860s, or incarceration at Rottnest Island prison, either worked as virtual slaves to landowning colonists, or lived as dispossessed fringe dwellers in camps on the outskirts of the city.<sup>21</sup> In 1886, a senior Noongar man, Tommy Dower, described his people's situation as one of absolute marginalisation and dispossession:

That white man take all blackfellows' country, and that blackfellow no place to sit down. That white man build houses, fence land, run cattle,

<sup>19</sup> Stannage 1979, *The People of Perth*, pp.98–9.

<sup>20</sup> Brockman, Carlotta, 'Reminiscences of Carlotta Louisa Brockman, née Prinsep, 1882–1956', State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) Acc. 931A.

<sup>21</sup> Stannage 1979, *The People of Perth*, pp.120–1.

sheep, horse, on blackfellows country. But poor blackfellows, no horse, no kangaroo or emu left. That plenty blackfellow die, and no notice taken of him by white man.<sup>22</sup>

## Letters from around the world

Absences from Britain and its institutions brought a sense of alienation and longing for the company of others of the same background perhaps understood by all British colonists, regardless of their environment. Henry Prinsep's letters to family and friends in Britain constantly sought to reassure them that all was well in Western Australia, that it was a good place to live and stake his personal future. His new life in Western Australia was both different and remarkably similar to the lives of many of his network of correspondents. The images he provided to them portrayed his fascination with the exoticism of Western Australia, its landscape and topography, the indigenous population, flora and fauna. But they also reassured his family about the connectedness of the colony to the Empire, that there was much in the social values of Western Australia that his correspondents would find familiar. Responding to his sister Annie in 1874, Prinsep urged her to forget her worries about the hardships of colonial life:

I can assure you that for a great many reasons the colonies are far preferable to the old country. A gentleman or lady here can keep up their position without that expenditure of money necessary at home. We are not ashamed of performing honourable necessities here and no one thinks the worse of me because I go to the well and draw up the water to make tea for myself. Of course when we can we get maids and few are without them, but there is not that outward show which costs so much.<sup>23</sup>

His life in Perth was pleasant, the excellent climate allowing for a healthy and active social and outdoor life. He was enjoying a simpler and less complex life than was possible in Britain and at the same time had the company of many who shared a similar background and identity. In the surviving outward letters to his family to be found in the Prinsep Papers, Prinsep portrays a life in which pleasure and relaxation play a large part, of engagement in political, social and cultural events, and of horseback trips to the country. He reports the arrival in the colony of new officials, such as Lord Gifford, previously with the army in India, South Africa and Cyprus, who arrived as Colonial Secretary to replace Frederick Barlee in 1880. He was delighted that the colony had gained a man

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22 Tommy Dower, *The Inquirer*, 13 October 1886, quoted in Bolton, G.C. 1988, 'Tommy Dower and the Perth Newspapers', in *Aboriginal History*, Volume 12, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, p.81.

23 H.C. Prinsep to Annie Prinsep, 23 April 1874, private collection.



'most cordial and with such nice quiet pleasant manners', and particularly that Gifford knew his sister, Louisa, and brother-in-law, William Bowden-Smith.<sup>24</sup> But in letters to 'old' Western Australians, such as Charlotte Bussell and Josephine's sister, Caroline, who relocated to Paris after the death of John Garrett Bussell in 1875, Henry reveals that life in Perth still presented problems. He writes of his low salary, lack of opportunity for advancement in the civil service, and failure to gain appointment to higher status positions as local Resident Magistrates in places such as the Vasse and Derby. The health of the family is a major worry, as Josephine started to show signs of mental illness that resulted in long periods of convalescence in Bunbury and Melbourne, and a stay in the Fremantle Lunatic Asylum. Henry's friend, Alfred Hillman, related through marriage, was concerned that Josephine's 'mania was becoming permanent, as she has so many relapses', while Henry, 'at the best not a strong minded man, is at his wits end to know how to deal with her, it is very sad.'<sup>25</sup> Three days later, Josephine was taken to the asylum, which Hillman thought was best for her, 'although there is a natural repugnance to putting a friend or relative into such a place, but I really think it is the best for all parties. It is a great drawback to that asylum that no private apartments are furnished.'<sup>26</sup> Charlotte Bussell wrote quickly from Paris:

