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Debating the Moral and Political Economies of Convictism: Samuel Marsden's Essays on Agriculture and the Spirit Trade in Early New South Wales

MATTHEW ALLEN

Samuel Marsden's essays on agriculture and the spirit trade, written circa 1807, are read as early examples of colonial economic thought. Marsden lamented the corrupting influence of the spirit trade, which encouraged drunkenness and idleness, undermining agriculture, 'the great source of national wealth'. Accordingly, he called for strict government control over prices and markets, a ban on barter for spirits or grain and compulsory agricultural labour. These views can be interpreted as an argument for a more moral economy, in which convicts were reformed and redeemed through agricultural labour within an orderly community of deferential convict labourers, emancipist small-holders, and paternal masters. But this influential vision of the colony would become the basis for a future political economy of convictism, a novel discourse that understood the colonial economy as centred on the productivity of convict labour.

The Rev. Samuel Marsden's essay on the 'Barter of Spirits', probably written in 1807, is reasonably well known to colonial Australian historians.¹ Marsden argued that the spirit trade was 'a very general & serious Evil' which 'enhances the Price of Labor [*sic*], destroys Industry, ruins Families, destroys immense Quantities of Grain, increases the public Expense, and precludes the Possibility of the Colony's Happiness and Prosperity so long as it exists'.² The essay hints at a broader view of the political economy of the convict colony of New South Wales and the central role of agriculture within it, linking spirit trading to

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

¹ See for example: Michael Sadler, 'Sam Marsden's Colony: Notes on a Manuscript in the Mitchell Library, Sydney', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 52, no. 2 (1966): 94–114; A.T. Yarwood, *Samuel Marsden: The Great Survivor* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 98–9, 117; Andrew Sharp, *The World, the Flesh and the Devil: The Life and Opinions of Samuel Marsden in England and the Antipodes, 1765–1838* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2016), 263–72.

² Samuel Marsden, *Essays Concerning New South Wales, 1807–18–, with List of Females in the Colony*, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 18, 1, 3–4.

problems with the labour market and colonial self-sufficiency. It is bound with two others on the 'Toleration of Catholics' and the 'Situation of Female Convicts', all three now held by the Mitchell library. As Andrew Sharp has recently suggested, these essays collectively represent a 'coherent account' of the colony's problems and an alternative 'vision of a future ... [as] a centre of Christian civilization' through developing an economy based on small-scale agriculture.³

These familiar Mitchell library essays are closely related to two others now found in the State Archives, a different version of the essay on spirits, and a separate and little-known essay specifically on agriculture.⁴ Michael Saclier argues that the State Archives essays were 'almost certainly derived from' the Mitchell essay on spirits, which served as a rough draft, and were sent to Governor Bligh before Marsden departed for England in early 1807.⁵ In contrast, Sharp suggests the State Archives essays were written first and sent to Bligh 'before the end of 1806', while the Mitchell essays were drafted slightly later and 'designed for publication in England as part of a plan for influencing the government while he was there'.⁶ Sharp's interpretation is logical since the State Archives essays are less polished and because Marsden's arguments about agriculture informed Bligh's policies during his short term as governor. Accordingly, I understand the pair of State Archives essays on agriculture and spirit trading that I focus on below as a significant intervention in colonial politics.

Building on his concern about spirit trading, Marsden argued that agriculture was 'the great source of national wealth' and that the principal aim of government should be to encourage it, because only through increased agricultural production would the price of labour decline. To achieve this goal, he called for compulsory agricultural labour to encourage habits of industry, claiming '[n]o man, bond or free should be allowed to live in idleness ... since the Provisions they eat are a loss to the Community because they cause none by their own labour'. Interpreting the colonial economy in moral terms he recommended privileging 'industrious' agriculture over 'idle' trade, through fixing prices and by providing preferential access to convict labourers.⁷ Due to 'prejudices, avarice, idleness, Litigations and every vice', these measures would prove unpopular but '[t]he Governor must expect to stand almost alone, if he consults impartially the Public good'.⁸ I understand Marsden's arguments as a vision for New South Wales as both a moral and a political economy, redemptive as well as productive. As I discuss below, I see this twofold vision of the colony as an early and influential evocation of convictism – a justification for exploiting convict labour on the basis of moral concerns, but also for political ends.

All five of Marsden's essays (two of which are discussed in some detail here) were written during a time of political ferment in the tiny community of British

³ Sharp, 264, 269.

⁴ Samuel Marsden, A few general remarks and observations, Colonial Secretary's Papers, Main series of letters received, 1788–1825, NSW State Archives, Series 897, 4/1719, No. 85.

⁵ Saclier, 104–7.

⁶ Sharp, 264.

⁷ Marsden, General remarks.

⁸ Ibid.

colonists in New South Wales. Growing conflict between a series of appointed governors and their supporters, and a rival faction centred on the officers of the New South Wales Corps, would culminate in the ‘rum rebellion’ of 26 January 1808 against the supposedly tyrannical rule of Governor Bligh. Though recent historians have tended to downplay the importance of spirit trading as an explanation for this bloodless coup, Marsden’s essays reflect the symbolic significance of rum and convict labour in colonial politics at this time.⁹ In the broadest terms, Marsden spoke for a vision of the colony as a reformatory where sober, protestant convicts worked to redeem their sins, and against what he believed was a corrupt rival vision of the colony as a trading hub, exploiting convict workers and their thirst for rum. In these broad terms, Marsden’s moralising argument prioritised punishment over profit, the tension between the two being central to colonial politics and to debates about convict transportation in the early decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Furthermore, his essays were written during the formative years of the new ‘science’ of political economy with its idealisation of free trade and the market; and during what Boyd Hilton has termed ‘the age of atonement’, an era powerfully shaped by a blending of evangelical and enlightenment thought.¹¹ Marsden’s essays also speak to these intellectual currents and illustrate the way they, in turn, shaped colonial ideas.

