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Between empire, periphery, and the United States of America: The local and international origins of the Melbourne Social Survey (1941–1943)

This article sets out to test competing characterisations of early Australian social research through an explication of the origins of Australia's first major social survey, the Melbourne Social Survey (1941–1943), and its historical retelling. It asks to what extent international social survey models, figures, intellectual approaches and finances shaped the survey, and what this reveals about the degree to which early Australian social research was defined by its position of global marginality. This article finds that histories of the survey have overestimated the influence of British survey models and intellectual traditions by paying disproportionate attention to its director from 1941, Wilfred Prest. It argues that a much more powerful inspiration for the social survey, and a new social research direction at Melbourne, can be seen in a trip to the United States of America taken by University of Melbourne Dean of Commerce, Douglas Copland, in 1926 and 1927. Planners of the Melbourne Social Survey were sure it would be 'of major social significance'. Today, the story of the survey and its historical representation illuminates shifting forces that shaped early Australian social research, and contributes to ongoing debate about the way twentieth-century social science knowledge has been circulated globally.

Social research; social survey; economics; universities; Melbourne; Australia

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This work was supported by the Australian Research Council (grant number DE140101564) and by a Monash University Advancing Women's Research Success grant.

Warm thanks to Stuart Macintyre and Tamson Pietsch for their comments and support and to three anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

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Over the past two decades, the history of Australian social science – its origins, obstacles and institutional emergence – has been recast in ways consistent with the broader transnational turn in historical scholarship. If national boundaries were always porous, what sense is there in telling a story that privileges them? Histories focussing on struggle, infighting and exodus in Australian social science have been replaced by accounts emphasising the circulatory nature of ideas, technologies, careers and networks within the British world and how they acted as empire's 'oxygenating flow', according to Timothy Livsey's metaphor. In particular, scholars have questioned the precision and usefulness of categories such as 'centre' and 'periphery' when discussing universities, disciplines and academic figures within the British imperial 'umbrella'. Tamson Pietsch has argued that it is more helpful to imagine 'lateral traffic', and 'lumps' of power determined by constantly shifting, sometimes dense, sometimes diffuse interpersonal, institutional and international relations – lumps that are by no means predictable or organisable into patterns. Similarly, Geoffrey Sherrington and Julia Horne observe 'continuous engagement' between the imperial centre and various settler locations in the history of academic institutions. Strident power relations and clear hierarchies of influence established in Oxbridge and moving outwards, across the empire, are less visible to them.[1]

[1] Timothy Livsey, "Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World, 1850–1939, by Tamson Pietsch," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42, no. 4 (2014): 773–75; Tamson Pietsch, *Empires of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World, 1850–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 3–7; Geoffrey Sherington and Julia Horne, "Empire, state and public purpose in the founding of universities and colleges in the Antipodes," *History of Education Review* 39, no. 2 (2010): 36–51.

These histories build on Alan Lester's conceptualisation of unbounded and interconnected space within the British empire. Place gains character, within Lester's topography, from the 'specific juxtapositions of multiple trajectories' that occur within them. Examples of trajectories include 'proselytization, humanitarianism, settler capitalism'. Lester concedes that some of these trajectories may be stronger than others, especially if they originated in Britain, yet he envisions constant, inevitable (one is tempted to read self-correcting) movement; the strength of any one trajectory will only ever be 'for a while'. In the work of Lester, Pietsch, Sherrington and Horne, there is an emphasis on individual biographies since only this focussed approach reveals the strength of feeling, agency, intricacy of relation and interaction that has shaped institutional disciplines such as social science.[2]

At the same time as this school of thinking about imperial interconnection carries momentum, two of Australia's most eminent scholars, historian Stuart Macintyre and sociologist Raewyn Connell, have provided accounts of Australian social science which appear to ignore, work against or even actively counter that project. For both scholars, in different ways, the story of Australian social science cannot be told without acknowledging the considerable implications of the national boundary, even if, by their rendering, it always functioned simply as an imperial or material category. For Connell, Australian social science is a 'story about colonial and post-colonial intellectuals, in a setting that was created by settler colonialism and continues to be structured by marginality in global economic and cultural networks'. She argues that it is 'an absolute requirement' of any attempt to understand the history of social investigation in Australia

[2] Alan Lester, "Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire," *History Compass* 4, no. 1 (2006): 135.

that the relationship between centre and periphery is made explicit, for that relationship reflects the relegation and erasure of intellectual endeavour in the colonised world that is too often overlooked. Without acknowledging this dynamic, one is bound to fall into the trap of believing that Australian social science has suffered by accident or inherent inferiority.[3] For Macintyre, the story of Australian social science is a national one because it has been decisively shaped by state and federal governments' persistently utilitarian approach to universities and research. Even in the wake of the Second World War, when increased government support enabled social science to secure an institutional footing and expand rapidly, the field continued to endure 'an unrequited instrumentalism'. Macintyre's history of neglect and division is shaped not so much by the cultural and intellectual subordination Australia has experienced as a settler resource colony, but by the material exigencies that follow from it being one.[4]

This article responds to the conceptual insights of all these scholars by presenting an updated history of the Melbourne Social Survey (1941–43), a pioneering piece of Australian social research, together with an analysis of its historiography, published during the last four decades (1980 to today). Conducted by the Faculty of Commerce at the University of Melbourne, the Melbourne Social Survey was the first university-led social survey of an Australian city, and resulted in one in seven Melburnian households being quizzed about income, housing conditions, family structure, transport, work preferences, and more. A smaller but still sizable number of households were asked what

[3] R.W. Connell, "Australia and World Sociology," in *Histories of Australian Sociology*, eds, John Germov and Tara Renae McGee (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005): 4–23.

[4] Stuart Macintyre, *The Poor Relation: A History of Social Sciences in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010).

they thought about the government's response to war. Unlike earlier surveys conducted in Australia, the Melbourne Social Survey was not confined to questions addressing poverty or housing shortages. Rather, its designers sought to capture the city as a whole in the manner of comprehensive social surveys undertaken in Britain, North America and Europe.[5]

To what extent, we ask in this article, do both the origins of the survey, and subsequent accounts of these origins, substantiate Connell's claim that 'in the intellectual world as on the capital market there is a periphery and a metropole', and that interactions between them take place on terms that reflect a pattern of inequality? Do these episodes indicate that the material conditions of Australian social science have shaped it fundamentally? Or are there ways in which these episodes challenge Connell and Macintyre's schemas and suggest a more fluid, unpredictable exchange between social science in Australia and the British umbrella, or even beyond? Does a history that pays attention to social and professional networks and individual biographies reveal more nuanced transnational interactions? Furthermore, does this story reveal the existence of a new form of 'international mindedness', extending beyond the British empire, that scholars have in recent times argued characterised Australian researchers in the interwar period?[6]

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5 Charlotte Greenhalgh, "Social Surveys," in *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century History*, 2nd edn, eds, Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann, (London: Routledge, 2020): 117–37.

6 Kate Darian-Smith and James Waghorne, "Australian Universities, Expertise and Internationalism After World War I", *Journal of Australian Studies* 43, no. 4 (2019): 412–28.

