

TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS:
CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONFLICT IN A 19TH CENTURY BOYS
REFORMATORY.

DAVID MAUNDERS

PHILLIP INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, MELBOURNE.



Max and Louisa Brown

Olinda Farm and Juvenile Justice Policy.

A little under a century ago, the superintendent of the Olinda Farm Reformatory, following government regulations, began a diary of 'every unusual event of the day'. It survives as a unique record of the values, attitudes and policies which applied to juvenile offenders. Given that the aims of the correctional system, then as now, were to deter young people from committing criminal acts and to reduce the likelihood of offenders reoffending, this microcosm of the late 19th century system suggests that the means for achieving them have changed almost diametrically. The most recent review of Victoria's juvenile justice system (the Carney Report) states as a matter of principle, that programs for young offenders should respect their cultural values and identity and make the least possible disruption to their way of life.¹ In contrast, the Olinda Farm operated in a legal and political environment which actively promoted a high level of intrusion into every aspect of young offenders' lives. It was taken as axiomatic that they belonged to a recognisable class of urban pauper criminals and that a great chasm of values and behaviour separated them from God-fearing respectable society. The juvenile corrections system was seen as having two closely related functions. One was to 'save' young people by bridging that chasm. This involved REFORMING the character; remaking the sinful self through processes of extensive moral change. The second was to service the colonial economy by transforming 'useless' slum urchins into a useful agricultural workforce. Irrespective of their own wishes, or those of their families, reformatory boys were destined to be farm hands.

The Olinda Farm was a 50 acre property located at South Wandin, known today as Silvan, three miles from Lilydale in the Dandenong area 30 miles east of Melbourne. It now forms part of the picnic ground and recreational area adjoining the Silvan Reservoir, but in 1893 was heavily wooded with only an acre or two cleared.² The land was owned by Albert Wiseman, partner with his two brothers in a Melbourne warehouse and general merchandise business. The Wisemans were philanthropists and all three had financially supported the initiative of William Mark Forster, a city saddler, who had started a club for working boys in 1883. This club, the Toorak and South Yarra Try Society soon expanded into a network of technical and educational classes. The flagship of the Try network was the Gordon Institute, built through public subscription and with a government land grant, to commemorate the loss of General Gordon at Khartoum. Opened in 1889, Forster managed it himself until 1890 when he was replaced by Charles Barber who had been his deputy. Forster continued a connection for many years after.³

¹ Child Welfare Practice and Legislation Review, Executive Summary, Vol 1, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1984, p.14.

² The Olinda Reformatory, *Lilydale Express*, 10 August 1898.

³ An outline of the history of the Try movement is given in David Maunders, *Keeping them off the Streets*, PhD thesis, LaTrobe University, 1987.

Forster had no doubt that individual and social need could be met by training neglected boys to become farm labourers. In cooperation with Albert Wiseman, a training farm was established at Fernydale Farm, South Wandin, under the direction of Murdock McAskell, an experienced farmer and pastoralist who had recently been engaged in the rescue of young slum dwellers. In 1888, Forster reported

Our great desire is that others follow the Wisemans' example and give the poor and neglected children of Melbourne an opportunity to better themselves both mentally and socially, for lads thus trained will always find employment in a colony like ours where our selectors and farmers are forever deploring the scarcity of agricultural labourers thus showing that the training of our youth in this fashion is a question of national importance. Melbourne will in this way be freed of its criminals, namely the neglected children of the city.⁴

Forster developed an acquaintance with George Guillaume, Secretary of the two bodies which administered the 'children's system', the Department for Reformatory Schools (established under the Crimes Act of 1890) and the Neglected Children's Department (established under the Neglected Children's Act 1890). Under the latter Act, Guillaume administered a mass fostering system ('boarding out') which catered for 'innocent' easily managed children. Under the Crimes Act, he was responsible for the reformatory treatment of convicted adolescent offenders, misbehaving adolescents who were unsuitable for fostering and other 'neglected children' whose unsavoury behaviour made them inappropriate for private homes.

Guillaume was profoundly in sympathy with the child-saving work of Forster and other charitable activists. On taking up his position in 1881, he had inherited a legacy of disastrous government attempts at direct institutional provision and had quickly espoused contemporary enthusiasm for a 'family' model of care and training⁵, for both 'innocent' and 'difficult' children, using a mix of fostering and small, family-like rural reformatories.⁶ In addition, he was strongly predisposed towards voluntary participation in child welfare, largely on the ground of its spiritual superiority. He had favoured the introduction of legislation (the Neglected Children's Act of 1887) which authorised charitable workers to apprehend 'neglected children' (i.e. those who were destitute,

⁴ Toorak and South Yarra Try Society, *Annual Report 1888*, p.10.