In this article, I interpret Marsden’s essays as both a call for a more moral economy, *and* a pioneering exercise in what I term the political economy of convictism, a novel and relatively short-lived discourse that understood and advocated for convict labour in economic terms. I begin with a discussion of the closely linked concepts of moral and political economy, both as they operated in the early nineteenth century and as they have been interpreted since, relating them to the historiography of the early colony and the role of convict labour within it. I then analyse the colonial context in which the essays were written, particularly the role of spirits in the early economy, and Marsden’s own position as a key official and influential advisor to the early governors. Finally, I undertake a close reading of the essays themselves drawing out Marsden’s views on agriculture, the spirit trade and the colonial economy and showing how these ideas not only influenced Bligh but helped shape a nascent discourse of colonial political economy based on convict labour.

⁹ Alan Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia: A History*, vol. 1, *Beginning* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), ch. 13; Grace Karskens and Richard Waterhouse, “‘Too Sacred to Be Taken Away’: Property, Liberty, Tyranny and the ‘Rum Rebellion’”, *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 12 (2010): 1–22; Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, *Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 31–43; Matthew Allen, ‘Distilling Liberty: Reconsidering the Politics of Alcohol in Early New South Wales’, *Australian Historical Studies* 50, no. 3 (2019): 1–15.

¹⁰ John Ritchie, *Punishment and Profit: The Reports of Commissioner John Bigge on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land, 1822–1823; Their Origins, Nature and Significance* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1970).

¹¹ Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 3.

Moral and political economy

I emphasise moral *and* political economy to draw attention to a series of closely connected historical and theoretical problems that Marsden's essays can illuminate. The term 'political economy' was increasingly common in eighteenth-century Britain, referring in its broadest sense to the economics of the state as opposed to the household. But at the time that Marsden was writing it was developing a more specific ideological meaning associated especially with the use of Adam Smith's labour theory of value, and subsequently with David Ricardo's theorisation of economic interests. Historians increasingly understand the new political economy that emerged at this time as not just an ideology but also a discourse, a new way of theorising society in abstract economic terms and conceiving of such study as a science, that was rapidly diffused throughout the growing public sphere.¹² In an Australian context, Ben Huf's recent thesis adopts this broad approach, focusing on an 'economic project' of government and theory, centred on the new genre of the government report, that used the 'constitutive metaphors' of political economy to discursively construct the colony of New South Wales as an economy, in a process he terms 'economisation'.¹³

The concept of a moral economy developed at the same time and in response to this new ideology. Critics argued that political economy undermined traditional social bonds and called for the restoration of a (largely imaginary) 'moral economy', even as *laissez-faire* became the dominant form of economic thought.¹⁴ Relevant to my argument, agriculture had an important role in these economic debates. Smith was an important forerunner of the new political economy and critiqued the physiocratic view that agriculture was the principal source of wealth.¹⁵ He insisted that manufacture and commerce were productive forms of labour, but he understood economic progress in stadial terms with agricultural subsistence naturally prior to manufacture and commerce.¹⁶ Indeed, Smith specifically argued that 'agriculture is the proper business of all new colonies' because land was so cheap (based on the assumption that it was either uninhabited or easily conquered). He warned that a nation's capital was 'a very

¹² Benjamin Huf, 'Making Things Economic: Theory and Government in New South Wales, 1788–1863' (PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 2018), ch. 1; Emma Rothschild, 'Political Economy', in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, eds Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 748–79; Keith Tribe, *Land, Labour, and Economic Discourse* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); Ryan Walter, 'From Theory to History: Keith Tribe's Land, Labour and Economic Discourse and The Economy of the Word', *Economy and Society* 45, no. 3–4 (2016): 537–66.

¹³ Huf, 5–10.

¹⁴ Ben Maddison, 'From "Moral Economy" to "Political Economy" in New South Wales, 1870–1900', *Labour History* 75 (1998): 81–107, 81; Norbert Götz, '"Moral Economy": Its Conceptual History and Analytical Prospects', *Journal of Global Ethics* 11, no. 2 (2015): 147–62.

¹⁵ Tribe, chs 5–6.

¹⁶ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 3 vols. (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1902), bk. 3, ch. 1; Bk. 4, ch. 9; Alan Macfarlane, *Adam Smith and the Making of the Modern World*, <https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/244511> (accessed 20 November 2024), 16; Tribe, ch. 5.

precarious and uncertain possession till some part of it has been secured and realized in the cultivation and improvement of its lands'.¹⁷

Unlike the theoretical science of political economy, moral economy was only theorised in the twentieth century as part of what Tim Rogan terms a 'critical tradition' that attacked the now dominant political economy in secular and humanist terms, insisting on the 'infinite value' of 'human personality' and calling for a moral as well as material economics.¹⁸ For historians, the most important thinker in Rogan's tradition is certainly E.P. Thompson who famously defined moral economy in 1971 as 'a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of various parties within the community'.¹⁹ Thompson developed his ideas as a means to understand food riots as protests informed by a sense of moral injustice, and he contrasts an 'old moral economy of provision' with a 'new political economy of the free market'.²⁰ However, and importantly for my argument, Thompson notes that the older moral economy 'cannot be described as unpolitical', arguing that:

it supposed definite, and passionately held, notions of the common weal – notions which, indeed, found some support in the paternalist tradition of the authorities; notions which the people re-echoed so loudly in their turn that the authorities were, in some measure, the prisoners of the people.²¹

As Didier Fassin notes, Thompson's discussion confuses two distinct meanings of moral economy, one economic, and the other moral. The former refers to a pre-market 'system of exchange of goods and services', directly opposed to the market-based political economy which steadily replaced it; but the latter, a broader 'system of norms and obligations' which underpinned the pre-market economy, 'has no opposite'.²² Indeed, as Andrew Sayer suggests, 'moral norms ... are also present and influential in advanced capitalist societies although they tend to be overlooked by political economy'.²³ It is for this reason that I want to avoid a hard distinction between moral and political economies and instead insist that all political economies have an underpinning morality, and

¹⁷ Smith, bk 3, ch. 4, bk 4, ch. 7. This assumption obviously underpins Marsden's thinking though he makes no mention of Aboriginal people in considering how the government should use their land. For more on Marsden's views on Aboriginal people, see Meredith Lake, 'Samuel Marsden, Work and the Limits of Evangelical Humanitarianism', *History Australia* 7, no. 3 (17 December 2010): 57.1–23.

¹⁸ Tim Rogan, *The Moral Economists: R. H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, E. P. Thompson, and the Critique of Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), ch. 1, quotations on 6, 8.