Some issues can be resolved relatively simply. There is no question in our minds, after years of reading the voluminous archives associated with the Melbourne Social Survey, that interactions – of an interpersonal, intellectual and practical nature – between researchers in Australia and Britain and the United States of America were both manifold and crucial to it. These interactions were to some extent acknowledged by historians writing at least four decades later, but not substantially, precisely, or in ways that were sufficiently contextualised by international developments. Equally, we have come to see that the survey was shaped by the interests of a commonwealth wartime government to a greater extent than has been acknowledged. In this sense, the survey was the product of conditions that were unique to Australia as conflict spread into the Pacific.[7] But even when this is taken into account, the long prehistory of the survey – the beginning of which we mark as 1926 – as well at its historiographical aftermath, cannot be adequately explained without recourse to boundary-hopping transactions.

The structure of this article reflects the most pressing questions that have arisen from our research into the Melbourne Social Survey, its historiography, and the challenges presented by recent accounts of Australian social science. First, we draw on biographical research and archival material that has never been used in connection with the survey to give a largely chronological account of the motivations, intellectual traditions, philanthropic interventions, international developments, local research activity, institutional structures, funding appeals, figures and networks that combined to bring about the Melbourne Social Survey. We build the case that the formative role of Faculty

[7] Georgina Arnott and Charlotte Greenhalgh, "The Survey and the State: Governments and Early Social Research in New Zealand and Australia, 1930s–40s," *Australian Historical Studies*, forthcoming 51, no. 4, 2020.

of Commerce dean Douglas Copland and innovative US social research models on the survey has never adequately been recognised by historians. In so doing, we offer a fresh set of local and international perspectives on this path-setting project and newly locate its origins in the 1920s amid a complex set of personal, intellectual and financial relationships that spanned Melbourne, Canberra and the United States. Second, we canvass historical accounts of the survey, noting the way they foreground the 1938 appointment of British economist Wilfred Prest as survey director and credit him with initiating, developing and executing Australia's first major social survey according to a British tradition of social research. Finally, we ask what all this reveals about the history and historiography of Australian social science in light of ongoing debates about it.

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Which year you mark as the beginning of the Melbourne Social Survey determines how you see its role in Australian social science. There are good reasons for nominating 1926. This was when Douglas Copland, Dean of the Faculty of Commerce at the University of Melbourne, went on a nine-month social science fact-finding tour across North America, Britain and Europe, coming face-to-face with what he believed was the future of social science. He hoped to point Australia in its direction. Along the way he kept Prime Minister Stanley Bruce abreast of developments and wrote frequently to colleague Gordon Wood, telling him: 'no doubt I shall have a plan on my return'.[8]

[8] Douglas Copland in Helen Bourke, "Social Scientists as Intellectuals: From the First World War to the Depression," in *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, eds, Brian Head and James Walter (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), 58.

That plan, a blueprint for Australian social science, was disseminated by the university's new publisher as *Studies in Economics and Social Science* (1927).[9] Copland scrutinized a wide variety of social science projects, programs, schools and institutes, yet his eye was repeatedly drawn to forms of quantitative research being developed in the United States and their capacity to make more efficient business and government administration. Copland understood something that historians have since agreed on: the 1920s was a fork-in-the-road moment for social sciences in the United States. If these disciplines could successfully emerge from their reformist origins and take their rightful place alongside the natural sciences, Copland believed, their potential was enormous. It was not the first time Australian social scientists had looked beyond Britain for intellectual leadership.[10]

An analogous transformation of the social survey – a key tool of social investigation – took longer to arrive and yet its origins can be seen in the innovative surveying work undertaken by Charles Merriam at the University of Chicago during the early decades of the twentieth century. By the time Copland met Merriam on his tour, at a social sciences conference in Chicago, Copland 'fully appreciated the opportunity', writes Copland's biographer, Marjorie Harper. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, Merriam helped transform the social survey from a reformist tool focussed on poverty that incorporated close observation and expert theorisation, to a modern instrument of 'objective'

[9] Douglas Copland, *Studies in Economics and Social Science* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1927).

[10] Copland, *Studies*, 57, 15; Mark C. Smith, *Social Science in the Crucible: The American Debate over Objectivity and Purpose, 1918–1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Donald Fisher, *Fundamental Development of the Social Sciences: Rockefeller philanthropy and United States Social Science Research Council* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Martin Bulmer, "Quantification and Chicago School Science in the 1920s: A Neglected Tradition," *Journal of the History of Behavioural Sciences* 17 (1981): 312–331; Bourke, 48–51.

investigation that employed questionnaires, the training of interviewers, random sampling, attitude testing, coded data, cross tabulations, Hollerith machines, statistics and other forms of refined measurement, and that could be hired by government, organisations and businesses for a cost. In *Studies in Economics and Social Science*, Copland introduced the social survey with inverted commas ('the social survey'), conscious of its novelty in Australia, where it had not been used to describe any large-scale investigation to date. He noted the social survey's lineage in Charles Booth's famous London studies, but used Merriam's words to evince the value of its objective observation, accurate measurements, and careful analysis and comparison.[11]

Copland's enthusiastic response to America, Merriam and the quantitative research methods embodied by the new social survey had a significant biographical context. As scholars of intellectual movements and institutions have shown, such contexts can illuminate the relative receptivity of key figures to new ideas, as well as their complex personal ties, and therefore something of the way intellectual change happens. Thirty-two years before his social science tour, Copland was born on a farm in South Canterbury, New Zealand. Copland finished his schooling because an allergy to horsehair kept him from farming, and as a child he became fascinated by *the idea* of America, writes Harper.[12] A 'competent' student, he settled on becoming a mathematics teacher until he encountered Canterbury College's George Pitcaithly and James Hight. Hight was convinced that quantitative economics would transform what he called the new resource

[11] Bulmer, "Quantification"; Marjorie Harper, *Douglas Copland: Scholar, Economist, Diplomat* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2013), 86; Barry D. Karl, *Charles E. Merriam and the Study of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Smith, 84–103; Merriam in Copland, 51.

[12] Harper, *Copland*, 13.

rich countries. His studies of land utilisation echoed those undertaken by American social scientists of the period and the work of Samuel Wadham at the University of Melbourne, undertaken with Copland's support in the 1930s.[13] Under Hight's tutelage Copland soared, writing a first-class honours thesis on the New Zealand wheat industry and becoming an agricultural statistician at the Census and Statistics Office in Wellington. Hight's connections facilitated Copland's appointment to the University of Tasmania in 1917, which proved a springboard for his next appointment as foundation Chair of Commerce at the University of Melbourne in 1925. Copland was the first professor of that university who had neither come from nor visited Britain. Twenty years later, an officer of 'one of the great American foundations' was reported to have said that he and his associates had noticed the 'unmistakable mark' of Hight's former students at the League of Nations and the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR). Copland's early life demonstrates the considerable movement—across geographic, intellectual and cultural distances—that the British empire sometimes made possible. The United States, informally connected to this empire, figured in Copland's imagination as leading the New World away from poverty, conflict and special-interest politics towards rational planning, sophisticated forms of measurement and, ultimately, economic strength.[14]

During 1926 and 1927, Copland travelled from the global periphery to 'the heart of the world', where he was given 'an insider's view' of its workings and returned with increased power.[15] This is how Copland conceived of the tour, what he had strived towards, and

[13] Harper, *Copland*, 16; S.M. Wadham and G.L. Wood, *Land Utilization in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1939).

