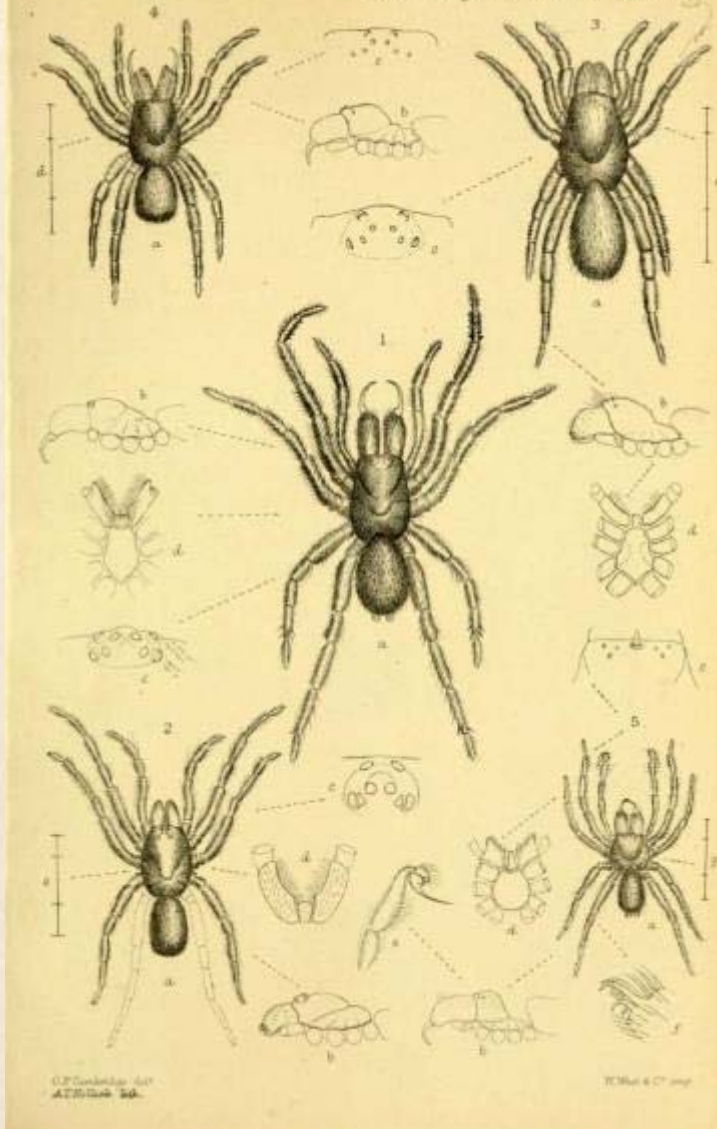


# A galloping tour of Sydney's medical history



Dr Peter Hobbins  
Department of History  
University of Sydney



# *Atrax robustus*

*Effects of Bite.*—An account of the fatal results from a bite of a male of this spider, and the circumstances surrounding it, is here given as it appeared in *The Sun*, Wednesday, 23rd February, 1927.

The story of how a spider bite proved fatal was told at the Hornsby Coroner's Court to-day, when the District Coroner (Mr. H. Richardson Clark) held an inquiry into the death of a baby boy, Clyde William Thompson, of Thornleigh. Constable Harmer, of Thornleigh, said that on February 15 the little boy was sitting on the laundry steps, with his parents close by, at their home in Clifford-avenue, Thornleigh. Suddenly with an agonising scream the child jumped up. Mrs. Thompson picked him up and hurried him into the kitchen.

Constable Harmer produced the spider—a big black one. He said that the museum authorities had told him that it was a trap-door spider, *Euctimena tibialis* Rainbow. This was the first case on record of a person dying from the bite of a trap-door spider. He was of the opinion that the child was crushing the spider in his hand when it bit him.

Anthony Musgrave, 'Some poisonous Australian spiders', *Records of the Australian Museum* 1927; 16( 1): p.34

O. P. Cambridge, 'On some new genera and species of araneidea', *Annals and Magazine of Natural History* 1877; XIX: Plate VI.