¹⁹ E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present* 50 (1971): 76–136, 79, 136.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 79. In 1991 he went further, noting that the old moral economy was 'as much, or more, "political" than is "political economy"': E.P. Thompson, 'Moral Economy Reviewed', in *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin, 1993), 259–351, 271.

²² Didier Fassin, 'Moral Economies Revisited', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 64, no. 6 (2009): 1237–66, 11–13.

²³ Andrew Sayer, 'Moral Economy and Political Economy', *Studies in Political Economy* 61, no. 1 (2000): 79–103, 79.

all moral economies are political projects. In a similar move, Fassin calls for a broader and non-normative concept, defining moral economy as ‘the production, distribution, circulation, and use of moral sentiments, emotions and values, and norms and obligations in social space’.²⁴

In this essay I use Fassin’s definition to read Marsden’s essays as an argument for a moral economy in which convicts are reformed and redeemed through agricultural labour within an orderly Christian community, hierarchically organised around a convict and ex-convict peasantry and a paternal government and officer elite. But I simultaneously read them as an early and influential argument for an economy based on convictism – that is, a political economy for the colony of New South Wales which centred on convict labour. Huf has made similar arguments, identifying convicts as a key focus of economisation and emphasising two important shifts in economic discourse about them: they were increasingly framed, not as servants but as an abstracted labour force, and their productivity was increasingly considered separately from their reformation. But he largely focuses on the period after the 1820s when Ricardian political economy became dominant.²⁵ In contrast, by focusing on Marsden’s essays, I draw attention to the origins of this convict political economy in the ideal of agrarian labour as the means to reform convicts and create an industrious workforce.

Convictism, idleness and redemptive labour

I rely here on Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and Michael Quinlan’s useful term ‘convictism’ which they define as ‘the means by which the past moral failings of transported workers were used to justify labour exploitation’.²⁶ As they show, convictism was based on the idea of penal labour as rehabilitative, justifying exploitation not merely in the interests of the state or the employer but also the exploited convict worker. Their work usefully situates convictism within a larger imperial political economy that depended on stolen land and unfree labour to produce the raw materials that were then refined by the newly made (and also exploited) working class of industrialising Britain. They use ‘convictism’ in relation to their arguments about labour exploitation and convict protest as forms of industrial bargaining, framing it as an ideological justification for this political economy of extractive colonisation in the penal colonies of Australia. But in their account, convictism in New South Wales first emerged in the Macquarie era, influencing the recommendations of Commissioner Bigge, which in turn led to a stricter convict system and the peak era of convictism in the 1820s and 1830s.²⁷ In contrast, I trace the origins of convictism to the moral economy

²⁴ Fassin, 37.

²⁵ Huf, chs 2–3.

²⁶ Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and Michael Quinlan, *Unfree Workers: Insubordination and Resistance in Convict Australia, 1788–1860* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

of redemptive labour envisaged by Marsden, while illustrating its roots in earlier religious and moralising discourse.

Convictism, in my sense, develops out of the concepts of industry and idleness, a virtue/vice binary whose ideological meaning is well captured in William Hogarth's famous series of engravings from 1743. Hogarth's didactic prints traced the lives of two apprentices, the industrious Francis Goodchild and the eponymous Thomas Idle, whose lives illustrate the rewards of hard work (Francis becomes Lord Mayor of London) and the punishment of vice (Thomas is hanged as a highway robber).²⁸ These twin character traits were central to both religious and secular reformist discourse in the long eighteenth century with sermons and popular criminal biographies often depicting idleness (alongside drunkenness) as a gateway to sin, while essays and other political arguments positioned industriousness as a key test of merit for the deserving poor.²⁹ Enlightenment reformers increasingly embraced these ideas, arguing that the idle needed to be disciplined into habits of industry – Jeremy Bentham once described his panopticon as 'a mill for grinding rogues honest and idle men industrious' – and this moralising logic would come to justify the exploitations of convictism.³⁰

Idleness was also an important offence, underlying both vagrancy and master and servant legislation, which influenced colonial magistrates – including, notably, Marsden himself – as they sought to control convicts.³¹ As Maxwell-Stewart and Quinlan show, the majority of charges brought before magistrates' benches in convict Australia were work-related and most of those involved behaviour that could equally be (and frequently was) understood as idleness.³² Indeed, during the best-documented period of Marsden's service as a magistrate – at Parramatta, 1815–20 – forty-six per cent of the offences that came before him were work-related.³³ Reflecting the importance of these character traits to the official understanding of the colony, Marsden was one of two magistrates tasked by Governor Hunter in 1796 to undertake an inspection of 'all

²⁸ For an analysis of these prints as didactic and Whiggish, aimed at an urban commercial audience of 'merchant patrons' (251), see Barry Wind, 'Hogarth's "Industry and Idleness" Reconsidered', *Print Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1997): 235–51. Many scholars have identified a more subversive undercurrent to these prints and Hogarth's work in general, but I am concerned here with the surface reading. See for example Ronald Paulson, 'The Simplicity of Hogarth's Industry and Idleness', *ELH: English Literary History* 41, no. 3 (1974): 291–320.

²⁹ For sermons see Joanna Cruickshank, 'The Sermon in the British Colonies', in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon, 1689–1901*, ed. Keith A. Francis et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 513–26; for biographies see Philip Rawlings, *Drunks, Whores and Idle Apprentices: Criminal Biographies of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2014); on reform more broadly: Joanna Innes and Arthur Burns, eds, *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780–1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³⁰ Jeremy Bentham, *The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, vol. 4, ed. Alexander Taylor Milne (London: UCL Press, 2017), 342.

³¹ See for example, the relevant Acts in force when New South Wales was founded: Vagrancy Act 1744 (17 Geo. II c. 5); Master and Servants Act 1766 (6 Geo. III c. 25).

³² Maxwell-Stewart and Quinlan, 23–7, 95–9.