⁵ Department of Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools, *Report 1890, VPP, 1891, Vol 5*.

⁶ Donella Jaggs, *Neglected and Criminal. Foundations of Child Welfare Legislation in Victoria*, Centre for Youth and Community Studies, Melbourne, 1986, Chapter 4 and 5. I am grateful to Donella Jaggs for advising me on this section covering 19th century legislation and institutions.

misbehaving or in immoral environments) and have them committed into their own legal guardianship, and was anxious to divest the government's institutional work with 'reformatory children' into voluntary hands. Forster and Barber were among the first to receive apprehending powers, being gazetted in 1889.⁷

Guillaume died in an accident in 1892. His successor, and former deputy, Thomas Millar, initially continued in the same directions. In 1893, he reported that three voluntary bodies had been willing to register as private reformatories, enabling the government to close the Ballarat Reformatory, the last large government institution, retaining only a central receiving and security establishment at Royal Park.⁸ The three new reformatories were at Pakenham, run by the Salvation Army, the Excelsior Home at Brighton, run by Forster's associate, William Groom, and 'Mr Wiseman's Reformatory School at Wandin Yallock'. Early signs of success at Fernydale led to the opening of a small sub-reformatory farm', the Olinda Farm.⁹

Under the Crimes Act 1890, reformatory superintendents received a fixed weekly payment for each ward. They were liable for inspection by the Department and registration could be withdrawn. Superintendents were to classify their charges according to age, conduct, physical and moral character and to observe a daily timetable which should include four hours of secular instruction. They could withhold mail if appropriate and maintain a register of movements. Superintendents might give corporal punishment but as seldom as possible and only as a maximum of twelve strokes on the hand, breech or back with a cane or leather strap. Misbehaviour might also be punished by confinement for up to 48 hours with bread and water and good behaviour might be rewarded by a monetary payment. Superintendents were authorised to compel the return of absconders and to prevent absconding and were to be assisted by the police where necessary. A committee of local persons should exercise scrutiny and give reports.

Superintendents also were required to satisfy themselves that employers would feed and lodge boys properly, care for their moral training and allow them to go to Divine service, provide medical attention allow them to write to former superintendents and forward quarterly reports with a portion of the child's wages to be saved in his name. Children should understand the terms of employment and could be returned for misbehaviour and were liable to pay for willful damage or for loss of clothes.¹⁰

There was one important point of difference in respect of 'convicted' and 'neglected' lads. In the former case, superintendents had the power to decide when they left and

⁷ Gazette, 4 October 1889, p.3310.

⁸ Department of Neglected Children, 1893, op.cit.

⁹ Department of Neglected Children, Report of Secretary, 1892, p.5, 1893, p.6. VPP.

¹⁰ Regulations Relating to Juvenile Offenders, Crimes Act 1890, Section 16-21, VPP 1890.

where they were placed (normally with a respectable farmer). In the latter case, the Department made decisions on release and placement. When guardianship was vested in gazetted persons (such as William Forster), that person retained final say.

The Olinda Farm Diary allows us to enter the smallest of these establishments, a farm and cottage for six only boys and functioning on a basis of family-like love and care. As on any small farm, everyone had to work and the superintendent toiled alongside the boys, clearing the land and planting crops, all the time struggling, missionary-like, to win the souls of the boys. The regular program followed the regulations: rising at six was followed by breakfast, hymn singing, scripture reading and prayer. Boys worked from eight to noon, then dinner, followed by recreation until two. Work resumed until five, when they had tea. This was followed by studies, games or reading. Devotions preceded bed at nine.¹¹ Absconding and visits from authority were frequent (Charles Barber and Albert Wiseman averaged about one a month for the first two years, and Forster a little less). However, the little reformatory had a short life. Although it was well regarded, government policy reverted to a preference for larger institutions where a wider range of agricultural skills could be taught for a lower per capita rate, such as the Salvation Army Bayswater Reformatory.

The Superintendents: Max Brown and wife.

In March 1893, Charles Barber, manager of the Gordon Institute, placed an advertisement in the *Methodist Spectator* for a married couple to take charge of a Reformatory Home for boys. The man must have some knowledge of farming and to be able to teach the 'three Rs' and conduct family worship, the wife was to take charge of all domestic work and to be a mother to the boys.¹² Barber sent the paper a letter which stressed the importance of the work: eighty-six boys had passed through Fernydale with successful results. The superintendent and his wife had to be earnest Christians who would train boys from a Christian standpoint and develop love for God and humanity in neglected lads. The farm was expected to be a true home with a true mother who would win respect and then love, so that boys might learn what true love and affection was. The superintendent was to teach and work with the boys on the farm so that their characters would be reformed by associating with him.