# Themes

- discipline and nutrition
- sanitation and segregation
- humans and nonhumans
- practitioners and patients
- alcohol and morality
- lifestyle and status

# Discipline and nutrition

- Sydney as a supervised settlement
- Centralised institutions and responsibility
- Governors (ex-) naval or military until 1867
- Individual and public health = healthy colony
- Convicts as workers rather than prisoners
- Immigrants instructed to be successful settlers

# Managing convict health



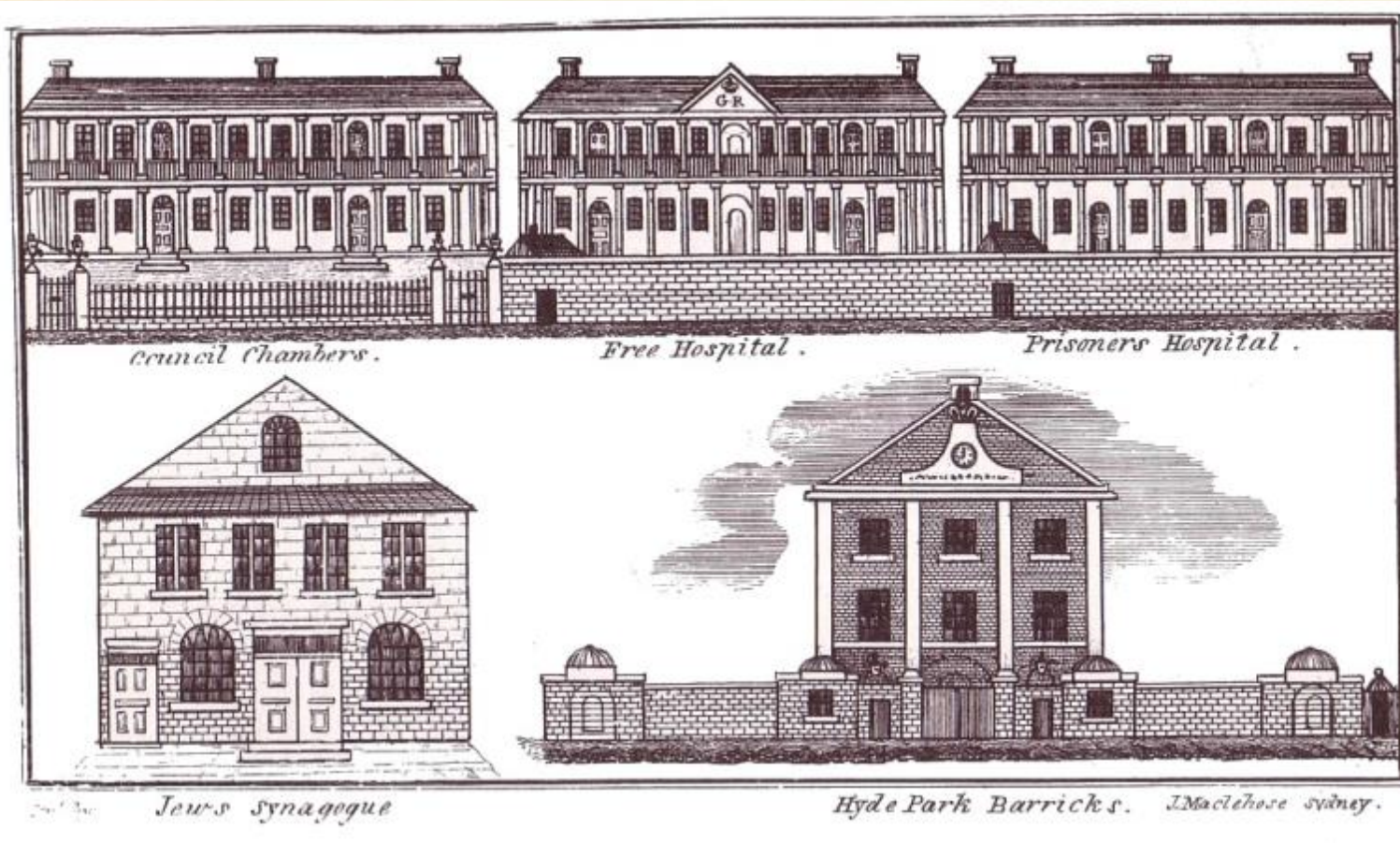
Augustus Earle, *Views in New South Wales* (1830).