[14] Harper, *Copland*, 10–62, 34

[15] Harper, *Copland*, 88, 85, 78, 91.

what those who enabled it planned, even if they did not use terms such as 'centre' and 'periphery'. The trip was hosted by the New York-based Rockefeller Foundation's Laura Spelman Memorial Fund (LSMF), which in 1925 had chosen Copland to become its first Australasian advisor for a travelling fellowship program. The LSMF would pay for fellows to study in America before returning to teach, a program that made numerous academic careers.[16] It decided that 'some one man' in Australia should make fellow recommendations according to a shared understanding of social research and a comprehensive knowledge of research, scholars and centres that the LSMF funded in North America, Britain and Europe.

When it chose Copland, the LSMF was mindful of his responsiveness to commerce and industry groups in Hobart and Melbourne when he had established faculties of commerce in those cities. Under Copland, these faculties were characterised by their strong association with such groups, reflected in the introduction of accountancy industry membership for Melbourne university graduates and the holding of evening classes to accommodate Hobart businessmen. The LSMF also perhaps knew of Copland's association with a group of mining executives sympathetic to the Rockefeller approach. Harper concludes that Copland's experience and associations 'fitted him for inclusion in the Memorial network'.[17] On the tour, he met with everyone from Herbert Hoover, the United States Secretary of Commerce and future President, to Wesley Marshall, arguably America's most influential twentieth-century economist and a

[16] Alex Millmow, "Australian Economists at Cambridge during the 1930s," *History of Economics Review* 61, no.1 (2015): 44–56.

[17] Millmow, "Australian Economists," 44; Harper, "Economics Before"; Harper, *Copland*, 42, 49, 81–82, 110.

proponent of quantitative economics. The LSMF 'took care to ensure coherence' on the tour, writes Harper, preparing Copland for a meeting with Merriam, for instance, by first introducing him to scholars undertaking similar work, much of which they funded. 'Travelling usually by overnight train, breakfasting, lunching and dining with people connected with the Memorial', Copland met with heads of universities, colleges, faculties, government departments, institutes, as well as the most senior of scholars. He acquired, writes economic historian Alex Millmow, 'an enviable network of contacts'.[18]

Copland returned to Australia with knowledge of new quantitative research methods, such as the social survey, and the mechanics that enabled these, such as degree courses in statistics, research institutes, laboratories and equipment. Perhaps more significantly for the Melbourne Social Survey, now budding in his mind, he returned with a sense of how these activities fitted within a new relationship that was developing between social research, industry, private philanthropy and government in the United States under the banner of science and objectivity. Merriam and LSMF director from 1922, Beardsley Ruml, were its chief architects.[19] Merriam contended that, like the natural sciences, objective social investigation produced consensus and would, if properly supported, eventually expunge politics.[20] (The claim that the natural sciences could produce consensus was a hallmark of American science of this period.) Unlike reform-driven and 'speculative' social investigation, Ruml argued that 'actual investigations and experimentation' could produce concrete solutions. Together Ruml and Merriam designed, and the LSMF funded, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) to

[18] Smith, 49–51; Harper, *Copland*, 86, 83; Millmow, "Australian Economists," 45.

[19] Fisher, 27, 45, 33–35.

[20] Charles Edward Merriam, *New Aspects of Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1925), v.

encourage the 'spread of cooperative scientific research that would attack "real" social problems'. This was principally investigation to enhance government administration and business efficiency.[21]

It was a model that Merriam had refined at Chicago, after establishing the Local Community Research Committee (LCRC) to undertake social research on topics chosen by administrators and business and industry leaders, paid in part by the LSMF. The scale on which LSMF-funded research took place in the northern hemisphere during this period is hard to overestimate. Projects at the Brookings Institute, the University of Stockholm, the London School of Economics and dozens more major institutions drew on the LSMF social science vision and attracted its finance. In 1925 Merriam attested to the 'swift reorganization of intellectual equipment and methods' that was 'revolutionizing the world'.[22] At the same time, path-breaking African American researchers such as W.E.B. du Bois researched and published behind 'the colour line' that continued to exist long after the end of formal segregation and which excluded them from such networks.[23]

In the United States, the quantitative shift in social science strengthened its credibility among private funders, philanthropists, universities and governments, while ushering in – some say *by* ushering in – a more managerial, administrative and compliant form of

[21] Fisher, 27 and appendix 2.

[22] Smith, 97; Merriam, v.

[23] Jonathan Scott Holloway and Ben Keppel, *Black Scholars on the Line: Race, Social Science, and American Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 17; Aldon D. Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015).

social investigation.[24] Jean Converse argues that among the most notable features of the transformation of the social survey during this period was its reorganisation of personnel. Whereas early-century surveys drew heavily on already-published material and small data sets – the largest among them relying on the labour of community volunteers or welfare and local authority workers – the enormous surveys rolled out during the Second World War, and being advanced by Merriam and the LSMF earlier, demanded 'armies' of trained investigators and coding staff. At the same time, there was an elevation of the survey director, whose claims about the survey were henceforth given singular weight. In this transformation, Converse sees an appeal to the pyramid-style of management embraced by business and industry, whose funds survey planners sought to attract. Merriam cultivated industry bodies and funders – *assiduously*, writes Mark Smith – in part by taking on the characteristics they valued. Described as a 'technocrat', an 'academic entrepreneur', even a 'baron', Merriam used big-picture language and metaphors to elucidate the grand potential of social research while making it known that it would not challenge the economic status quo; that the transformation of social investigation was geared towards 'better understanding', not reformism.[25]

Back in Australia, where social investigation was struggling to secure an institutional footing and plagued by conflict among its proponents as to which disciplines should be taught at universities, Copland championed a model of social science forged by Merriam,

[24] Martin Bulmer and Joan Bulmer, "Philanthropy and Social Science in the 1920s: Beardsley Ruml and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, 1922–29," *Minerva*, 19, no. 3 (1981): 347–407; Fisher, preface and 8.

[25] Jean M. Converse, *Survey Research in the United States: Roots and Emergence 1890–1960* (London: Routledge, 2017), 244–261; Smith, 97–98.

Ruml and the fund that had underwritten his trip.[26] He sought to decouple the field from its reformist origins, emphasise its scientific credentials and spruik its value as objective investigation to governments and industry. These efforts cannot be put down to the American influence alone. Even in Tasmania Copland had worked hard to attract the support of such bodies. His interest in quantification was long-held and deeply rooted in his own intellectual capacities as a mathematician, as well as the needs of a primary-producing economy. Yet his encounters with the United States offered him a conceptual framework, language and set of practices. The way he presented himself, and was remembered by others, bore striking resemblance to Merriam. Helen Bourke, in her valuable account of early Australian social science, termed Copland its 'entrepreneur' and 'an exponent to business and governments of the scientific accuracy of his discipline'. Merriam's *New Aspects of Politics* (1925), rightly described as a manifesto, was one of three books that Copland recommended in *Studies in Social Sciences* (1927). Copland drew on its lines of argument and leaned heavily on the rhetorical power of the same words: quantification, statistics, objectivity, data and, foremost among them, science. The LSMF trip Copland described as a form of 'data' collection.[27]

Copland was not the first to attempt to strengthen Australian social investigation by aligning it with developments in the United States or quantitative approaches, or even in seeking to attract funding from philanthropists. But a combination of forces – timing,

[26] Social science and its disciplinary subsets were only established in Australian universities from the 1930s onwards, partly as a result of Copland's efforts. Anthropology, the exception, was established earlier. Adolphus Peter Elkin, "The Need for Sociological Research in Australia," (1943) in *Histories of Australian Sociology*, eds, John Germov and Tara Renae McGee (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005): 89–100; Connell, 4–9; Burke, 48–54.