It was a dreadful shock to me when I first read that she was in the asylum and I could quite enter into your agony when told that she must be taken there. But on reflection, I felt thankful that there was such a quiet safe retreat for her, where she would have good nursing, and a kind, judicious, moral attendant in Dr Barnett. The change to the cool sea breezes of Fremantle should also do her an immensity of good. It was far better than irritating her poor brain almost to becoming frantic by the opposition she must have met with by remaining longer at home. In a room where she could do no harm she might throw about the things as much as she liked, as a child with its toys, or open and shut the window till she was tired of the occupation, but the constant opposition to what she wanted to do was making her worse and worse. So it was a wise and beneficial thing to remove her, dear Harry, hard tho' it seemed at the time to take her to such a place, the name of which makes one shudder, but the asylum at Fremantle is very different to an asylum in England. There it is like a safe home, but in England it is like a prison. You cannot see the loved one when you wish, nor can you ask any questions. All is gloom and misery, at least so I have been told.<sup>27</sup>

24 H.C. Prinsep to Charlotte Bussell, undated, SLWA Acc. 1274A.

25 Hillman, Alfred James 1990, *The Hillman Diaries, 1877–1884*, F.J.B. Hillman, Perth, 16 and 18 January 1880.

26 Ibid., 21 January 1880.

27 Charlotte Bussell to Henry Prinsep, 10 March 1880, SLWA Acc. 1972A/61.

Amongst these difficulties, Henry enjoyed an active social life with his circle of friends and acquaintances, who moderated the absence of family in Western Australia. In this, he realised he was far better off than many of his fellow colonisers in places around the Indian Ocean. When Jim Prinsep spent five years in Ceylon between 1876 and 1881, trying out his skills at coffee-planting, he wrote to his older brother bemoaning the strangeness of his environment. 'I've got a berth now', he wrote from Pusilawa in the Ceylonese highlands, 'you may perceive its heathenish name above. This is a pretty place, lots of work and most woefully dull. I don't see a white face from Sunday to Sunday.'<sup>28</sup> Holidays were 'confounded dull' and often unnecessary, as 'none of the staff are Christians... These Canjanies are the curse of the place as they prevent direct communication with the coolies acting as some kind of middle man.' Henry replied, suggesting that he should consider coming to Western Australia, as a 'good sheep station here would be far happier and healthier life for you and not half the risk'.<sup>29</sup>

Although a place like Ceylon might be strange to a young man like Jim Prinsep, there was still plenty to evoke a sense of familiarity. His sister Louisa Bowden-Smith lived in Colombo in a 'very nice house called Darley House on the Lake and entertained a great deal', and her family are described as being 'rather the leading people in Colombo'.<sup>30</sup> In 1875, Aunt Jules (Julia Margaret Cameron) and her husband, Charles, moved from England to their hill station house, Dimboola, joining their son, Ewen, and other close family members. The presence of family served to reduce Jim's sense of isolation. Nor did Louisa forget her brother on the other side of the Indian Ocean. She wrote to Henry almost every week, relaying news of social life in Colombo, the affairs of family and friends in Britain, and sending him mementos and photographs of their shared childhood in England. Letters from his sisters constantly sought to reassure Henry that he remained very much a part of the family and had not been forgotten in far-away Perth.

His sisters, aunts and brother regularly wrote to tell Henry of family events and give news of their friends. Louisa, in particular, made an effort to involve Henry in the affairs of the family in her weekly correspondence, during which she gave accounts of the death of older family members, the pain of separation from her young children, who were staying in England with relations while she was in Ceylon, and forwarded letters from members of the extended family, including Julia Margaret Cameron and Aunt Sara Prinsep. The correspondence between Louisa and Henry runs almost unbroken from the time of his arrival in Western Australia until his death in 1922, just before Louisa died in the same year. It is a remarkable collection, Louisa's letters providing a vivid account of her life, a youth spent in England, marriage and children in Colombo, frequent

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28 Jim Prinsep to H.C. Prinsep, 14 March 1876, SLWA Acc. 3592/A/30A.