Barber found the ideal applicants. Max Brown was a 47 year old English pharmacist, fifth son of a family who had been tenant farmers of the Dukes of Bedford.¹³ The family had also

¹¹ Olinda Farm Diary (hereafter OFD), initial entry, May 1893.

¹² *Spectator* 31 March 1893.

¹³ Details of Max Brown's early life are taken from his serialised autobiography, 'My Boyhood' published in William Forster's *Australian Boys' Paper* throughout 1900-1. Further information has been obtained from interviews with surviving

engaged in butchering and brickmaking businesses. His elder brothers left for the Australian colonies in the early 1850s. The fourth brother, Lee, was successful as a butcher in the goldfields of Talbot and Clunes and by 1859, after four years in the colony, owned three shops. He returned home in 1863. His account of the new world may well have persuaded his parents to migrate with Max and his two unmarried sisters in 1867.

Max had attended the Harpur School in Bedford and completed his education at the age of fifteen and a half. Shortly before completing school, he experienced a spiritual conversion, during a religious revival.¹⁴ He became a lay preacher and a more committed and active Methodist than he had been previously. On leaving school, he was apprenticed to a surgeon. He did not complete his training but did qualify as a pharmacist. Like most pharmacists of his day, he also extracted teeth.¹⁵

Max and his family settled in Talbot and with his brother's help, Max took over a pharmacy shortly after his arrival.¹⁶ Five years later he moved to St Arnaud where he remained until 1891, when he sold the business for the benefit of his health. In 1876 he married Louisa Bath, six years his junior. Louisa had been brought up near Ballarat and had briefly taught school before taking on the education of her younger brothers and sisters when her family acquired a property at Swanwater West, near Donald. She, too, was a devout Methodist. They remained a devoted, though childless, couple.

Cultural and political conflict at the Olinda Farm.

Many aspects of life at the Olinda Farm suggest interpreting events in the context of hegemony theory, but the reality is far more complex. Certainly the Browns shared the general values of those who legislated for and administered the juvenile correctional system and were personally acquainted with many of them: Millar, the department head, Wiseman, Forster and Barber. Yet conflict in the seven years of the reformatory's life was not confined to a clash of values between Browns and boys, though the diary records extensive resistance in the form of absconding, stealing and smoking. Of greater significance was the definite shift of government policy away from the small family model based on ideas of domestic nurture, to a training model, bigger and efficiently organised. This was driven by the depression and simultaneous period of drought and the loss of commitment to the family model after Guillaume's death.

There was also conflict within the structural arrangements of the Olinda Farm. Albert Wiseman's philanthropy was related to

relatives, principally Mrs Olive Tucker of Ballarat, niece to Mrs Brown, and from shipping records.

14 *Australian Boys' Paper* 1 October 1900.

15 Max Brown's services are listed in his advertisement in the *St Arnaud Mercury* 20 September 1879.

16 *Talbot Leader*, 4 August 1868.

his economic interest as the boys provided free labour for clearing and capital improvement of his land. The depression affected the Wiseman brothers' financial interests and Albert determined to divest himself of the Wandin property. This faced Max Brown with having to put up capital, to lease and finally buy the farm in order to continue the work of reform. It put him under increased pressure, not only to succeed in the task of rebuilding lives, but also to generate sufficient income through farming to remain solvent. McAskell at Fernydale was in a similar position, but was advantaged by having first pick of available boys.

Max Brown suffered internal conflict. He continued to believe in the effectiveness of the small family farm as a means of rebuilding the character of young delinquents, after government policy shifted back to a preference for larger establishments with some organised training. He was distressed to find that the farmers to whom boys were sent for employment were not the kindly instructive employers that the system had been predicated on. Given the prevailing depression and drought, this may not have been surprising. Furthermore, his immediate superior, McAskell, seemed more set on controlling behaviour than on reconstructing personalities and gave him little moral support. Finally, Max suffered frustration from his limited scope for decision making. Most of his boys were 'neglected' and consequently their departure depended on decisions taken by the department. A number were under the guardianship of Forster such as Edward Norman who was sent to Olinda by him and released on his authority.¹⁷

Two Different Worlds: Browns and Boys.

The Browns sought to provide a rebirth, to construct a new biography for their charges. The central point lay in replacing their vicious, inadequate or non-existent families with 'a true English Home, one to be remembered by them in after years with deepest pleasure...'¹⁸ Boys were encouraged to address them as 'mother' and 'dad'¹⁹ and generosity abounded at Christmas time with presents and feasting.²⁰ On occasion, it even went as far as changing names: William Thomas Couch was known as Will to Max and Tommy to his mother.²¹ The Brown's extended family was also involved: Max's nieces spent a summer holiday and exercised a calming influence on the boys.²² There was fun and holidays: boys were encouraged to use a nearby swimming hole,²³ and Max delighted in taking them fishing.²⁴ From 1895 on, there was an annual camping and fishing holiday at Wonga Park.²⁵ Max was

17 OFD, 21 April 1895.

18 OFD, May 1893.

19 19 The Olinda Reformatory, *Lilydale Express*, 10 August 1898. Also for example OFD 21 November 1893.