[27] Burke, 53–58.

principally – meant that his impact at the University of Melbourne was considerable.[28] Responding to local conditions, Copland separated out economics in *Studies in Economics and Social Science*, most notably in his title, believing that locally it was closer to achieving scientific status and that Australian economists would soon 'speak with the same authority as the pure scientist'.[29] Yet economics as Copland conceived it was a broad science; all social problems should first be analysed economically, a conviction that underpinned economic research at Melbourne in these decades. Within a year, the university introduced an honours stream and research Chair, both in Economics, developments that were crucial to the Melbourne Social Survey. Copland knew that economics, in its refined sense, was increasingly on the minds of Australian governments. During the 1920s they more actively consulted economists and would, in the final years of that decade, call on him to establish the Premiers' Plan. This plan, which controversially recommended a twenty per cent cut to wages and the bolstering of business confidence through no new property taxes, represented one of the first instances of an economist shaping public policy in Australia. The privileging of economics was a shot across the bow to a number of social science advocates who had argued for the centrality of sociology, the scientific basis of which Copland doubted.[30]

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[28] Economist Robert Irvine toured North American universities before writing *The Place of the Social Sciences in a Modern University* (1914), in which he championed 'scientific investigation of social progress'. Burke, 48–50; Elkin, 91–92.

[29] Copland, *Studies*, 66. Yves Rees, "From Socialists to Technocrats: The Depoliticisation of Australian Economics," *Australian Historical Studies*, 50, no. 4 (2019): 463–82.

[30] Burke 58, 56, 60; Alex Millmow, "Douglas Copland and the Aftershocks of the Premiers' Plan, 1931–1938," *History of Economics Review* 53, no. 1 (2011): 25–43; Peter Groenewegen and Brian McFarlane, *A History of Australian Economic Thought* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011): 127; Sol Encel, "Sociology: Some Notes

The origins of the Melbourne Social Survey can be seen in the projects that Copland elevated in *Studies in Economics and Social Science*. He applauded those that got out of the library and into direct touch with industry and government; that undertook extensive primary investigations to *service* such bodies; and that drew on private endowment to support the gathering of large data sets. Copland canvassed a number of American organisations, dwelling on the objectives of the SSRC, American research institutes that were undertaking urban social surveys as well as those examining the problems of public administration and 'land economics'. He made special mention of the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), which undertook 'exact and impartial investigations in the field of economic, social and industrial science, and to this end to co-operate with governments, universities, learned societies and individuals'. The NBER, headed by Wesley Mitchell, received numerous grants from the LSMF throughout the 1920s. That the NBER had conducted research into the most divisive of topics – income distribution – and received wide-ranging support for its conclusions demonstrated, to Copland, 'the fact that when quantitative study in the field of economics is conducted on scientific lines, it may meet with the same measure of approval as similar work in other sciences'. Like Merriam, he held that politics could be eradicated by social research. Australia, he argued, might start by building facilities and projects that would allow for 'extensive statistical investigation', for this was 'one of the most pressing needs' in the country. Copland returned determined to deepen statistical knowledge about Australia.[31]

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on the Early Years," in *Histories of Australian Sociology*, eds, John Germov and Tara Renae McGee (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005): 43–48.

[31] Copland, *Studies*, 49–59; Fisher, 12, 37–45.

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Then again, you might peg the starting year of the Melbourne Social Survey at 1937. A speech Copland gave that year pitching the survey reflected almost a decade of dedicated statistical and surveying groundwork within the Faculty of Commerce. Some of this activity was funded by the LSMF; much of it was informed by the social research that Copland had observed during his LSMF trip. Copland's 1937 speech took place in Cambridge, England, to an audience that included the thirty-two-year-old Wilfred Prest, assistant lecturer in Economics at the University of St Andrews. Though nobody knew it then, Prest would be remembered as the director of the Melbourne Social Survey and the fact that he was from York, the city of Seebohm Rowntree's 1899 survey, would be treated with significance.[32]

Throughout the 1930s much time was spent in and around the newly created honours school of economics developing statistical and survey methods, measuring a range of social problems, and creating a pool of expertise and enthusiasm for a much larger social survey of the city. This activity built on the extensive groundwork already undertaken by Australia's colonial 'statists', whose work had been integral to the enactment of a relatively instrumentalist approach by Australian governments to their economies.[33] Overseeing the Melbourne school's research was former Tasmanian statistician, acting

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[32] Marjorie Harper, "Economics Before the Department: 1855–1944," in *Balanced Growth: A History of the Department of Economics, University of Melbourne*, ed., Ross Williams (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2009): 31; Harper, *Copland*, 110; Burton, Herbert, oral interview by I. Hamilton, 1982, the National Library of Australia, http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-215205431; Graeme Davison and John Lack, "Planning the New Social Order: the Melbourne University Social Survey, 1941–3," *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 17, no. 1 (1981): 36.

[33] Groenewegen and McFarlane, 92–107.

commonwealth statistician and first Ritchie Chair of Economics, Lyndhurst Giblin, who held that 'the civilisation of a country may be judged from its statistics'. For Copland, Giblin's appointment in 1928 elevated quantitative research within the faculty. It was not long before the idea of a social survey of Melbourne drew the faculty together. Notes taken in 1934 by Giblin's associate, Richard Downing, indicated to Downing's biographer, Nicholas Brown, a 'growing desire in and around the 'Melbourne School' to establish a social survey in the Booth tradition'. Teaching statistical method, Giblin supervised numerous research projects aimed at measuring aspects of social life including poverty, housing, consumption and nutrition. Copland's 'star pupil', Jean Polgalze, the first of a number of high-achieving students to receive a LSMF travelling fellowship, undertook a statistical study of business cycles before returning to Melbourne to teach statistics, and in 1936 Downing published an analysis of the 1933 census. In the coming years Downing and Polglaze would help design and manage the Melbourne Social Survey.[34]

By late 1936, the commerce faculty had devised the idea of a comprehensive social survey of Melbourne and Copland returned to the northern hemisphere on his third Rockefeller-funded trip. At Harvard University, Copland was one of three guests, alongside Wesley Mitchell, invited to celebrate its tercentenary celebrations with an address. Copland was given an honorary doctorate and described as a 'scholar hailed throughout the world'. After hearing Copland's address, 'The State and the

[34] Richard Downing, "Giblin as Ritchie Professor," in *Giblin, the Scholar and the Man*, ed., Douglas Copland (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1960): 39–48; Giblin in William Coleman, Selwyn Cornish and Alf Hagger, *Giblin's Platoon: the Trials and Triumph of the Economist in Australian Public Life* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2006), front matter; Copland, *Giblin*, 4; Nicholas Brown, *Richard Downing: Economics, Advocacy and Social Reform in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 46–48.