³³ Alphabetical List of all Crimes..., Bigge Evidence and Appendices, Australian Joint Copying Project, Mitchell Library, Sydney, CO201/121, 688–701.

the different districts ... to shew the idleness and industry of the settlers'.³⁴ More broadly, as Meredith Lake has shown, industry and idleness were central to Marsden's understanding of the colony, of convicts and of Aboriginal peoples. Importantly, she points to an undated and untitled manuscript of his, ostensibly an agrarian analysis of soil quality, that also identifies the idleness of emancipist farmers as the key impediment to productive agriculture.³⁵

Earlier historians have identified this strand of colonial thinking. Richard Ely explores a similar concept, which he terms 'the religio-moral economy of penal transportation', but does not draw attention to the importance of agricultural labour to colonial ideas about convict reform.³⁶ More relevantly, Alan Atkinson argues that one strand of planning for the colony was based on the idea that convicts would be free on arrival, granted land, and hence reformed because their ownership of property would motivate them to industriousness as self-sufficient peasant farmers. Governor Phillip adapted this idea by insisting that convicts would remain under government authority – and in practice directing their labour – until their sentences expired, establishing a precedent for top-down control of the economy.³⁷ As Brian Fletcher has shown, the early governors had extensive powers to regulate agriculture and trade. The Commissariat set prices for farm produce, distributed the convict workforce, rationed most convicts, regulated wages and conditions for free labourers, and strictly controlled trade in the key commodity of spirits, through permits, price limits and distributions.³⁸ These powers were arguably necessary given that the colony was both 'constitutionally subordinate' and 'economically dependent' on Britain, but they gave the governors far greater control over the colonial economy than exercised by the British government, and thus facilitated the use of the economy for ideological ends.³⁹ Specifically, they allowed the governors to create a kind of convict moral economy in Thompson's sense: enforced labour was matched with a reciprocal obligation to support and maintain the workforce.

Moreover, convicts rapidly understood their situation in these terms, developing a kind of collective understanding of their customary rights. Atkinson identifies four patterns of convict protest, three of which – 'appeal to authority', 'withdrawal of labour' and 'compensatory retribution' – were grounded in this sense of the legitimacy of the system: 'some acceptance (passing or permanent)

³⁴ Hunter to Portland, 20 August 1796, *Historical Records of New South Wales* (hereafter *HRNSW*), ed. F.M. Bladen (Sydney: Government Printer, 1895), vol. 3, 77.

³⁵ Meredith Lake, "'Such Spiritual Acres': Protestantism, the Land and the Colonisation of Australia 1788–1850' (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2008), ch. 5; Lake, 'Samuel Marsden'; Soil Notes, in Samuel Marsden, *Transcription of Samuel Marsden's Sermons*, ed. David Pettett, 2014, 600–3.

³⁶ Richard Ely, 'Pains and Penalties: The Religio-Moral Economy of Penal Transportation to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land', in *Re-Visioning Australian Colonial Christianity*, ed. Mark Hutchinson and Edmund Campion (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1994), 61–96.

³⁷ Atkinson, *Beginning*, 66–78.

³⁸ Brian H. Fletcher, *Landed Enterprise and Penal Society: A History of Farming and Grazing in New South Wales before 1821* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976), 2–3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

of the forms by which the convicts were bound, and a belief that they had some rights, either as servants, on the English pattern, or as prisoners'.⁴⁰ Maxwell-Stewart and Quinlan have usefully updated Atkinson's typology, adding a fifth form of protest, 'issuing demands', but they too understand convict protest in relation to what they term 'a moral economy of unfreedom'.⁴¹ So the early colony was in some important senses a moral economy. But it was also increasingly reliant upon trade with a market emerging for consumer goods purchased from visiting vessels that supplemented government supplies.⁴² While spirits were certainly not the only or even the main commodity in this market, in order to understand Marsden's essays and his economic ideas we need to appreciate their unusual importance to the emerging colonial economy.

The spirit trade and the early colonial economy

Clear and accurate understandings of the role of spirits in the economy and society have been hampered by a long historiographic tradition that centred on a 'rum rebellion' perpetrated by a 'rum corps', on a 'rum currency' and on uniquely drunken colonists in the story of early New South Wales.⁴³ Popular histories still draw on this legacy, targeting the market for sensationalist accounts of early colonial history, even as they offer what are, at times, more nuanced analysis of the actual role of alcohol.⁴⁴ In contrast, I understand spirits in the early colony in the context of the role of alcohol in British society, and argue that their significance in the colonial economy was due to scarcity, not abundance.⁴⁵

In late eighteenth-century England, alcohol was abundant in the sense that anyone who could afford it could nearly always access it, increasingly in distinct forms that reflected the taste of the drinker. In contrast, the novelty and remoteness of New South Wales limited access to alcohol. Colonial drinking practices were broadly similar to Britain's, but during the period Marsden wrote about – prior to 1807 – there was very little legal local production, which made the colony reliant on imported spirits as the most efficiently-shipped and hence

⁴⁰ Alan Atkinson, 'Four Patterns of Convict Protest', *Labour History* 37 (November 1979): 28–51, 30. Atkinson understands his other type of protest, 'attack', as 'a fundamental rejection of authority'.

⁴¹ Maxwell-Stewart and Quinlan, ch. 2, 301.

⁴² D.R. Hainsworth, *The Sydney Traders: Simeon Lord and His Contemporaries, 1788–1821* (Melbourne: Cassell Australia, 1972), chs 1–3; George Parsons, 'The Commercialism of Honour: Early Australian Capitalism, 1788–1809', in *A Difficult Infant: Sydney before Macquarie*, ed. Graeme Aplin (Sydney: NSW University Press, 1988), 102–19; Margaret Steven, *Merchant Campbell, 1769–1846: A Study of Colonial Trade* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1965); Janette Holcomb, *Early Merchant Families of Sydney: Speculation and Risk Management on the Fringes of Empire* (London: Anthem Press, 2014).

⁴³ For more on this tradition see my forthcoming monograph: Matthew Allen, *Drink and Democracy: Alcohol and the Political Imaginary in Colonial Australia* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2025), ch. 2.

⁴⁴ Matt Murphy, *Rum: A Distilled History of Colonial Australia* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2021); Tom Gilling, *Grog: A Bottled History of Australia's First 30 Years* (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2016).

⁴⁵ For related arguments, see also Allen, *Drink*, ch. 3.

profitable alcoholic drink.⁴⁶ Compounding this predominance, a unique combination of economic conditions also exaggerated the value of spirits in early New South Wales.