20 See OFD 25 December 1893, 1894, 1895, etc.

21 Ibid., 17, 23 November 1895.

22 Ibid., 31 December 1895.

23 Ibid., 24 December 1893.

24 e.g. OFD 25 October 1893.

25 Ibid., 29 February 1896, 28 January 1897, 8 February 1898.

conscious of reform as a missionary task. One of the techniques of reform of the day was prayer and Max prayed for wisdom to send boys into the world 'God fearing, honest and industrious'.²⁶ He was overjoyed when three boys, influenced by a 'young Christian who is here for his health's sake' called him in after going to bed, to ask what they had to do to be saved. He put the 'plan of salvation before them in all its simplicity' they saw it and 'embraced it with manifest delight.'²⁷ Unfortunately one of the three did not maintain his faith and ended in jail. Frank Samagus who arrived in March 1896 at the age of 17, responded the most positively to evangelism. He remained only three months but wrote regularly and returned for holidays. During a three week stay in 1897 he led two boys to 'decide for the Lord'²⁸ and after working for a while in butchery, entered an Adelaide Bible College to train as a missionary in March 1899.²⁹

Committed to the concept of reform and rebirth, Max invariably approached each new boy with optimism, even those who proved later to be great trials. For one of the most difficult, Ted Adams, the initial entry states

*I hope he will be a good boy. He has been much neglected hitherto, but there is something about the boy I like.*³⁰

Max, like his colleagues, took it for granted that the boys would prefer country life to that of the city. On occasions he saw what he expected to see:

*Dyer returned tonight glad to get away from Melbourne.*³¹

Yet within a few days, he saw Dyer miserable and asking for a place (i.e. a work placement on a farm). Ted Adams, a frequent absconder, declared that he hated the country and wanted to get to Melbourne. Max commented

*Poor boy, he has more love and kindness shown him here than he ever before experienced and yet he would rather be a city arab again.*³²

Abstinence from alcohol was urged and Max was pleased when three boys asked to sign the pledge.³³ Visits to the local Band of Hope provided regular evening entertainment. Tobacco however was more easily obtained and concealed and proved to be a constant source of conflict. Boys could get it from fruit pickers and passers-by³⁴ and occasionally stole it from

26 Ibid., May 1893.

27 Ibid., 3 September 1894.

28 Ibid., 28 February 1897, 18 March 1897.

29 Ibid., 23 March 1899.

30 Ibid., 9 September 1893.

31 Ibid., 30 November 1893.

32 Ibid., 3 October 1893.

33 Ibid., 13 July 1893.

34 Ibid., 17 August 1893, 18 November 1894.

neighbours.³⁵ Smith, a frequent absconder, gave as his excuse the craving for tobacco. He was unwise enough to inform Thomas Millar, the Secretary of the Reformatory Schools Department, that Max allowed boys to procure tobacco at the store. Max commented

*The fact of his absconding ten times is, I should think, sufficient evidence that he found it impossible to obtain the means of gratifying his passion at the Home.*³⁶

Max may have understood the craving for tobacco as he was a confirmed smoker himself, ('a habit of which I have no reason to be proud')³⁷ though the diary gives no indication that he did. Other aspects of the boys' behaviour did perplex him. They were rowdy and changeable 'quarrel(ing) like Kilkenny cats one moment and swear(ing) by each other the next'.³⁸ Boys inexplicably slit their coats with axes.³⁹ Unsupervised boys getting water from the school tank disturbed the school master in his home;⁴⁰ fighting could result in a knife being drawn.⁴¹ Yet boys were incredibly loyal, even to the extent of offering to accept punishment for each other.⁴²

Boys would lie and steal even when plenty was provided. Fruit, particularly cherries, was a big temptation. In spite of great quantities being given, around four pounds per day to each boy,⁴³ unripe fruit was picked and hidden.⁴⁴ Money was stolen from other boys and items from passers by and neighbours.⁴⁵ Lying came naturally to the boys. Unless 'proved guilty and every way of escape blocked you cannot get at the truth with many of them.'⁴⁶ Max felt that they must be compelled to see that deceit was one of the most serious of sins.

Max's evangelical Christianity gave him a clear understanding of sin and the devil. Late 20th century workers would probably see the boys as disadvantaged or adjusted to a culture of poverty, but Max saw himself battling with the devil.