Entrepreneur', Charles Merriam invited Copland to participate in a 1938 conference held by the National Resources Board.[35]

Meanwhile, Gordon Wood assumed temporary control of the Melbourne faculty. He was a keen ally of the Rockefeller-funded IPR, which had supported Wood's two geological and statistical surveys, *The Peopling of Australia* (1930) and *The Pacific Basin* (1930). These books were published in the same year, remarkably, as *Borrowing and Business in Australia* (1930), the product of Wood's own Rockefeller fellowship. In 1932 Wood began collaborating with agricultural scientist Samuel Wadham, which would result in *Land Utilization in Australia* (1939) and, eventually, plans to extend the faculty's social survey into rural Victoria, with Wadham overseeing this part. In 1936, Gordon wrote to Vice-Chancellor John Medley, telling him that he was 'personally very interested' in finally commencing a large survey of Melbourne: 'I feel strongly that the time has come to undertake an industrial survey of Melbourne with all its implications, geographical, economic and social'. A subsequent proposal, entitled Social Survey of Melbourne, confirmed that 1936 was the year when 'it was becoming clear that an authoritative survey of social conditions in Australia was an urgent necessity'. The University of Liverpool's 1934 social survey of Merseyside, also funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, provided a methodological model.[36] In March 1941 Wood would tell Medley that they intended the survey to be 'largely modelled' on the Merseyside survey. That survey had put an emphasis on facts and figures and been careful not to draw conclusions or offer

[35] Harper, *Copland*, 198, 203.

[36] Gordon Wood to John Medley, 20 October 1936; "Allocation of Special Research Fund", box 55; "Social Survey of Melbourne", n.d., box 70, 1963.0028, Faculty of Commerce and Economics papers (FCE), University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne (UMA).

solutions to social problems. As it turned out, interventions from the survey's commonwealth funders between March and September 1941 would dilute this Liverpudlian influence. Even in 1936 Wood had his eye on commonwealth funding, suggesting to Medley that they draw on a Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) special research fund that had recently allocated £950 for projects within the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce and Economics at Melbourne.[37]

Throughout 1936 and 1937 a flurry of research and planning aimed at refining statistical and surveying techniques brought the Melbourne Social Survey closer still. A faculty proposal for six projects covering a range of topics, to be conducted by honours students and funded by the CSIR, shared the common goal of filling statistical gaps using two relatively untested methods in Australia: first, estimation based on 'practical judgement', 'freedom from bias' and consulting 'business interests concerned', and second, the use of direct questioning to generate 'an intimate study of a sample'. The emphasis on objective observation, the interest in business perspectives and the use of sampling were all hallmarks of Merriam's research model and would be echoed, to varying extents, in the final version of the Melbourne Social Survey. As it transpired, the CSIR fund underwrote a 1937 survey of the Melbourne wholesale markets, performed by honours students Horace Brown and Downing, which used direct questioning of individuals to establish working conditions.[38]

[37] Wood to Medley, 18 March 1941, box 70; Wood to Medley, 20 October 1936, box 55, 1963.0028, FCE, UMA; Arnott and Greenhalgh.

[38] "Research Programme, 1937, Departments of Agriculture, Commerce and Economics", box 55, 1963.0028, FCE, UMA.

At the same time, Giblin commenced a separate sample study that surveyed households in three suburbs – Collingwood, Carlton and Fitzroy – to produce unemployment statistics. Shortly afterwards, an organisation called the Public Schools of Victoria commissioned the faculty to undertake a 'social survey' on its behalf, the results of which would guide their residential settlement scheme. Giblin's unemployment survey was quickly refashioned to meet the organisation's criteria.[39] Herbert Burton, an economic history lecturer whose LSMF fellowship had enabled him to perform a statistical study of French economic history, supervised the door-to-door research undertaken by survey officer, E.E. Ward. It was useful experience for a future member of the internal management committee of the Melbourne Social Survey. The 1937 social survey generated an article in the *Economic Record* that called for more research of this kind.[40] So great was the faculty fervour for empirical studies of housing and unemployment that one honours student, Jean Blackburn, recalled being advised against a thesis on her chosen topic of women's wages and instructed to undertake a study of public housing – something she did not 'fully grasp'.[41] Beyond the university, the Victorian Housing Commission, under the leadership of faculty graduate and accountant Oswald Barnett,

[39] Referred to as the Public Schools of Victoria in commerce faculty archives, this organisation may have in fact been the Associated Public Schools of Victoria, a body that represented private schools in Victoria and was considering residential settlements. It may be that faculty members considered this unemployment survey a prototype for the Melbourne Social Survey. "Allocation of Special Research Fund"; "Research Programme, 1937, Departments of Agriculture, Commerce and Economics", box 55; "Memorandum for the Vice–Chancellor", box 57, 1963.0028, FCE, UMA.

[40] From 1949 Burton was awarded numerous Carnegie Corporation grants. Barbara Burton, who was married to Herbert, managed fieldworkers in the Melbourne Social Survey. Burton, interview; E.E. Ward, "A Sample of Unemployment in Australia," *Economic Record*, 14, no. 1 (1938): 23–38.

[41] Craig Campbell and Debra Hayes, *Jean Blackburn: Education, Feminism and Social Justice* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2019), 44.

performed a door-to-door survey of 'slum' households, producing data that Wood sought in late 1940 for the Melbourne Social Survey. Barnett's statistical expertise co-existed with the 'religious orientation' and 'paternal instincts' of his commitment to slum reform.[42] The effect of all this activity was a deepening of local expertise and networks around surveying. In 1941, Barnett would join Downing, Polglaze and Wadham on the Melbourne Social Survey consultative committee, helping to refine its use of sampling.[43]

Once war broke out in September 1939, plans for the Melbourne Social Survey were adjusted to make allowance for the commonwealth government's strategic interests. The Faculty of Commerce engaged in various activities aimed at supporting these, not the least of which were the 'continuous confidential inquiries' undertaken by Prest and Downing in 1940 to collect industrial and commercial data for the government. Meanwhile, the Rockefeller fund underwrote research into economic fluctuations.[44] In a five-page document from this time that appears to be the script of a speech given by either Copland or Wood, the fluctuations research was identified as one of two major faculty-wide projects; the other was a social survey of Melbourne. The tone of the document suggests it was written in 1940, when enthusiasm for reconstruction peaked. Conscious that some would argue it was an unsuitable wartime project, the speaker

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42 Graeme Davison, "The Compassionate Eye: Research and Reform," in *The Seventh F. Oswald Barnett Oration* (Ecumenical Housing Inc: Melbourne, 2000): 9, 6–11.

43 Wood to Oswald Barnett, 12 November 1940, box 67; Wood to Medley, 18 March 1941 and "Social Survey of Melbourne", minutes of consultative committee meeting, 28 April 1941, box 70, 1963.0028, FCE, UMA.