Believing that sobriety in prisons was necessary for reforming prisoners, the British government, in the first two decades of the colony, ordered governors to control the trade in spirits.⁴⁷ All domestic distillation was prohibited, importation of spirits was allowed only under an official permit, and wholesale trade within the colony was monopolised by the Commissary – a government store – which issued rations of liquor to the soldiers and officers and sold additional spirits at a fixed price to landowners and licence-holders. Convicts were not supposed to receive spirits except as wages, the number of licensed public houses was strictly limited, and from 1800 imported liquor paid a tariff which subsidised government services through the Gaol and Orphan Funds.⁴⁸ While there were significant practical variations and failures of enforcement under specific governors, this remained government policy.⁴⁹ In contrast, alcohol policy in Britain was increasingly *laissez-faire*; supply was largely determined by a flourishing and profitable free market, distilling and brewing were massive and consolidated national industries, and small-scale domestic production was common, even where it was illegal.⁵⁰

More importantly, the theoretical strictness of policy in New South Wales clashed with the realities of its economy. Partly due to a lack of hard currency, spirits became an item of barter.⁵¹ For example, the construction of the first colonial church, built privately by the first clergyman, Rev. Richard Johnson, in 1793, was paid for partly in spirits. The total cost of the church, nearly seventy pounds, Johnson paid mostly (nearly sixty) in Spanish dollars – the remainder in rations for his labourers: 50 lbs of meat, 100 lbs of flour, 3 lbs of tobacco, 5 lbs of tea and 20 gallons of rum.⁵²

Spirits were essential to motivate convict workers. While convicts were required to work for the government, it was very difficult to compel them to work efficiently, given the lack of adequate supervision in an open prison,

⁴⁶ For drinking in Britain in this period see: Allen, *Drink*, ch. 1; John Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures: A Social History of Drinks in Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999), 52–7, 75–80; Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815–72*, 2nd edn (London: Keele University Press, 1971), 37–9, 88–9.

⁴⁷ Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850* (London: Pantheon Books, 1978); Simon Devereaux, 'The Making of the Penitentiary Act, 1775–1779', *The Historical Journal* 42, no. 2 (1 June 1999): 405–33.

⁴⁸ Hunter to Portland, 2 February 1800, *HRNSW*, vol. 4, 35; General Order, 14 June 1802, *HRNSW*, vol. 4, 790; Proclamation, 28 May 1804, *HRNSW*, vol. 5, 380–1.

⁴⁹ For more on this regulatory regime and its problems, see Matthew Allen, 'Alcohol and Authority in Early New South Wales: The Symbolic Significance of the Spirit Trade, 1788–1808', *History Australia* 9, no. 3 (2012): 7–26.

⁵⁰ Harrison, ch. 2; James Nicholls, *Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), ch. 7.

⁵¹ For examples see: John Turnbull, *A Voyage Round the World, in the Years 1800, 1801, 1802, 1803, and 1804 ...*, 3 vols (London: R. Phillips, 1805), vol. 3, 170–2; Joseph Holt, *Memoirs of Joseph Holt ...*, ed. Thomas Crofton Croker, 2 vols (London: H. Colburn, 1838), vol. 2, 114–15.

⁵² Johnson to [Dundas], 3 September 1793, *HRNSW*, vol. 2, 64–6.

especially once the government assigned them to private masters. Since convicts already received rations and had little opportunity to spend money on anything other than consumable luxuries, such goods were in high demand as the best means of hiring and motivating workers.⁵³ David Collins, the leading legal official in the colony who presided over the Criminal Court, described the problem in 1798: convicts 'never felt themselves interested in the effect of their work, knowing that the ration from the store ... would be issued to them, whether they earned it or not'. In contrast, if they were promised spirits as a reward 'they would labour while they had strength to lift the hoe or the axe'.⁵⁴

The use of alcohol as remuneration was not unique to New South Wales. Rural labourers in Britain traditionally consumed weak alcoholic drinks – so-called 'small beer' or cider – regularly throughout the day, often provided by their employer as a customary right.⁵⁵ The practice of paying convict workers in rum was a natural adaptation of this tradition to colonial conditions. Moreover, the use of alcohol as a more general form of payment and medium of exchange was also common in other colonies, such as on the slave-based sugar plantations of the West Indies.⁵⁶

In high demand and under strict control, spirits presented enormous opportunities for profit in the emerging capitalist economy. Increasingly focused on spirits as an easily-shipped and highly-profitable commodity with a reliable market, traders helped undermine official restrictions on alcohol.⁵⁷ Phillip Lisle, in a comprehensive analysis of the early spirit trade, found that the wholesale price was 'fairly stable' at an average of six shillings a gallon, while retail prices fluctuated considerably but were never less than one pound a gallon and sometimes as high as four or five pounds; so speculators made anywhere from 300 to 1600 per cent.⁵⁸ Even allowing for some expense in storing, decanting and selling the liquor, these were extraordinary profits. Regulation only entrenched a profitable oligopoly among the privileged elite granted access to wholesale liquor. This elite, initially made up of officers in the New South Wales Corps, gradually expanded to include anyone with capital and few

⁵³ Sydney James Butlin, *Foundations of the Australian Monetary System, 1788–1851* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968), ch. 2; John Hirst, *Freedom on the Fatal Shore: Australia's First Colony* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2008), 27–50; Stephen Nicholas, 'The Convict Labour Market', in *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past*, ed. Stephen Nicholas (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 111–26; Maxwell-Stewart and Quinlan, ch. 6.

⁵⁴ David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales ...*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell, Jr. and W. Davies, 1798), vol. 2, 202. For other examples of rum as convict wages, see: *ibid.*, vol. 1, 268; Richard Atkins, *Journal of a Voyage to Botany Bay and South America, 1791–1810*, Mitchell Library, MLMSS737, 86, 123–4; Holt, vol. 2, 91.

⁵⁵ Robert W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England, 1700–1780* (London: Hutchinson, 1981); Bob Bushaway, *By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in Britain, 1700–1880* (London: Junction Books, 1982), ch. 4.

⁵⁶ Paul E. Kopperman, '"The Cheapest Pay": Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army', *The Journal of Military History* 60, no. 3 (1996): 445–70.