A hawker called yesterday and gave Howson some tobacco. Was much pleased by Jack bringing it to me expressing his error for taking it but determined to resist the temptation to smoke. I guess the Devil is getting scotched as regards Jack.⁴⁷

35 Ibid., 3 February 1896.

36 Ibid., 6 October 1897.

37 *Australian Boys' Paper*, 1 May 1901.

38 OFD, 10 August 1893.

39 Ibid., 20 August 1896.

40 Ibid., 5 October 1893.

41 Ibid., 20 March 1894.

42 Ibid., 15 October 1893.

43 Ibid., 24 November 1893.

44 Ibid., 15 November 1893.

45 Ibid., 31 August 1894, 3 February 1896, 23 December 1896.

46 Ibid., 1 October 1896.

47 Ibid., 18 August 1893.

When sins were detected and punished, boys were expected to be contrite and often were, at least outwardly. They asked forgiveness, expressed sorrow and deducted their own conduct marks.⁴⁸

While present day workers might think in terms of equity, social justice and rights, Max, though recognising the boys' deprivation, was perplexed at their indifference to the good things provided.

I wish that I could distribute the food to the innocent poor of our cities who might and who would appreciate the gift.⁴⁹

Max did not consider that the 'innocent poor' might respond in the same way as his boys. He recognised ingratitude as a sin, as a waste of love⁵⁰ and it bothered him very deeply that kindness appeared not to touch them.⁵¹

If one of my boys sin I feel it as though I was part of the boy. I love them and although I may be disgusted with their ingratitude, etc., yet I still love them and therefore suffer with them.⁵²

Max accepted his responsibility to punish boys when the need arose, but it conflicted with the deeper values of love and kindness and caused him severe stress. He admitted that 'I hate the lash and ... am only too happy to find an excuse for not using it.'⁵³ Administering a flogging⁵⁴ made him sick and instigated a severe headache.⁵⁵ Boys sometimes laughed at the thought of physical punishment⁵⁶ and so Max tried other means: bread and water as permitted by regulations⁵⁷ and dressing the boys in women's clothing.⁵⁸

After four years of work at the reformatory, Max became disillusioned with corporal punishment. Reform had to be based on trust and respect. He wrote

McAskell says he will not take a boy's word avowing that he cannot trust any. I feel sorry for him for I find unless I can trust a boy I can do nothing with him... I may be a fool but

48 For example, Ibid., 19 July 1893, 30 August 1893.

49 Ibid., 11 November 1893.

50 Ibid., 3 February 1894.

51 Ibid., 14 May 1897.

52 Ibid., 26 April 1897.

53 Ibid., 29 December 1895.

54 Max uses the term 'flogging' on a number of occasions, probably synonymously with 'thrashing'. Whilst the juvenile Offenders Act did provide for corporal punishment, it did not sanction flogging.

55 Ibid., 14-15 October 1893

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 16-17 October 1893.

58 Ibid., 16-17, 27 October 1893.

*after four years experience, I feel that I cannot act otherwise for I feel that if reform is to be accomplished it will have to be through love and not terrorism alone.*⁵⁹

Punishment for absconding usually required a chastisement. Of the 35 boys who passed through Olinda, 14 absconded. Of these, only 6 absconded more than once and only two more than twice. There were long periods when no boy absconded: December 1894 to October 1895 were free as was the whole of 1896.

Fred Smith arrived on 30 July 1897 but was returned to the 'schools' (i.e. to the Reformatory Schools Department, at the Royal Park Depot) on 4 October. In this two month period, he absconded or attempted to abscond, ten times.⁶⁰ As we have already seen, tobacco was the given reason.

Jack Howson, one of the first Olinda boys, agreed to abscond with other boys in order to assist their capture. Max had qualms about this: it was 'too Jesuitical', too near 'doing an evil that good might ensue.'⁶¹ Though Howson received much praise in the early months, Max came to regard him as cunning and deceitful⁶² and one of his three major failures. He became a confirmed drunk.