# Health and sickness, 1800–80

- Airs, waters and places
- Dirt and light
- Climate
- Contagion
- Constitution and diet
- Morality, class, temperance and vice

# Health and the fabric of Sydney



James Macle hose, *Picture of Sydney and Strangers' Guide in NSW*  
(Sydney: James Macle hose, 1839), opp. p. 117

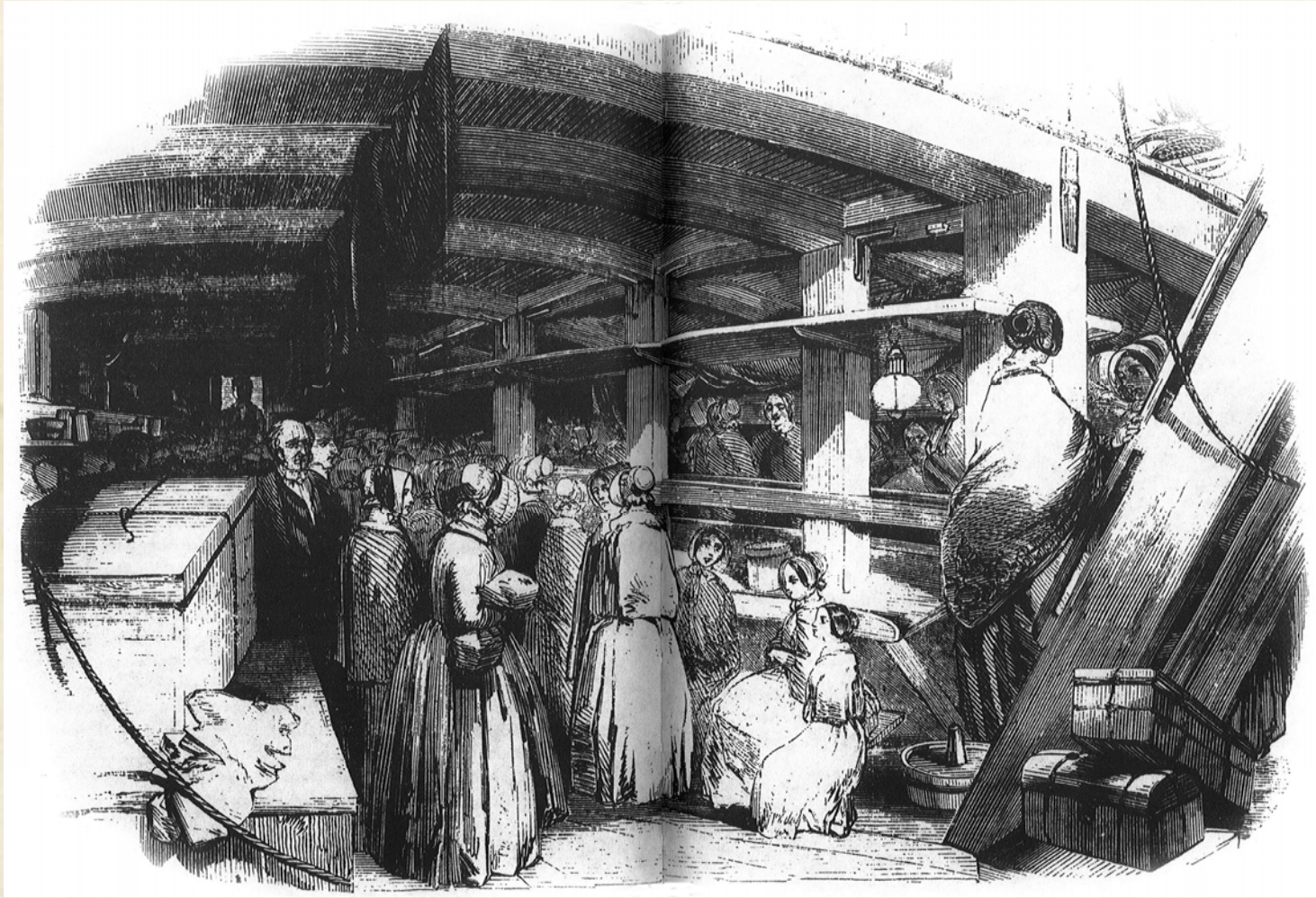


# Public health?

- Food and drink
- Industry and trade
- Sanitation and sewerage
- Quarantine – human and animal
- Vaccination and castration
- Hospitals and asylums?
- Education and publicity?