29 Henry Prinsep to Jim Prinsep, August 6th 1877, SLWA Acc. 1274A.

30 Prinsep, 'Autobiography'.



trips to England to visit her children and have medical treatment, the death of her husband, her return to Britain, and her steady descent into disability from the effects of arthritis. Her early letters are a model of tidy handwriting and legibility but, as illness takes hold, they become increasingly difficult to read, the later letters virtually illegible. She is desperate to keep her widely dispersed group of siblings together, and bemoans the fact that older brother, Charlie, who had inherited the Tasmanian estates and moved between Britain and Australia, has 'drifted into anonymity' and 'does not seem to belong to the family'. Her letters are full of affectionate and vivid news about members of the extended family and social network: May is 'looking prettier than ever', Uncle Thoby 'stoops very much' but otherwise is 'just as nice as ever', Aunt Sara 'looks just like a Pompadour picture', her white hair giving her a much softer and even younger look', Signor (Fredrick Watts) is 'lively as ever' and has 'quite changed his Messiah like ways and goes about the country everywhere', while Annie Prinsep is still unmarried and has become 'quite the daughter of the house' at Thoby and Sara's home on the Isle of Wight.<sup>31</sup> Members of the family continue to travel to work in the colonies, many of their Prinsep and White cousins in India, while cousin Monty White in Antigua had 'gone quite bald'. Most surprising of all was the decision by Aunt Jules to leave England and her growing reputation as a photographer for Ceylon in 1875, because 'old Uncle Charles wants to die there', a move May's husband, Andrew Hichens, thought to be 'total madness'.<sup>32</sup> In 1874, Louisa forwarded a letter from Cameron describing the move of Thoby and Sara Prinsep from London to a new home in Freshwater, the Briary, designed and paid for by Watts:

Aunt Sara, Uncle Thoby and Signor all got out of the Tennyson's carriage and all seemed wonderfully fresh and as my boys say 'fit'. Of course there was great excitement but we did not allow them to stand about to look at the outside of House. There is a long covered passage bricked at foundation with trellis walk on one side and wall on the other side leading up to house, then a hall and studio. Best part of the house, a delicious stove that emits great heat and not a blazing fire, that is to say, not a fire that shows. A stair case with some trellis work of small squares in centre of hall and immeasurable rooms, none very large but all very good aspect, very sunny. Great running about from room to room, Uncle Thoby alone with me in studio before dancing a fandango or some very quickstep. ... he was vastly delighted. Aunt Sara does not yet understand the designed rustic simplicity wondered at their being no cornices & c. She will come to admire it well. It was a great day for Signor, he who had received at their hands for more than a score of years

31 Louisa Bowden-Smith to Henry Prinsep, undated (c.1875), SLWA Acc. 3592A/16A.

32 Louisa Bowden-Smith to Henry Prinsep, Andrew Hichens to Henry Prinsep, undated (c.1875), SLWA Acc. 1972A/12.

was now conferring. Very pleased he seemed and I felt very glad for him. A whole bunch of newly gathered snow drops from this, his new garden he offered gracefully to Aunt Sara. All was prosperous and Uncle Thoby declared he was more hungry than he had been for 20 years and baskets were opened and the first family meal occurred.<sup>33</sup>

Four years later, Louisa wrote to describe the funeral of Uncle Thoby Prinsep at Freshwater, mourning the loss of the 'dear old man', whose passing requires all of the family to close 'a page in one's life, and turn over to begin another life in which he does not figure as a grand central figure for all to turn to'. She reassured Henry that, 'whatever he may have written to you in business, I never heard him speak of you with anything but affection'.<sup>34</sup> Sister Annie Prinsep wrote from England to give news of Tennyson and Watts, telling Henry that they still remembered and asked after him. She wrote of taking 'long walks' with Tennyson in London, 'in which I saw more of London in a few days than in many driving', and of 'charming evening parties ... where we met all the great and peculiar people, Gladstone, Knowles, Browning, Du Maurier & c.'<sup>35</sup> In 1878, a letter from Malta describes her holiday with Watts: 'It is certainly a splendid winter place':

Signor is able to get out twice every day whereas he used to be shut up in his room for weeks during the winter at home. He means to come here every winter. The place is a mass of forts and is very gay. I've been to several dances already.<sup>36</sup>