Even serious absconders were not beyond rescue. Ted Adams arrived on 9 October 1893 and though he absconded several times, came to love Olinda. He was transferred to the nearby Hillside Reformatory on 6 July but found it lonely and wandered back to Olinda. He was moved to Fernydale but escaped from there being classed as one of the worst boys, though Max considered he was doing well before leaving Olinda.⁶³ After absconding from job placements, he was returned to Olinda as incorrigible.⁶⁴ He remained until April 1896 showing little aptitude for farming. Max often regarded him as criminally careless, destroying property and causing unnecessary expenditure.⁶⁵ He made a mess of strawberry picking and killed a snake after seizing its tail.⁶⁶ Max was on occasions pleased with his work and felt that he made an effort to be useful⁶⁷ and he finally grew into a 'big fellow... keeping steady'.⁶⁸

Max still maintained his concern for absconders. When Theo Hansen absconded from Olinda two days before news of his father's death arrived, Max took the train to town and succeeded in finding him in Chapel Street, South Yarra.⁶⁹

59 Ibid., 26 April 1897.

60 Ibid., 6 October 1896.

61 Ibid., 30 November 1893.

62 Ibid., 3 February 1894.

63 Ibid., 5 August 1894.

64 Ibid., 11 January 1895.

65 Ibid., 23 July 1895.

66 Ibid., 4 March 1896.

67 Ibid., 26 August 1895.

68 Ibid., 24 May 1897.

69 Ibid., 19 October 1899.

A further six or seven boys absconded from jobs in which they had been placed. They were still under Max's supervision and he placed most of them with people he knew around Donald. He came to believe that the fault did not lie with his boys:

Tom Cooper is reported as having absconded. As usual complaints are many on the employers part. I wish I could make myself acquainted thoroughly concerning the places to which the boys are sent. I cannot and will not believe that a boy who conducts himself in every way well at the home shall without some cause relapse into evil. In this case I believe that the fault is a much on the master's side as Coopers.⁷⁰

Max came to regard absconding from a 'place' as something almost to be expected, a virtually legitimate response to ill-treatment or injustice on the part of employers and an indictment of the system's incapacity to protect young workers. It was 'so difficult to choose a home in which our work will be continued wisely.'⁷¹ Possibly depression and drought made farmers more demanding than in prosperous years.

On the other hand, some boys were so happy at Olinda that they wanted to remain even when the state allowed them to leave. William Thomas Couch arrived in May 1894. He did not settle being under the impression that he was not to stay long. He was right as the Neglected Children's Department moved him a month later much to Max's annoyance.⁷² He was returned in February 1895, giving Max the opportunity to comment that he should not have been withdrawn.⁷³ Will Couch worked very well after this, gaining the quarterly money prize and receiving extensive praise for his work. On 25 October, Couch's sister wrote saying that his family was trying to have his time shortened and to get him home, not sent to a farm. Max regarded this as unwarranted interference. It was followed by a visit from his mother who tried to persuade him to come home, but young Will refused. Max agreed to keep him on after his time had expired and to find him a situation. Mrs Couch wrote her son a number of letters which Max (legally) refused to pass on. In these she declared herself to see him treated as a working beast, condemned religion as a cloak for thieves and bade him kill himself rather than stay.⁷⁴ A place was found for him in May 1896 but the life was very rough and he shared a hut with eleven others.⁷⁵ Max persuaded his brother Lee to take Will. He went to Lee's property at Swanwater West and got on well.⁷⁶ He later worked in Western Australia and

70 Ibid., 14 January 1899.

71 Ibid., 2b 3 August 1899.

72 Ibid., 16 June 1894.

73 Ibid., 21 February 1895.

74 Ibid., 17, 23 November 1895.

75 Ibid., 18, 21 May 1896.

76 Ibid., 7 January 1897.

Queensland and ended up in South Africa, probably with one of the militia units in the Boer War.

Max concluded the diary when only one boy remained. In considering the outcomes for the 35 boys who passed through his hands, he concluded that most had proved successes and that he was glad to have played a part in their reform. The diary also shows that in his seven years of work at the home, Max became increasingly aware and sympathetic to the boys' position, and although the diary was an official document which was examined by the Secretary of the Reformatory Schools Department (or possibly because of this), he used it to record his criticism of government policy and action.

The move to increased efficiency: changes in government policy regarding reformatories.

One of the effects of depression was to make the government determined to save costs by sending boys to employment as early as possible. Early in his career in the reformatory, Max was severely critical of Departmental decision to move boys to work placements before the process of reform had time to take effect. Joseph Davis, one of the first three boys, was moved to a place barely two months after the start. He had previously been at Fernydale, but Max considered that he would like to have kept him for some months longer.⁷⁷ The case of William Couch has already been mentioned. On the occasion of his first departure, only a month after arrival, Max commented:

It appears to be the policy of the government to get rid of the boys at the earliest convenience, reformed or otherwise. We ought to feel honored that a few weeks or months should be considered sufficient under our rule to fit the lads for fighting the battle of life but unfortunately the result does not come up to expectations.⁷⁸

In time of economic depression, no doubt government was concerned to move boys into an earning, rather than costing situation as soon as possible.