⁵⁷ Phillip Lisle, 'Rum Beginnings: Towards a New Perspective of the Grose Years', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 91, no. 1 (2005): 15–28, 24–5; Hainsworth, 22–31.

⁵⁸ Lisle, 21–3. These are my translations of Lisle's more specific figures.

scruples about how they invested it.⁵⁹ The need to buy spirits, at inflated prices, to pay workers led many small farmers – former convicts or soldiers who had settled on the land – to bankruptcy, further enriching the spirit-sellers who also exploited their position by paying their servants in goods at retail value.⁶⁰

What sustained such practices was not simply a conspiracy of the so-called ‘rum corps’: it was the predictable consequence of high demand, irregular supply and regulatory restrictions. Access to wholesale spirits further enriched those with capital and permission to buy, at the expense of those without, and this process was often exaggerated by the efforts to regulate and control spirit trading. Even critics of the trade were implicated because spirits were such an integral part of the colonial economy. Despite claiming to avoid such trading as ‘unbecoming of me as Minister & beneath me as a gentleman’, Rev. Johnson purchased spirits at 4 shillings 6 pence a gallon and calculated their value at 10 shillings when paying his church builders; and in so doing, he gave his labourers an opportunity to profit for themselves since the price of spirits on the open market in 1793 fluctuated around two pounds per gallon.⁶¹ Everyone permitted to purchase spirits at wholesale prices made a substantial profit, and control over this privilege was a significant factor in the political instability that plagued the early colony. It is in this context that Marsden’s essays focus on the spirit trade as fundamentally corrupting the colonial economy.

Marsden’s essays

In order to interpret the essays, we also need to understand Marsden’s intellectual milieu and his position in the colony when he wrote them. Marsden was a scholarship student at Cambridge, and both this opportunity and his position in New South Wales were offered to him because he was championed by an important evangelical network centred on figures such as Rev. Charles Simeon and William Wilberforce. As Sharp has eloquently shown, Marsden’s evangelical training and network fundamentally shaped his worldview and political thought, inclining him to a conservative defence of hierarchical authority and order but also to more radical advocacy for a reformation of manners and morals.⁶² However, Sharp does not draw attention to the way Marsden’s background likely inclined him towards political economy.

As Hilton has argued, during the period when Marsden was formulating his views on the colonial economy, pessimistic thinkers such as Rev. Thomas Malthus and Wilberforce, reacting against the optimistic Christian utilitarianism of William Paley, drew attention to ‘natural suffering and individual depravity’ in

⁵⁹ Butlin, chs 1–3; Hainsworth, chs 1–3; Parsons.

⁶⁰ Holt, vol. 2, 96, 294–8; Atkins, *Journal*, 175, 185–6.

⁶¹ Johnson to Stonnard, 11 August 1794, in Richard Johnson, *Some Letters of Rev. Richard Johnson, B.A.: First Chaplain of New South Wales*, ed. George Mackaness (Sydney: Mackaness, 1954). See also: Atkins, *Journal*, 176–7; Johnson to Dundas, 3 September 1793, *HRNSW*, vol. 2, 66.

⁶² Sharp, 23–30, ch. 3.

what Hilton describes as a 'political economy of original sin and redemption'.⁶³ Marsden was certainly aware of and influenced by Wilberforce and while there is no evidence he had read Malthus his ideas about agriculture in New South Wales resonate with similar concerns about the problem of feeding a population. Hilton argues for important connections between 'the ideology of *laissez-faire* individualism' and a 'moderate' tradition (though not the only tradition) of evangelical thought. While such evangelical moderates wanted 'to make society operate as closely to "nature" as possible by repealing interventionist laws, so that men [could] exercise "self-help"', they were also 'paternalist in ... wishing to control the morals of the nation'.⁶⁴ Seemingly, Marsden's call for compulsory agricultural labour is a poor fit with such *laissez-faire* evangelicalism, but in the context of a penal colony, he can be understood as a kind of moralistic paternalist, calling for regulation as an expedient necessary to inculcate the industriousness needed for a functional political economy. In a society of convicted idlers, the market could not function, and the governor would have to intervene.

Importantly, Marsden's political influence was at its peak when he wrote. After the departure of Rev. Johnson in 1800, Marsden was *de facto* principal clergyman and as such one of the highest-ranking officers, a fact acknowledged by his precedence in the listed hierarchy in official documents.⁶⁵ In this period the Church of England was an arm of government and Marsden's duties reflected this.⁶⁶ He was responsible for many forms of demographic record-keeping, notably recording and aggregating births, deaths and marriages, and from 1795, he served as a magistrate, justifying this secular appointment as an opportunity to 'bring ... the inhabitants of this settlement under some proper government and subordination'.⁶⁷ More relevant here, he was regularly entrusted, by early governors, with inquiring into and reporting on colonial problems – notably the industry and idleness of the Hawkesbury settlers in 1796 – and the essays I am concerned with are informed by these official investigations.⁶⁸ He also performed the leading role in the largest regular public gathering by delivering a sabbath sermon at which attendance was notionally compulsory, and which served as a form of official propaganda, bolstering the state. For example, in an unfortunately undated sermon, he preached that men 'should

⁶³ Hilton, 3–4, 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁵ George Howe, *New South Wales Pocket Almanack and Colonial Remembrancer: For the Year of Our Lord and Saviour* (Sydney: G. Howe, 1806), 51.

⁶⁶ On the role of the Church in early NSW see: John Gascoigne, *The Enlightenment and the Origins of European Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ch. 2; Brian Fletcher, 'The Anglican Ascendancy, 1788–1835', in *Anglicanism in Australia: A History*, ed. Bruce Kaye (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002); Stephen A. Chavura, John Gascoigne and Ian Tregenza, *Reason, Religion, and the Australian Polity: A Secular State?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), ch. 2.

⁶⁷ Marsden to Rev. Atkinson, 17 September 1796, in Samuel Marsden, *The Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden 1765–1838*, ed. John Rawson Elder (Dunedin: Coulls Somerville Wilke, 1932).