44 Wood to the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor and Council of the University of Melbourne, 17 September 1940, box 67, 1963.0028, FCE, UMA. The Rockefeller research was supervised by Copland and undertaken by Downing, Polglaze and Bruns, all of whom worked on the Melbourne Social Survey.

claimed that 'even if the only objective were to wage war efficiently… it would be essential to have more information about living standards' since excessively 'subnormal' standards would undermine the war effort. Furthermore, survey results would enable the government to plan a comprehensive postwar housing scheme to enormous social and economic benefit. 'A social survey of Melbourne is a rather unusual chance to do useful work', the speaker concluded, for it could advance the underdeveloped economic theory of Australia, statistical knowledge, and be of 'major social significance'.[45] A separate project proposal clarified that 'the outbreak of war, while apparently shifting the emphasis from national to international affairs, has in reality given the necessity for such a survey new urgency'. Their survey would 'attack' social and industrial dislocation. Its results would ease 'the transition to peace'.[46]

While this grafting of the Melbourne Social Survey onto the broader project of war would shortly enable it to attract substantial funding from the commonwealth government, thus realising part of Copland's vision of stronger connections between government and social science, senior faculty members throughout the 1930s had also become accustomed to drawing on the financial support of major corporate and industrial wealth. In Tasmania Copland had established links with a powerful Melbourne-based group of metal company and other executives, known collectively as 'the Collins House', who had been influenced by the American corporate philosophy of Rockefeller and Carnegie, most notably their belief that social 'uplift' went hand-in-hand with industrial efficiency. In Melbourne, Copland and Wood consolidated this association and

[45] "Note on problems of economic research", undated, NA, box 177, 1986.0024, Wilfred Prest Papers (WP), UMA.

[46] "Social Survey of Melbourne", n.d., box 70, 1963.0028, FCE, UMA.

developed a broader network of wealthy and powerful connections through the LSMF, IPR and the Australian Institute of International Affairs. From 1935, the mining investor and member of Collins House, William Robinson, put Copland on an annual stipend almost equivalent to his professorial salary in exchange for weekly reports to the Collins House membership on economic conditions, first-hand accounts of his dialogue with governments around the world and economic advice. Wood too was a correspondent of Robinson. Copland also secured £12,500 from this group (which included Robinson's business partner, mine-owner and politician, William Baillieu) to fund construction of a library and union building at the University of Melbourne. Throughout the 1930s Copland led appeals to the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation to contribute funds towards university facilities and visiting scholars.[47]

It was to a separate but connected network of wealthy and politically conservative businessmen that Wood appealed for funds for the Melbourne Social Survey in July 1941. Although, he told them, he felt a 'little guilty' drawing on personal connections, he also made sure that they knew it was 'very hard going' obtaining funds for 'projects of this kind'. Wood wrote to between five and ten chairmen, explaining in marginally different letters that 'we can scarcely hope that our society will emerge unaltered from the present [wartime economic] struggle, and the best efforts of business leaders and University workers should be devoted to continuous study of changing conditions'. Wood's characterisation of the survey in these letters differs markedly from every other in the faculty archives, which each in their different ways locate the survey's significance in its attempt to respond to widespread housing shortages, poor living standards, the government's strategic interests and broader social research questions. Parallels can be

[47] Harper, *Copland*, 47, 120, 192, 199, 110.

found in the manner in which Merriam approached his financial backers. In such correspondence, Mark C. Smith says Merriam's goal was always to 'allay' fears about the reformist impact of the particular piece of proposed research and convince potential backers that social science was the answer to their problems. Wood's letters implied that the survey would ease a return to the prewar conditions that had enabled these firms to flourish. He declared that the researchers' 'greatest interest' was to collect data on the lives of those on 'the lower grades of income'. He harnessed the language of the natural sciences, asserting that researchers would 'ascertain the facts' and prepare 'social statistics'. They would, in short, survey and – by implication – help control the thing these executives feared most: change. Pharmaceutical manufacturer, Maurice Nicholas, forwarded a £100 cheque for the survey, terming it 'essential work', and suggested other potential donors, which Wood privately discussed with him at 'the Club'. Horace Richardson, managing director of Cox Brothers department store, promoter of free enterprise and future founder of the Liberal Party of Australia, also contributed £100, explaining that he would like his company secretary, who had 'made a close study of work akin to your project', to provide practical advice. Wood agreed to consult the company secretary in much the same fashion as Merriam involved business leaders in his research. George Coles, another hugely successful retailer and a future president of the conservative Institute of Public Affairs, also forwarded £100. Wood secured funding from the City of Melbourne, bolstering existing funds from the CSIR. Much larger cash injections would follow at the end of 1941 from a new commonwealth government reconstruction grant with quite different priorities.[48]

[48] Wood to Chairman of the Myer Charitable Trust, 5 July 1941; Wood to Chairman of GJ Coles, Cox Bros, Aspro, 19 June 1941; Maurice Nicholas to Wood, 4 July 1941; Wood to Nicholas, 5 July 1941; Horace Richardson to Wood, 25 June 1941, box 70, 1963.0028, FCE, UMA; Smith, 96–97; Wilfred Prest

Work towards the Melbourne Social Survey undertaken in the 1930s shows the influence of models of social research promoted by Merriam and Ruml. The focus on measurement and statistics rather than reform or welfare, on collaborating with business leaders, on large-scale and 'objective' data collection and compilation, rather than qualitative analysis, and on business-friendly research addressing economic cycles, fluctuations and statistics all marked their work out from reformist social research undertaken in the allied fields of social work and sociology. The faculty was thinking big – *American big*—as it approached the first social survey of an Australian city.

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And yet, you might reasonably mark the start of the Melbourne Social Survey as 1941, the year surveying actually began. To date, all historians of the survey have identified its origins in the years immediately prior, with its crucial instigation being the arrival of Wilfred Prest, from Fife, Scotland in early 1938. The manner in which Prest was appointed is worth laying out before approaching those histories, published from the 1980s up to Charlotte Greenhalgh's 2016 article in this journal, which portray Prest as familiar with social survey developments to an extent unrivalled by those in Australia.[49] The situation, as these histories depict it, is that of a northern hemisphere scholar delivering metropolitan knowledge to a southern hemisphere group of researchers largely ignorant of it. If this were true, it would be hard to think of a better exemplar for

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to Bruce Williams, 29 September 1941, box 26, WP, UMA. It is unclear to which club Nicholas was referring but it may have been the exclusive Melbourne Club, which in 1949 was lobbied by members of Collins House to join Copland. Harper, *Copland*, 340.

[49] Charlotte Greenhalgh, "The Travelling Social Survey: Social Research and Its Subjects in Britain, Australia and New Zealand, 1930s–1970s," *History Australia* 13, no. 1, (2016): 124–38.

Connell's account of knowledge transfer in an international market defined by unequal power relations. The trouble with such a narrative is that it overlooks almost a decade of planning for the survey. Prest contributed to the development of the Melbourne Social Survey but he did not singlehandedly instigate, design, plan or attract funding for it. Indeed, even in Prest's appointment it is tempting to read the 'continuous engagement' that Sherrington and Horne describe as existing between the imperial centre and settler universities. The episode seems to provide further evidence for Pietsch's claim that 'lumps' of power existed across universities within the British umbrella; that individuals, such as Douglas Copland, could carve out for themselves positions of relative power, in large part because of their complex interpersonal histories and networks of association.