In later years, Max had great difficulty in getting a supply of boys and therefore the loss of even one affected his labour. Yet lest this be considered an issue of exploitation, the economics of the reformatories must be considered. Until April 1895, the Browns probably operated on a salary either from the Gordon Institute or from Albert Wiseman. Their employer would have received the government allowance and Wiseman the proceeds of the farm. In the summer of 1894-5, Max recorded sending fruit to both Wiseman and Barber, so it is difficult to see if the Gordon leased the whole enterprise, or was only responsible for the boys. In April 1895, Max recorded two simultaneous events: firstly Mr Wiseman 'is giving up the

⁷⁷ Ibid., 22 July 1893.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 16 June 1894.

farm work but hopes that Mr McAskell and myself will continue it on' and secondly that Mr Barber's health necessitated his dwelling in a warmer climate in the winter and 'his brain requires rest'. As a result, boys would come direct from the 'schools' not from the Gordon.⁷⁹ The arrangement entered into seemed to be that the three farms (Fernitydale, Olinda and Hillside) were leased from Wiseman, with the superintendents receiving the government allowance and the earnings from the sale of crops. Local government records show that Max eventually bought the property outright (Lot 124B in the Parish of Woori Yallock) from Albert Wiseman in 1898.

In 1895, the three farms agreed to work under McAskell, who was 'gazetted' superintendent (i.e. given formal government authority, with the others acting as his agents). Max noted:

McAskell having consented to act as Gazetted Super to all the farms, we have agreed to take the work in hand and make it pay if possible. I shall be fully content if I come out with a clean sheet at the end of the year. It will only be done by strict economy and making the use of every acre available.⁸⁰

Consequently, the boys' labour became of financial importance, though when the proposal was made to loan out boys to neighbouring farmers, Max recorded that he thought it would benefit them although

I need all the help of the boys on the farm but I cannot keep them from anything that will tend to their benefit and should deny myself for them.⁸¹

McAskell considered that the practice was against regulations, so Max had written to the department but the practice was not supported.

Over the next year, McAskell used his position to ensure that Fernitydale always had a full complement of boys, at the expense of the other two smaller houses. Max commented that by having so many boys and so many fresh ones led to the inevitable abscondings: at this time, four had fled from Fernitydale at once.

It appears as if he wished to shut up Olinda as he is keeping me out of boys. I have only had an average of 4 the past year and now I have but three. Something must be done or we shall starve.⁸²

The following week, he went to Melbourne and impressed on Thomas Millar the need to keep him supplied. He brought two

79 Ibid., 9 April 1895.

80 Ibid., 24 April 1895.

81 Ibid., 4 September 1895.

82 Ibid., 16 March 1896.

boys back with him.⁸³ A few weeks later, on the third anniversary of the opening of the home, he was able to record that he now had six government boys and hoped to be able to keep up that number. Without doing so, it would be impossible to make ends meet as the farm would not give any return for some years.⁸⁴ Max had planted 160 apple trees in 1894 and 1895 and these needed time to come to maturity. Like other local growers, he was concerned about the high freight costs involved in getting produce to market (about four pounds ten shillings per acre) and became one of the leaders of a deputation to the Railway Standing Committee, proposing a narrow gauge line to serve the community.⁸⁵

The situation did not last. By May 1896, Max was down to half strength again and estimated that he was losing a pound per week. McAskell was maintaining his numbers at 13 to the detriment of Olinda and Hillside. It was useless to complain to Millar who only referred the matter to Mcaskell, who took care to supply his own need.⁸⁶

The supply of boys did not improve and the market for fruit continued to suffer from the depression. In May 1899 Max reported that the 'paucity of boys causes great hindrance to my work' and that he not only had less under crop but would be late in getting it in.⁸⁷ The following month, he reported that he had to employ labour for the first time, owing to having no boys.⁸⁸

In the final diary entry, Max reiterated his feeling that the government intended to drop Olinda as a home. But for the needs of his one remaining boy, he would have closed his books six months earlier.⁸⁹ The Browns remained at the farm, except for a short period at the Methodist Tally Ho Boys Home, until 1907, growing fruit and using their accommodation as a boarding house.⁹⁰

The closure of Olinda Farm stemmed from much deeper causes than McAskell's self interest. Juvenile offending did not increase in the way that George Guillaume and his colleagues had feared, but fell, as it did in most advanced economies in this period. In Victoria, between 1881 and 1901, criminal charges against children under 15 years of age declined by over 50%, from 111 to 49 per 10,000 of population in that age group.⁹¹ In addition, the courts made increasing use of the suspended sentence provision introduced in the 1887 legislation, with correspondingly less recourse to custodial

83 Ibid., 21 March 1896.

84 Ibid., 30 May 1896.

85 *Lilydale Express*, 24 April 1896.