# Rations and shipboard hygiene



*Illustrated London News, 17 August 1850.*

# Hospitalisation in Sydney, 1819–59

1819	1838–39	1849	1859
Ulcers	Accidents/violence	Accidents/violence	Rheumatism
Accidents/violence	Influenza	Rheumatism	Accidents/violence
Abscesses	Diarrhoea	Ulcers	Venereal
Venereal	Rheumatism	Venereal	Diarrhoea
Catarrh	Dysentery	Dyspepsia	Ulcers

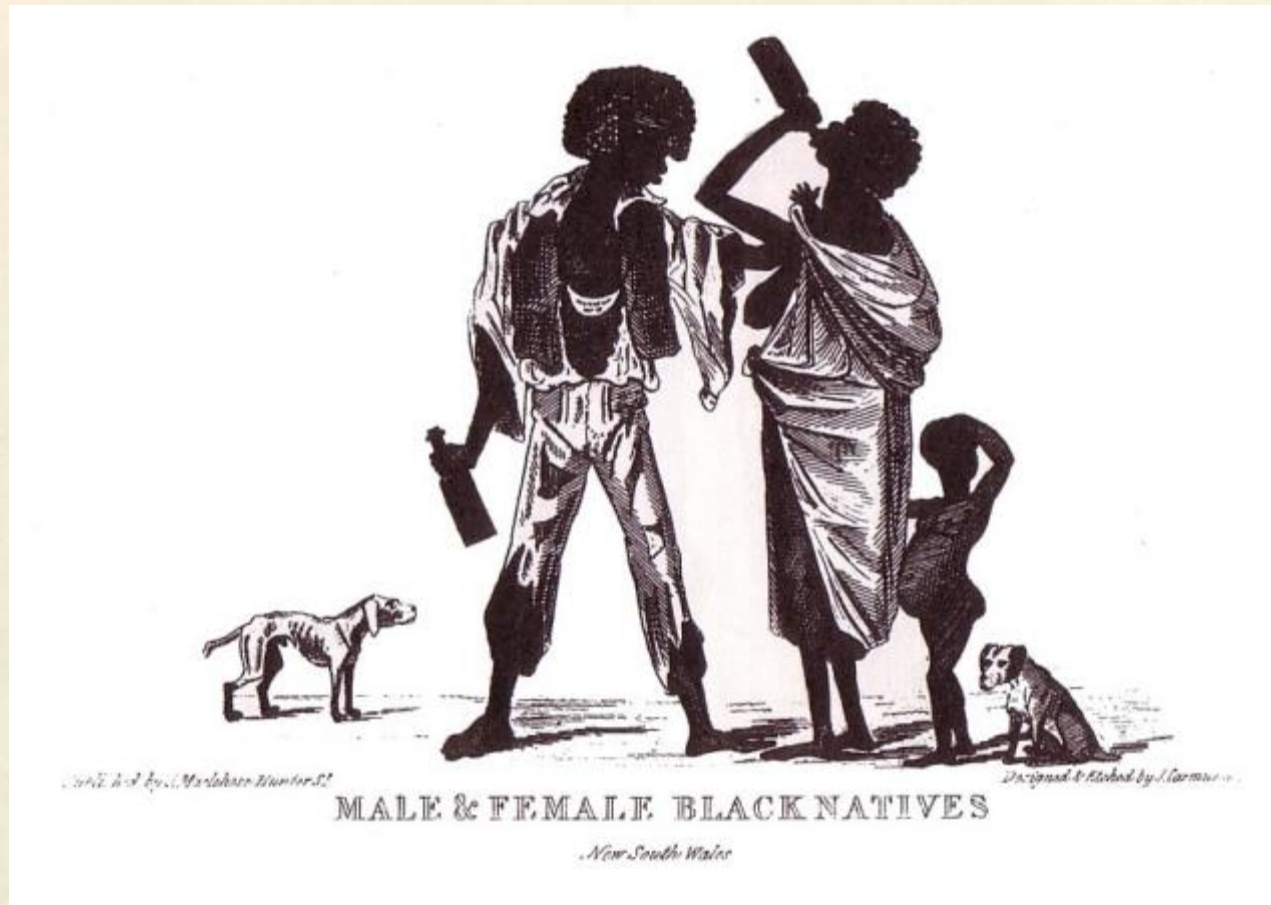
Data adapted from Peter Curson, *Times of Crisis* (1988), pp. 12, 19.