⁶⁸ Sharp, 159–64; Samuel Marsden and Thomas Arndell, 'General Remarks on the District of Parramatta, 2 March 1798', *HRNSW*, vol. 3, 367–75.

be subject to principalities and powers and obey ... magistrates', and that government and its representatives were 'benefactors [from] God ... [whose office was] to do all in their power for the suppression of iniquity'.⁶⁹ Marsden wrote his essays, not merely as a concerned observer but as an active participant in, and theorist of, colonial government.

Marsden's advice for Bligh reflected this intellectual heritage and colonial influence. As noted above, Marsden argued that 'to make this colony flourish', encouraging agriculture should be the principal aim of government because only through increased agricultural production would the price of labour decline. In his telling, cheap labour was the first essential of the colonial economy; to ensure it, the colony needed to produce surplus grain, driving down the price of food and hence labour. Once bread and labour were cheap, then 'Speculations of Trade and Commerce' could begin, but until then, progress was impossible and commercial trade 'ruinous'.⁷⁰ Importantly, Marsden was not simply opposed to commerce. Rather, based on his observations about the corrupting influence of rum among the idle settlers, he wanted the trade limited and regulated until the colony was self-sufficient.

Marsden argued that the government lacked 'effectual means' to produce sufficient food, but most 'settlers' – by which Marsden meant small farmers, largely former convicts, who were settled on the land – were also unable to 'carry on Agriculture but in a feeble manner' largely due to their debts, and as a result the colony did not produce a surplus of grain to feed itself and to form the basis of a trading economy.⁷¹ Trade at inflated prices – notably for spirits – drove settlers into poverty and debt so that they were unable to afford seed or provisions for labourers. He expanded on these arguments in his draft essay on spirits, claiming that a sawyer would cut one hundred feet of timber in exchange for a 'a bottle of spirits which he can drink in a few hours ... [or] two Bushells of Wheat which would furnish Bread for him for two Months'. Since labourers preferred to be paid in rum, settlers were obliged to purchase it and were 'either ruined by the high price of Spirits or the high price of Labour'. Spirit dealers were able to buy up grain, increasing the price and leaving the colony 'distressed for want of Bread'. The enormous profits such dealers made tempted men to abandon farming and created a black market in spirits and the permits required to legally import spirits.⁷² Marsden's arguments for an agrarian economy rested on the corrupting effects of the spirit trade and not merely on his instinctive paternalism.

But the economic crisis caused by spirit trading had moral causes and consequences. The underlying cause was the endemic idleness and dishonesty of the

⁶⁹ Sermon 23 in Marsden, *Sermons*, 125–6. This theme is repeated throughout his sermons which Pettett discusses more broadly: David Pettett, 'Samuel Marsden, Blinkered Visionary: A Re-Examination of His Character and Circumstances through the Study of His Sermons' (PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 2016). See also Sharp, chs 2–3.

⁷⁰ Marsden, General remarks.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

settlers who in general 'have no honesty, no prudence, and little Industry'. Indebtedness led desperate men to prostitute their wives and daughters, resort to crime, or use 'litigation' to 'cheat and defraud every person with whom he has any Concern'. The result of such desperation was often financial ruin, with the family becoming, once again, 'a burthen upon the State'. In addition, the spirit trade 'destroys all subordination and causes the highest in authority to be disrespected'.⁷³ Since idle men could grow rich through spirit dealing, the proper relationship between rank and virtue, the hierarchical order of society, and the ties of patronage and deference that reinforced it were all undermined.

To solve these problems, Marsden argued that all colonists should be required to work in the fields:

Every Man that can plant a Cabbage or Potato should be compelled to do it. Industry should be enforced as much as possible by persuasion when it can be done, and where persuasion cannot avail compulsion must be used. No man, bond or free should be allowed to live in idleness.⁷⁴

Attacking the 'idle petty dealers and retailers' he suggested a number of practical means to compel them to work; convicts should only be assigned to work on farms, and ticket-of-leave holders should be required to live in agricultural districts and report their employment to the local magistrate who should ensure they were working productively. The state should also guarantee a 'just price' for grain and purchase it 'from the industrious Settler in the first instance', because profits on agriculture were 'the Farmer's right' but were swallowed up by speculative traders. Even beyond this, the governor should oversee agriculture, ensuring farmers 'cultivate their Lands and take care of their Crops'. He should 'discourage all litigation', 'reduce the number of Petty Dealers', restrict the assignment of convicts to agricultural labour, and find 'some means of Employment ... for the abandoned women'.⁷⁵ Thus Marsden set out a moral and paternalistic vision of convict society with compulsory agricultural labour to encourage a work ethic, and the privileging of 'industrious' agriculture over 'idle' trade through fixed prices and preferential access to convict labourers. But this was not simply a nostalgic call for a moral over a political economy. Rather, Marsden made a series of highly contextual arguments for delaying free trade until the colony was more firmly established, self-sufficient in food produced by an industrious workforce no longer obsessed with spirits. In Hilton's terms, Marsden was a moderate evangelical. He believed in a free market but only among moral and industrious economic agents.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Re. litigation in the early colony, see Bruce Kercher, *Debt, Seduction and Other Disasters: The Birth of Civil Law in Convict New South Wales* (Sydney: Federation Press, 1996). Marsden's (under-developed) point seems to be that in the hands of idle convicts and ex-convicts, law was politically subversive.

Though space does not permit a full analysis of them here, this moral and political economy was also at stake in the three Mitchell essays Marsden wrote during the voyage to England. In the second draft of the essay on the spirit trade, he built upon his economic argument about the relationship of moral reform and economics. Marsden expressed his opposition also to Catholicism because he considered it to undermine deference to state authority; he argued that in its absence 'the common People will ... in Time become attached to the Government', united as members of a confessional state, in which 'Industry would succeed Idleness' and 'The Colony would Prosper'.⁷⁶ His concern for the situation of female convicts was driven by the way that he considered them to encourage idleness and crime among their 'infatuated Admirers' where, in contrast, 'the Marriage Bond would oblige a man to provide' and give his wife 'a legal Claim to share in the Fruits of their mutual Labor'.⁷⁷ The core of all of his essays was a politicised view of how the economy of a convict colony should function to inculcate industriousness.