86 OFD, 4, 7 May 1897

87 Ibid., 1 May 1899.

88 Ibid., 13 June 1899.

89 Ibid., 17 July 1900.

90 Information from the *Lilydale Express*, 6 December 1907, and from memorabilia in the hands of Mrs Tucker, niece to Mrs Brown.

91 *Year Book of Victoria*, 1903.

orders. Direct reformatory committals declined from 116 in 1881, to 61 in 1891 and 42 in 1901.⁹² The Victorian government statistician observed in the 1898 *Year Book* that 'under the age of fifteen the proportion of criminality is so small... that for present purposes, the population of that age may be left out of consideration altogether.'

Despite the decline in offending, the number of reformatories grew in the 1890s: new Protestant reformatories for boys were opened at Bukawert, Kingsbury and Harcourt and Mount Paradise, near Pakenham, for Catholics. The Salvation Army moved its Heidelberg Reformatory to larger premises at Bayswater, where it offered superior advantages to the smaller reformatories. While Max and his boys pioneered at the foot of the Dandenongs, clearing, grubbing, planting and harvesting fruit and vegetables and chasing the cow which kept absconding into the bush, the Salvation Army provided a comprehensive training program on 350 acres of prime land. The property boasted a model dairy, irrigation and up-to-date agricultural equipment, as well as purpose-built accommodation for the boys.⁹³ Not surprisingly, Millar was persuaded of the advisability of taking advantage of such an excellent facility, and despite his previous enthusiasm for small family reformatories, 'with extreme regret' arranged to withdraw authority from 'one or two' of the smallest reformatories, Hillside and Olinda, in 1900, though in practice they had been run down long before.

At the end of the depression of the 1890s, government, as in later decades, was attracted to technical training. The general or family model of juvenile reform, supplemented by placement with small farmers, was seen as ineffective and supplanted by the technical training model offered by Bayswater. While Millar openly admitted that Bayswater's technical superiority had resulted in the demise of some of the smaller reformatories, the press mounted increasing public criticism of the family model. The belief that delinquency could be cured by a period of surrogate family life in reformatories or farmhouses was being discredited by evidence that badly supervised individuals, albeit with impressive religious references, could not be trusted to exercise authority effectively or even humanely. Brookside, the Protestant girls' reformatory which had influenced Guillaume to favour the family model in the late 1880s, was slated by journalist Alice Henry as 'savouring of the dark ages'⁹⁴ and closed by government authority in 1903. A series of *Age* articles in February 1905 took the government to task for sending reformatory wards to people it knew little or nothing about. In many cases, their education was sadly neglected and when they ceased to be wards of state, they were likely to join the great army of 'generally useful' and 'light labourers' who 'ultimately drift into the ranks of the unemployed or worse.' For less money than they now cost the state, they might receive a skilled training. There was

92 *Ibid.*, 1898.

93 Report of the Department of Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools, 1899, p.6. VPP, 1899-1900, Vol 5.

94 *Argus*, 2 August 1899.

competition among the reformatories for boys and Fernydale was singled out for criticism as the secretary 'observes that those at Wandin Yallock pick raspberries!'⁹⁵

David Syme and the *Age* contributed to the establishment of the Fink Royal Commission of Technical Education, 1899-1900, which ultimately resulted in the extension of technical schools. The post-Federation era emphasised national survival through technical efficiency, but in spite of this and the criticism of the private reformatories, successive governments were only too glad to leave reformatory work to voluntary bodies until after the Second World War. In the increasingly complex secular society, efficiency finally triumphed over morality and the state increasingly took charge of young offenders. The Carney Report, the Child Welfare Practice and Legislation Review Report, published in 1984, recommended that only government bodies should hold offenders in detention.⁹⁶ Finally Bayswater, the last survivor of the non-government reformatories, closed in 1987.

Conclusion

The Olinda Farm diary not only fulfilled its statutory obligations of recording the arrivals, departures, abscondings, punishments and placements of the boys sent there, but also gave a very clear picture of the values, stresses and emotions of its author. It shows how the Browns and boys came from two different worlds, but in time both crossed to some extent, into the other. Many boys accepted some of the values offered, fully as in the case of Samagus the missionary, or most likely for the majority, to the extent sufficient to survive and gain some comfort. In its later years, the diary shows the local effects of the conflict between the value rational approach of Christian family based reform and the demand for technical training to contribute to increased national economic efficiency. Though this resulted in the demise of Olinda, the non-government institutions continued to be the cornerstone of Victorian juvenile corrections policy for almost three-quarters of a century.

⁹⁵ 'Boys of the State,' *Age* 2,4,6,11 February 1905. Especially 4 February.

⁹⁶ Government of Victoria, *Child Welfare Practice and Legislation Review Report*, 1984, p.496.