In appointing a senior lecturer in Industrial Organisation and Relations in 1937, Copland did not search for the most elite candidate of the imperial centre. It is unclear how typical this was of recruitment trends at the University of Melbourne since historical surveys have tended to focus on higher, professorial appointments, which responded to different protocols and considerations.[50] And yet, such processes established cultural norms within an institution. While some episodes from this period indicate an ongoing 'Oxbridge' bias in professorial appointments, Melbourne was always more receptive to Irish and Scot candidates than was Sydney, for example.[51] To fill the senior lecturer vacancy, Copland set up a London-based selection committee and directly advertised at the London School of Economics, the universities of Cambridge, Oxford and

[50] Tamson Pietsch, "Wandering Scholars? Academic Mobility and the British World, 1850–1940," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 36, no. 4 (2010): 377–87.

[51] R.J.W. Selleck, *The Shop: The University of Melbourne 1850–1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 691–694; Sherrington and Horne, 41.

Manchester, as well as Knox College in New Zealand. Towards the end of this lengthy search, Copland concluded that all of the Australian and New Zealand applicants lacked requisite expertise and the London committee was 'not suitable for considering men for this type of job'. 'It was silly of me', Copland confided to Giblin, 'not to have picked a selection committee' while in England. Their choice, Copland told the Vice Chancellor, was for the candidate set to become an 'outstanding expert in the sphere of Economics which he had made his own', but as Copland pointed out, this was not industrial economics. Copland seems to have been repelled by the English committee's interest in the 'most brilliant' candidate, telling others that he was looking for a young man who had an interest in local conditions and might adapt to them. Appearing rather resigned, he got behind Prest, from St Andrews in Scotland, because he had the relevant teaching and research experience and had been recommended by those equipped to judge 'the type of man we need'.[52]

Once Copland had settled on Prest, Prest needed to settle on Melbourne. Prest at first refused the job, telling Copland that he had been offered a position in South Africa and that the job in Melbourne represented a significant 'difference in salary & status', no doubt a reflection of the funding cuts that were made to Australian universities during the Depression. In his original application Prest had asked Copland whether there was any room for 'augmenting his income'. He replied: 'we look with favour upon a reasonable connection with the Government or industry, provided it does not interfere

[52] Frederic Benham to Douglas Copland, 16 September 1937; Copland to Ernest Merrington, 28 June 1937, Copland to Edward Robinson, 29 April 1937; Copland to Lyndhurst Giblin, 19 September 1937, box 53; Copland to Medley, 5 October 1937; Copland to G.W. Daniels, 25 September 1937, box 54, 1963.0028, FCE, UMA.

with normal work'. Any knowledge or interest Prest had in the planned social survey was not discussed, yet Copland's address about it that year in England may have encouraged Prest to take a punt on Melbourne. Responding to Prest's refusal, Copland revealed his confidence in both Melbourne and Prest, insisting that in this city Prest would 'blaze a trail'.[53] Prest declined South Africa and took the Melbourne job. The terms on which Prest came to Melbourne seem to suggest the dynamic between Australian and British scholars in the late 1930s was not one of straightforward power relations. Settler universities appeared to offer something valuable, and knew they did, carefully selecting scholars from Britain who they thought could bridge metropolitan knowledge and local conditions.

By contrast, existing accounts of the origins of the Melbourne Social Survey reinforce perceptions that early Australian social science was strongly mimetic of British social research. Graeme Davison and John Lack's influential 1981 history of the survey explained that when Prest arrived in Melbourne, in early 1938, 'social surveys were virtually unknown'. Two years on, once Prest had garnered the interest of faculty members, the survey spark was lit: 'gradually, around 1940, in conversation between Prest and his colleagues, especially Richard Downing and Jean Polglaze, the idea of a comprehensive social survey of the people of Melbourne began to take shape'. Prest had trouble convincing others. Forced to 'build upon' any local expertise, Prest approached Oswald Barnett, a journalist and Methodist anti-slum reformer. Davison and Lack suggest that Downing got behind the survey because he was 'fresh' from a one-year trip to Cambridge, and by implication more aware of British developments, and calculated

[53] Prest to Copland, 9 October 1937 and 31 May 1937; Copland to Prest, 16 June 1937, box 54, 1963.0028, FCE, UMA.

that the housing shortages his mentors Giblin and Copland spoke about from Canberra, might be alleviated by the survey. In short, Davison and Lack identified three factors enabling Australia's first major social survey: 'the intellectual biography of its director, the local tradition of urban reform and the domestic impact of the Second World War'.[54]

Accordingly, social surveying knowledge from Britain, which Prest was 'steeped in', was imperative to the Melbourne survey and 'without Prest's British experiences it is unlikely that the idea could have germinated at all'. After convincing others of the merits of the survey, Prest worked in isolation to develop its methodology, following 'closely in the steps of his British predecessors … Booth, Rowntree and their successors'. By Davison and Lack's reckoning there had been no activity in the faculty that might have eased this massive undertaking. The end result was that the survey, in both 'spirit and method', intellectually mirrored Britain. It reflected the 'welfare-orientated, but rigorously statistical, social surveys conducted by Charles Booth, the Webbs, Seebohm Rowntree and A.L. Bowley'. Even the decision to survey one in thirty households, a form of sampling not seen in Australia, was another direct result of the British influence, albeit a contemporary one. Sampling went against the grain in Australia where it was 'still regarded with suspicion by Australian official statisticians'.

In this telling, the Melbourne Social Survey was Prest's attempt to import the strongest and latest surveying traditions and trends from Britain, and it was only his ongoing commitment to maintaining this influence – keeping a 'close watch on British work' – that the project became such a high quality, pioneering piece of research. Copland and

[54] Graeme Davison and John Lack, "Planning the New Social Order: the Melbourne University Social Survey, 1941–3," *Journal of Sociology*, 17, no. 1 (1981): 36–45.

Giblin only appear in Davison and Lack's account as 'elders of Prest's own department'. Wood does not appear at all. For Prest, war accentuated the 'isolation' he felt working on the Melbourne Social Survey and it was only when it was over that he was able to 'finally visit Britain and catch up with the latest developments'.[55]

Following Davison and Lack's account, historians have continued to argue that Prest was responsible for the vision, execution and oversight of the Melbourne Social Survey. Successive histories describe Prest's 'surprise' at the 'dearth' of social survey research in Australia. Prest worked determinedly to fill a 'gap' by persuading his colleagues of the value of a local study, designing the Melbourne Social Survey, and 'persuading the federal government that such a survey was critical to its planning for postwar reconstruction'. Encapsulating the notion of Prest's singular influence, Kate Darian-Smith referred to the survey as the University of Melbourne Prest Social Survey.[56]

In elevating Prest's role and compressing the Melbourne Social Survey into the years after his arrival, historians have overlooked the mark of local and international figures, ideas, funding sources, research activity, expertise and intellectual exchange on the survey. The impact of this has been considerable. The emphasis on Prest and his

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[55] Davison and Lack: 36–45.