# Sanitation and segregation

- Geographic isolation as blessing and curse
- Disease as individual and environmental
- Morality, class and race govern sickness
- Quarantine the primary barrier to contagion
- Epidemic threats justify civic intrusion
- Disease reshapes the city and its denizens

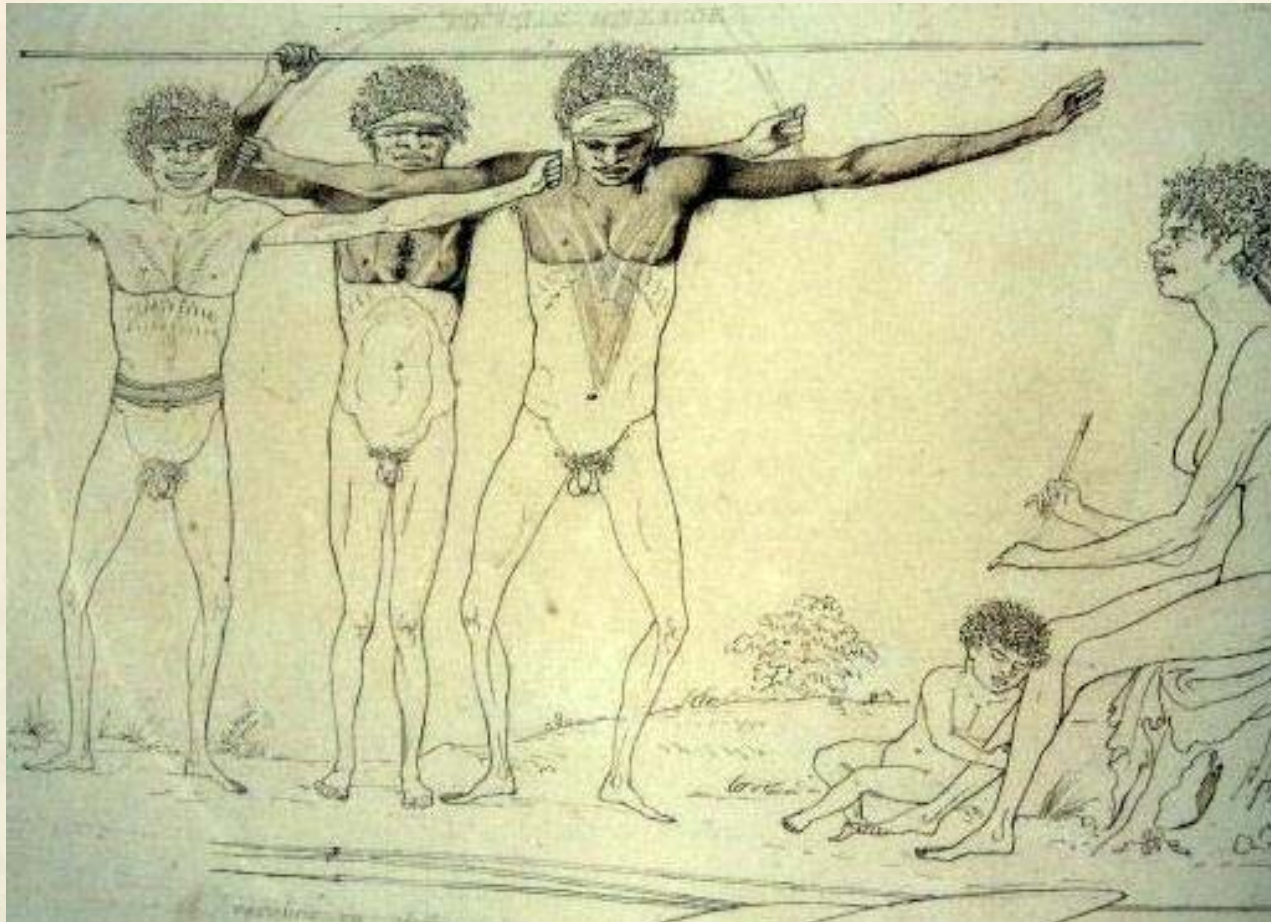
# Class and race, morality and dirt



James Maclehoze, *Picture of Sydney and Strangers' Guide in NSW*  
(Sydney: James Maclehoze, 1839), pp. 164-6