Prinsep reserved his correspondence with Uncle Thoby Prinsep, and later his young brother, Jim, and brothers-in-law, Andrew Hichens and William Bowden-Smith, for discussions of business, including the complicated affairs surrounding the managements and settlement of his father's estate, and Henry's disposal of the properties in Western Australia in 1874. Between 1866 and his death in 1878, Thoby was a regular correspondent, his letters mostly dealing with matters of the estate and Henry's management of the Western Australian properties, with family news often added by Sara. Through his aunt and uncle, Henry learned about the trouble sister Annie was having in her final year at school and their plans to send her to Western Australia to join Henry, once he had built a 'stone and mortar' home that will 'keep out the wet and the wind better than wattle and daub'. 'I should be very glad if Annie came out', Thoby wrote in 1867. 'She is now very happy with Julia Cameron, except that she pines for a Miss Vasick, the music mistress at Miss Clarence's for whom she has conceived an unnatural attachment, writing to her every day and fretting and

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33 Julia Margaret Cameron to Louisa Bowden-Smith, 6 February 1878, SLWA Acc. 1972A/66.

34 Louisa Bowden-Smith to Henry Prinsep, 17 February 1878, SLWA Acc. 1972A/20.

35 Annie Prinsep to Henry Prinsep, 2 May 1878, SLWA Acc. 1972A/135.

36 Ibid.

ping because she isn't allowed to go back to school to resume her relations with her whatever they may be.'<sup>37</sup> In 1876, Jim Prinsep wrote to Henry from Pusilawa in Ceylon to tell him that, at the age of 28, Annie was losing her hearing. Although Annie seemed disinclined to marry, May continued her efforts to find a husband for her, 'continually hunting up new candidates for the honour'.<sup>38</sup>

Andrew Hichens, a London stockbroker who had married May in 1874, took on the task of disentangling the family affairs after Thoby's death and reported to Henry that the situation was worse than he had imagined:

The accounts of the estate crediting each child with his or her share of the trust income and debiting each with their expenditure has been very carefully made out and approved by Desborough and my lawyer and Charlie's lawyer. From these accounts it appears that in order to discharge the debt due to your Father's marriage settlement and the first charge to the daughters, there will be some £8000 required besides the debt to the National Bank. As there is no prospect of the W. Australian estate realising more than £5000 or £6000 at the outside, it follows that Charlie will have to raise the remainder which owing to your unfortunate proceedings will probably be increased by the cost of a law suit or full payment of the Bank claim. Now the net income of Charlie's Tasmanian property manages about £800 a year and if he has to burden it with a mortgage of some £4000 at 6 per cent he will have barely £500 left, so his position as eldest is not very brilliant at all. As to Jim he will get his share of the settlement after deducting what has been spent on his education in excess of his proportion of income and it will come to about £1800 or about £80 a year.<sup>39</sup>

Hichens admonished Henry for requesting 2,000 pounds to support a scheme to reinvest in property in the vicinity of Bunbury, which could 'yield no profitable result'. 'West Australia seems to be a drag in the market', he wrote. Potential investors had no interest in colonial schemes where there was an absence of managers, no agents 'whom they knew and could absolutely trust', and 'the property was valueless as an investment'.<sup>40</sup> He was not a rich man, he told Henry in 1876, and even if he had the 2,000 pounds Henry was requesting, he would 'resist all demands to advance it on so doubtful a matter':

I have a good business so long as I am able to work at it and it allows me to live comfortably and to do something to help the very numerous poorer members of my family, which you may suppose to be abundant

37 Thoby Prinsep to Henry Prinsep, 26 August 1867, SLWA AN3592A/15.

38 Jim Prinsep to Henry Prinsep, 14 March 1876, SLWA Acc. 3592A/30A.

39 Andrew Hichens to Henry Prinsep, 23 March 1876, SLWA Acc. 1972A/80.

40 Ibid.

when I tell you that I have 40 nephews and nieces. But I have not large means and I have very full claims as such as I have. All these are details which I would prefer not revealing but your letter compels me to do so. I can only repeat that I will gladly do my share in any feasible plan for improving your position, but certainly not in the manner you propose.<sup>41</sup>