[56] Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front: Melbourne in Wartime, 1939–1945* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2009), 84, 10; Jenny Carew, "Every Thirtieth House: A Wartime Social Survey," in *Fitzroy – Melbourne's First Suburb*, Fitzroy History Society (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991): 144; Ellen Warne, Shurlee Swain, Patricia Grimshaw and John Lack, "Women in Conversation: a Wartime Social Survey in Melbourne," *Women's History Review* 12, no. 4 (2003): 527; Graeme Davison, "The Social Survey and the Puzzle of Australian Sociology," *Australian Historical Studies* 34, no. 121 (2003): 151: Greenhalgh, 128.

intellectual inheritance has led historians to view the survey as principally welfare or reform orientated in the manner of prewar British social surveys. In a point of separation from Booth, Rowntree and Bowley's surveys, the Melbourne survey did not seek to determine the cause and extent of poverty only. It surveyed working-class, middle-class and affluent suburbs across Melbourne, seeking details on transport, housing conditions, work and income. The British emphasis may also have contributed to a widespread misapprehension that the survey was geared towards establishing longstanding material conditions across the city when in fact it was comprised of two stages, the second of which was designed to ascertain changes that had occurred between 1941 and 1943 in employment and income; conditions that were, in other words, provoked by war. This stage, confined to two working-class suburbs, sought to establish the attitude of householders towards costs of living, war loans, a government savings banks and the postwar period. The survey's interest in attitudes distinguished it from early-twentieth-century British social surveys. In this sense, its intellectual lineage might more profitably be traced to the innovative attitudinal surveys that were being overseen by Merriam and funded by the LSMF.

The focus on Prest's role has also obscured local influences on Australia's first major social survey, the principal one being the strategic interests of a wartime government. In the months leading up to the commencement of the survey in September 1941, Wood succeeded in securing the lion's share of its funding through a new Commonwealth University Reconstruction Research scheme. It came at a cost. The survey team

scrambled to redesign the survey questionnaire, scope and timeline to satisfy the requirements of a wartime government focused on civilian mobilisation and morale.[57]

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This article's reappraisal of the origins of the University of Melbourne social survey makes two key interventions in the history of social science in Australia. First, it demonstrates that there were decisive local and US influences on the aims, methods, organisation, and funding of the Melbourne survey, which co-existed alongside the subsequently well-recognised British influences. Second, it demonstrates the necessity of excavating archival material which reveals how social research projects were planned, funded and staffed when assessing their intellectual contributions. The careful archiving of more than 7,000 completed survey sheets in the Wilfred Prest papers at the University of Melbourne is a boon to scholars working across multiple fields of Australian history. Yet understanding the history of the survey itself requires equal attention be paid to the correspondence, committee meeting minutes, and budgets that are held in the Faculty of Commerce collection in the same archive. After all, mid-century researchers were adept at harnessing the language of scientific objectivity and the authority of the survey director in ways that underlined their professional status. Their accounts, however, did not always

[57] Wood to Medley, 18 March 1941; "Social survey of Melbourne, the need for the project", n.d.; "Brief record of conference of representatives of Australian universities on reconstruction research held in Canberra on 6/7th of June, 1941"; Roland Wilson to Medley, 3 April 1941; Wood to Wilson, 30 July 1941; "University of Melbourne, programme of reconstruction research suggested by the Reconstruction Research Committee and submitted by the Vice-Chancellor of the University", box 70, 1963.0028, FEC, UMA; Wood to Medley, 18 March 1941, box 26, 1986.0024, WP, UMA; Stuart Macintyre, *Australia's Boldest Experiment: War and Reconstruction in the 1940s* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2015); for government influence on the survey, see Arnott and Greenhalgh.

accurately reflect how these large-scale research studies of Australian social life were developed, funded, and executed, and rarely revealed the intricate networks of influence and connection that facilitated them.

It has been argued in recent times that university researchers in the interwar period were influenced by a 'new internationalism' that looked beyond Britain's empire towards Europe and the United States.[58] Our article builds on the work of scholars who have shown that social investigators and progressive reformers of this period were part of an extended 'pivot' away from Britain towards the leader of the New World, a pivot so marked that it often resulted in Australians becoming Americans.[59] Copland's nine-month LSMF tour saw him travel extensively throughout the United States and Europe, observing social investigation in theory and practice. But to describe this tour as a form of internationalism would be to overlook the fact Copland met and observed chiefly LSMF-funded figures and projects, which inevitably reflected the LSMF's American outlook and in turn shaped his.

The financial incentive that encouraged Australian researchers to look to the United States underscores the inequality embedded in this global market of ideas. Copland's interest and receptivity to the research subjects, imperatives, quantitative methods, funding sources, institutional structures and language championed by the Rockefeller company through its philanthropic arms illustrates this process of influence, which

[58] Kate Darian-Smith and James Waghorne, "Australian Universities, Expertise and Internationalism After World War I", *Journal of Australian Studies* 43, no. 4 (2019): 412–428.

[59] Burke; Stuart Macintyre, *Poor Relation*, 13–22; Marilyn Lake, *Progressive New World: How Settler Colonialism and Transpacific Exchange Shaped American Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

appears to have guided the shape and direction of the Faculty of Commerce, a key site for social research in this period. The economic foundations of Australia's pivot towards the United States during this period has been well documented, including recently by Yves Rees who has shown that 'non-elite' Australians travelled in increasing numbers to the United States in pursuit of economic stability.[60] This article began by asking what the origins of the Melbourne Social Survey and its historiography could reveal about the ways in which Australian social investigators have related to, and been positioned within, broader international dynamics. Our conclusion is that while researchers continued to look to Britain for intellectual leads and recruitment, the private-enterprise-backed US social research model was an equally decisive influence.

Early histories of the Melbourne Social Survey, published from the 1980s, paid little attention to the impact of government funding or American thinking on Australian social researchers, instead emphasising British links established through Wilfred Prest. Yet the concern of historians with the social survey director – at the expense of planners, fieldworkers and funders – itself reflects the influence of American social research models, as well as the enduring sway of the 'Professor God' mythology, rife during Prest's thirty-year reign as head of economics at Melbourne.[61] The elevation of the social survey director was driven by Merriam and others seeking to mimic corporate models of pyramid-style management valued by potential funders. The idea that the social survey was a reflection of the director's vision, intellectual inheritance, drive, genius even, has

[60] Yves Rees, "Moving On Up: Economic Opportunism, Transpacific Mobility and Non-Elite Internationalism", *Journal of Australian Studies* 43, no. 4 (2019): 464–478.

[61] W. Max Corden, review of *Balanced Growth: A History of the Department of Economics, University of Melbourne*, *Economic Record* 86, no. 274 (2010): 461.

been shown in recent years to be an unhelpful mythology governing the history of social surveys, including early ones undertaken by Booth and Rowntree.[62] Thus, even the historiography of the Melbourne Social Survey, when placed in the context of the survey's more complete history, indicates that intellectual frameworks emerging from global centres continued to shape Australian scholarship towards the end of the twentieth century, and beyond, in subterranean yet profound ways.

[62] Rosemary O'Day and David Englander, *Mr Charles Booth's Inquiry: Life and Labour of the People in London Reconsidered* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1993).