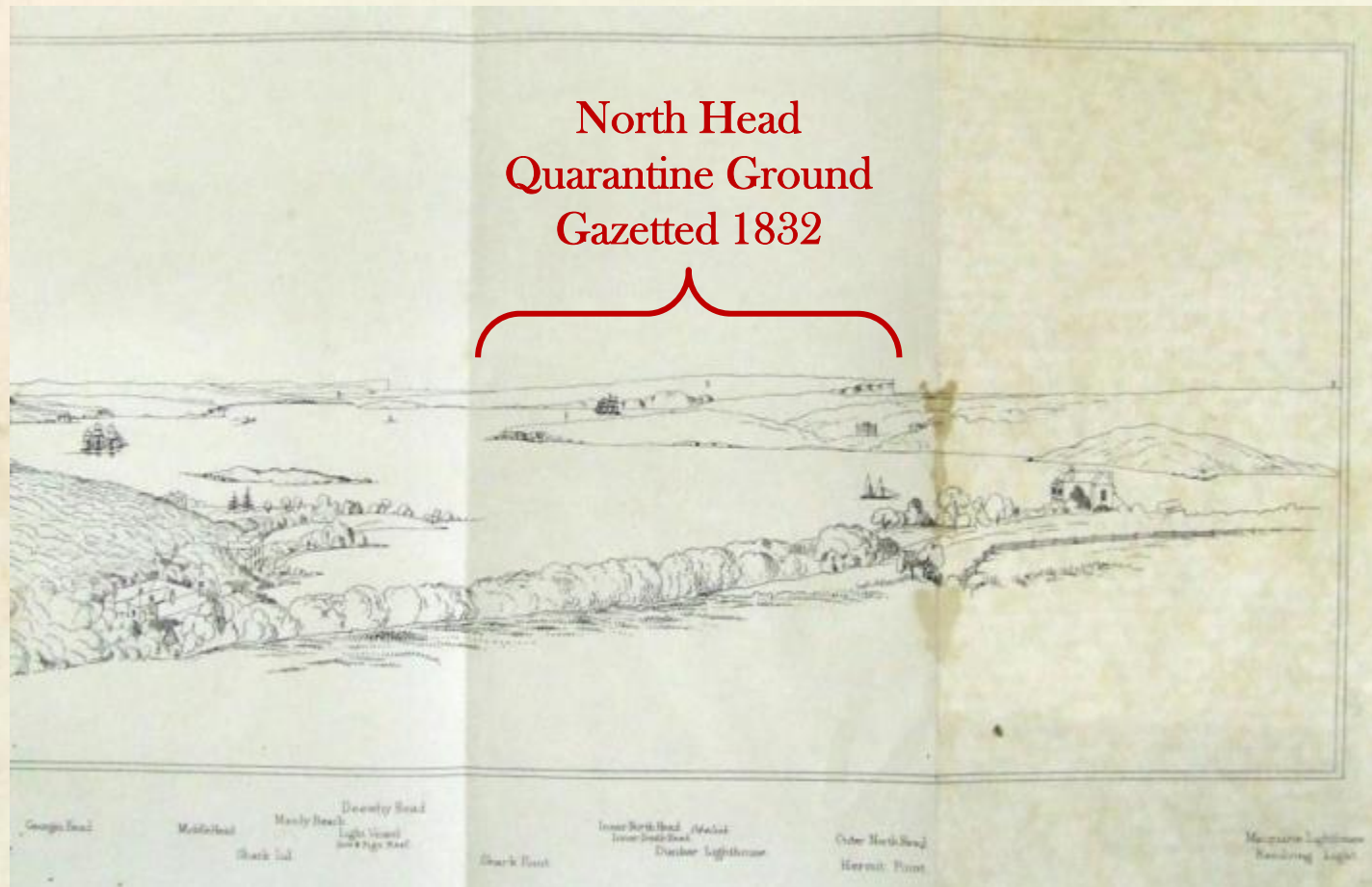


# Colonialism and biological invasion



Charles Alexandre Lesueur, *Corobore ou Danse* (1802).