William Bowden-Smith, who was in business in Colombo, was similarly reluctant to invest his finances in Henry's business proposals, although he was prepared to lend Henry 200 pounds, 'free of interest, so that you may carry on with your purchases'.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in 1876, Hichens reluctantly agreed to support Henry's request to supply materials to allow him to go into business as an art teacher, warning him in the process to be 'careful not to let your artistic scheme interfere with your permanent work'. After consulting with Watts and Val Prinsep, Hichens consigned an order for '½ dozen small colour boxes for beginners, one dozen tubes of moist colour of each the 12 most important colours, some 4 ½ dozen brushes, six dozen pencils F. and six dozen B., 2 quins of Whatman paper, a gross of drawing pens, a dozen copies of Vere Foster's programme studies Landscape, 3 programme studies (Vols by Leitch), two or three dozen sheets of French drawing studies of figures and architectural designs, a pound of India Rubber'.<sup>43</sup> Despite the obvious unwillingness of Hichens and Bowden-Smith to invest their funds in schemes in Western Australia, Henry continued to request their financial support for his plans to invest in land, and later to import indentured Indian labour to develop the north-west of the colony. Again, Hichens refused, as Jim Prinsep wrote in 1891:

Though I don't suppose Andrew cares one dump whether the NorWest is populated by Hindoos, Chinese or any other race, or that he is prepared to embark in any scheme for introducing Hindoos or kicking out Chinese, for his own private gain or profit, I am sure if he can do anything that might be to your private advantage he will do so gladly.<sup>44</sup>

Other letters deal with the important matter of patronage, connections and introductions to networks that might help Henry get ahead in his colonial environment. In 1876, Hichens wrote that he would be pleased to speak to the new Governor of Western Australia, Sir William Robinson, who he believed he might have known when he was at the Colonial Office as a clerk: 'If he ... is a dark good looking man about 40 with a pretty tenor voice he ought to be an old musical pal of mine, and in that case I would write and ask him to do what he could in the way of looking after you.'<sup>45</sup> In 1878, after entertaining Henry's

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41 Ibid.

42 William Bowden-Smith to Henry Prinsep, undated, SLWA Acc. 1972A/12.

43 Andrew Hichens to Henry Prinsep, 3 November 1876, SLWA Acc. 1972A/80.

44 Jim Prinsep to H.C. Prinsep, 10 December, 1891, SLWA Acc. 3592A/43.

45 Ibid.

boss, Commissioner of Crown Lands, Malcolm Fraser, Hitchens advised Henry that there was little point in cultivating Colonial Office contacts, as Fraser is 'a very good friend to you and I think he will take advantage of any opportunity of getting you on, but he says you must have patience, for it is impossible to push a man, but if you do your work well and give no cause for complaint he will see that you have any thing that may be going'.<sup>46</sup>

More often, it was Henry who did the introductions for friends visiting Britain from Western Australia. When Colonial Secretary Frederick Barlee visited England in 1875, he spent time at Freshwater with Thoby and Sara Prinsep, meeting Annie Prinsep, Watts and Tennyson. Barlee reported that Thoby bore no ill-will towards Henry from the failure of his business ventures and would like to help him in whatever way he could. He understood it was Henry's 'inexperience and impetuosity' at the time that had made him ill-suited to the task of rescuing the enterprise, but this should not bring 'the slightest taint upon his character or fitness for future employment of any kind'.<sup>47</sup> Frederick Watts 'often wishes you were here with him to aid in his studies and play on the violin'. Barlee was particularly delighted to be introduced to Tennyson,

to take a long walk with him, when he pointed out to me all the beauties of Freshwater. Such a chance does not occur to everyone. He is a man who hates to have any fuss made of him, but is pleasant, full of fun and wit, a species of very amusing dry humour, and I need hardly say, possesses an enormous fund of information. He greedily sought more information about Australia and sometimes surprised me by the obtuse nature of the questions that he asked.<sup>48</sup>

Later in 1875, Hitchens apologised to Henry for not being in London when his 'distinguished friend' explorer John Forrest called, but 25 years later he was able to meet the man who had risen to the rank of Minister of Defense in the newly founded Commonwealth of Australia and introduce him to the Lord Mayor of London.

Letters from family and friends throughout Australia and the Empire continued to arrive throughout Henry's and Josephine's lives, and the arrival of colonial and British mail was eagerly awaited. Prinsep's Tasmanian friend, Georgia Bisdee, wrote to give 'you who have so many associations with Calcutta' news of her recent visit to India. His old friend, Harry Hocking, described his new position in Jamaica and his engagement to negotiate a 'reciprocity treaty'

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46 Andrew Hitchens to Henry Prinsep, 21 November 1878, SLWA Acc. 3592A/43.