In what ways did Marsden's essays impact upon colonial policy? We know that he made related arguments to a series of prominent officials and patrons during his visit to England in 1807–09.⁷⁸ We know also that, during his brief term as governor, Bligh implemented many of Marsden's specific proposals, for example banning the use of spirits in barter, especially for grain.⁷⁹ Marsden's economic analysis was echoed also in a series of petitions by groups of Hawkesbury settlers supporting Governor Bligh in the wake of the rum rebellion. Fletcher shows that perhaps as many as three-quarters of the Hawkesbury settlers signed one of these petitions and that they represented a wide cross-section of those farming the region, including emancipist small-holders, and wealthier emancipists and free settlers.⁸⁰ The most relevant of these petitions was a protest against the rum rebellion, sent to Viscount Castlereagh at the Colonial Office by a group of twenty-five free and emancipist farmers, among the most respectable and prominent men in the district, in November 1808. Praising Bligh's 'most salutary [*sic*] orders [which] put a stop to the bartering of spirits, and the strolling [*sic*] dealers ... suppressing extortion', they argued that:

these and similar regulations were of the greatest service to the industrious, whilst they struck at the vitals of that monopoly and extortion which had so long reign'd in the colony, by which many of the officers and leading men had enriched [*sic*] themselves to the ruin of the inhabitants in general.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Marsden, *Essays*, 12, 21.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 26, 28–30.

⁷⁸ Sharp, ch. 13.

⁷⁹ General Order, 14 February 1807, *HRNSW*, vol. 6, 253–4.

⁸⁰ Brian H. Fletcher, 'The Hawkesbury Settlers and the Rum Rebellion', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 54, no. 3 (September 1968): 217–37, 228.

⁸¹ Settlers Petition, 4 November 1808, *HRNSW*, vol. 6, 802–4.

Like Marsden they explicitly connected this interpretation to colonial agriculture and the wider political economy, claiming that under military government, the officers were 'monopolizing the labouring men ... for various other purposes than agriculture, which must, in the end, be the total ruin of the colony'.⁸²

Maxwell-Stewart and Quinlan attribute the flourishing of convictism to the recommendations of Commissioner Bigge and the subsequent tightening of the convict system during the 1820s. In their account, the expansion of the system of penal stations and female factories was designed to remove the idle and disorderly of both sexes from the community in a '[finely] calibrated system that balanced the paternalism of the country estate with the pain of penal labour'.⁸³ Notably, Marsden advocated for a similar system in his extensive correspondence and interaction with Bigge, suggesting that enforced agricultural labour would 'correct [convicts'] idle vagrant thievish habits' and make them 'more likely to return to the regular habits of industry and honesty'.⁸⁴ Furthermore, while there is no evidence that Governor Macquarie read Marsden's essays, their feud in the 1810s also centred on Marsden's claim that the colony failed to reform convicts and make them industrious.⁸⁵ Thus a case can be made that Marsden's essays spoke to a range of views about the colonial economy, including the importance of agriculture and the problem of spirit-trading. While this does not make Marsden the originator of convictism, his distinctive arguments for redemptive agricultural labour illustrate the close connection between moral and political economy in the context of a penal colony.

Finally, although Marsden avoided saying so, his own economic interests as a substantial landowner were implicated in his argument, because the larger the pool of agricultural labour, the easier and cheaper it would be to employ them.⁸⁶ But he was not simply self-interested. As Jan White has shown, Marsden's own assigned convicts were disproportionately from agricultural backgrounds and had skills that were useful to their master on his extensive lands.⁸⁷ White describes Marsden as 'an able master' who 'presented his convicts with great opportunities to succeed if they had the will and endeavour to grasp

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Maxwell-Stewart and Quinlan, 69. See also Raymond Evans, '19 June 1822: Creating "an Object of Real Terror": The Tabling of the First Bigge Report', in *Turning Points in Australian History*, ed. Martin Crotty and David Roberts (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 48–61.

⁸⁴ Marsden to Bigge, 31 January 1820, cited in Lake, 'Spiritual Acres', 162–3. See also Ritchie, 188–9, 197, 203.

⁸⁵ Sharp, ch. 19. Marsden's critique of Macquarie is summarised in Samuel Marsden, *An Answer to Certain Calumnies ...* (London: J. Hatchard & Son, 1826).

⁸⁶ John Harris makes a related argument, suggesting Marsden's wealth depended on cheap convict labour and that he followed 'a kind of "prosperity doctrine"' enriching himself at the expense of his ministry to the convicts, but I find this a little anachronistic. Marsden's moral economy required a class of paternalist masters to redeem their convict servants, and I agree with Sharp that his acquisition of land was not motivated by greed. See John Harris, *Judging the Macquaries: Injustice and Mercy in Colonial Australia* (Sydney: Acorn Press, 2020), 120–1; Sharp, ch. 27.

⁸⁷ Jan White, 'A Master and His Men: A Different Perspective on the Reverend Samuel Marsden in New South Wales from 1794 to 1838' (MA thesis, University of New England, 1994), 34–5.

them'.⁸⁸ Similarly Lake argues that his agricultural endeavours were 'fundamentally connected to his religious vision for colonial society'.⁸⁹ As a master, Marsden lived up to the ideal of his essays, presenting convicts with a real opportunity to reform themselves through agricultural labour, while condemning and punishing signs of idleness.

Marsden's essays were a call for a more moral economy that centred on the cultivation of convicts' industriousness. They advocated for a pre-market economy, controlled by the governor, to produce this moral end. Specifically, Marsden urged that the idle spirit trade and its many harmful consequences should be prohibited, and agricultural labour enforced, resulting in an orderly community of deferential convict labourers, emancipist small-holders, and paternal masters. It was equally the case, however, that the arguments and language of the nascent political economy that relied upon the ongoing supply of convict labour (rather prioritising the creation of free labour through convict reform) already lurked within his analysis. He implicitly conceived of convicts as a labour force and framed his arguments for agriculture in terms of 'national wealth' and reducing the 'price of labour'.⁹⁰ Industriousness was itself a commodity – the productive capacity of unfree labour – that would become central to the future political economy of the colony, and of the convictism upon which it continued to depend.

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⁸⁸ Ibid., 107.

⁸⁹ Lake, 'Samuel Marsden', 57.7.

⁹⁰ Marsden, General remarks.