47 Frederick Barlee to Henry Prinsep, 11 February 1875, SLWA Acc. 1972A/7.

48 Ibid.

between Jamaica and the United States in 1891.<sup>49</sup> Letters arrived asking Prinsep to help new arrivals in the colony. In 1907, his cousins, Fanny Daniell and Neta Sanderson, wrote asking him to look after Fanny's son, Frank, forced to leave India because of his wife's illness and wanting to 'continue colonising' in order to provide a healthy life for his children rather than return to England. 'I believe someone in India has given him a letter of introduction to Uncle Harry', wrote Sanderson: 'Mrs. Daniell thinks he will like to settle permanently in WA and wants Uncle Harry to help him get something to do. I wonder how often he has that request made of him.'<sup>50</sup> There are many letters about conditions in Britain, firmly in the grip of social, political and industrial change. Prinsep's old school friend, Alfred Harrison, kept him informed of Britain's political development from his position as a clerk in the House of Lords:

The House of Commons is becoming, or rather has become, quite unmanageable. This is, of course, a result of the extension of the franchise, which has made it possible for men to get into Parliament who cannot, by any stretch of courtesy, be called gentlemen, and who would not have had a chance of getting in formerly.<sup>51</sup>

Josephine's cousin, Frances Ardagh, wrote that London's 'streets are as full as ever, crammed in some places but with a totally different population than one is accustomed to. Lots of foreigners and country folk. In the trains and buses one hears Yorkshire, Devonshire—broad South and the Eastern Countries dialects with French and German.'<sup>52</sup> The events of the Empire, particularly war, are the subject of many letters. In 1918, Hallam Tennyson, soon to marry Prinsep's sister, May, who was widowed after the death of Andrew Hitchens, commented on the contrast between the peace of the rural Isle of Wight and the battlefields of France:

Lovely spring weather has begun here and all the snowdrops are coming out of the sheltered rocks among the bushes. The crocuses have also begun to send up their tiny flowers. The rooks caw very loud and are beginning to build their nests and the thrushes are shouting from the thickets. All this peace and a hundred miles away turmoil, death and destruction.<sup>53</sup>

Prinsep's sister, Annie, wrote to provide her solution to the industrial unrest that followed World War I: 'This last strike of railway men is simply wicked. My

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49 Georgia Bisdee to Josephine Prinsep, 17 December, 1911, SLWA Acc. 3593A/38; Harry Hocking to H.C. Prinsep, no date, 1880, SLWA Acc. 3594A/30/1; Bessie Hocking to H.C. Prinsep, June 11 1891, SLWA Acc. 3594A/26/28.

50 Fanny Daniell to H.C. Prinsep, 11 May, 1907, SLWA Acc. 3594A/26/3.

51 Alfred Harrison to H.C. Prinsep, 20 June 1881, SLWA Acc. 3592A/35.

52 Frances Ardagh to Josephine Prinsep, August 26 (no year), SLWA Acc. 3593A/9.

53 Hallam Tennyson to H.C. Prinsep, 24 February 1918, SLWA Acc. 3592A/67B.



verdict would be that every man who strikes should pay £5 for every idle day and have the back of his hand tattooed to mark him for life. Talking is not of the slightest use as the strikers know perfectly well the harm they are doing.'<sup>54</sup> But although the Britain Prinsep remembered was undoubtedly changing, imperial ideals of the superiority of its institutions and modalities continued to be held close. These ideals were expressed in a letter to Josephine, written shortly after Prinsep's death by his nephew, Bill Bowden-Smith, in retirement after a career with the Royal Navy and postings around the world:

All the villages round are lovely. The Downs which separate Berks from Wilts four miles to the south and the Thames seven miles to the north. Oxford only ten miles away, a place full of interest as you will know. I find any amount to do in addition to looking after this place and my family. They have made me a magistrate, and I am President of every mortal thing in the village, from the Conservative Asscn downwards—British Legion, Boy Scouts, cricket club, football club, Church Council.<sup>55</sup>

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54 Annie Prinsep to H.C. Prinsep, September 1918, SLWA Acc. 3592A/67B.

55 Bill Bowden-Smith to Josephine Prinsep, 15 February 1927, SLWA Acc. 3593A/11.

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