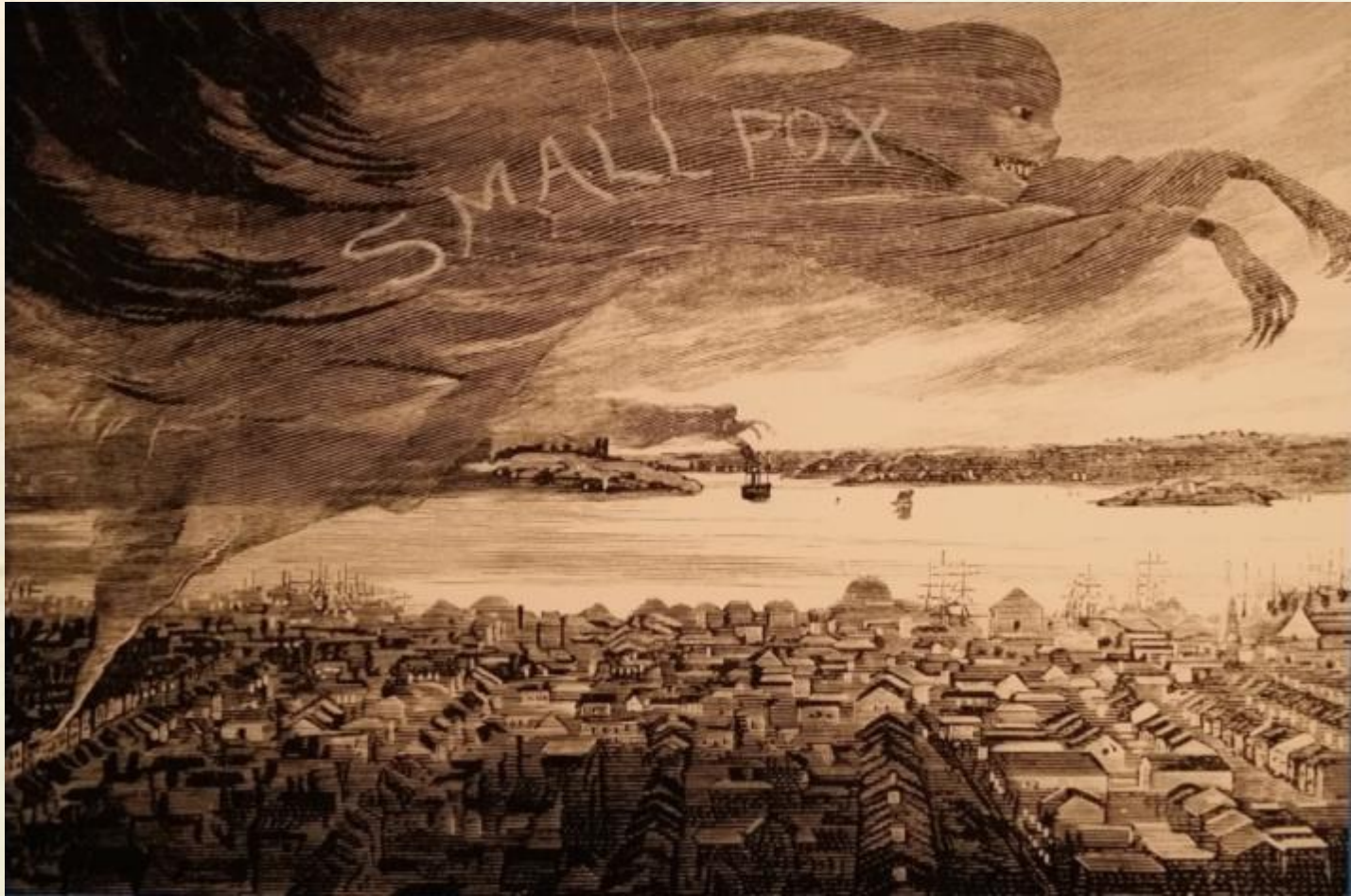
# Keeping disease out



James AC Willis, *The Harbour of Port Jackson, New South Wales*,  
(Sydney: Thomas Richards, Government Printer, 1871)

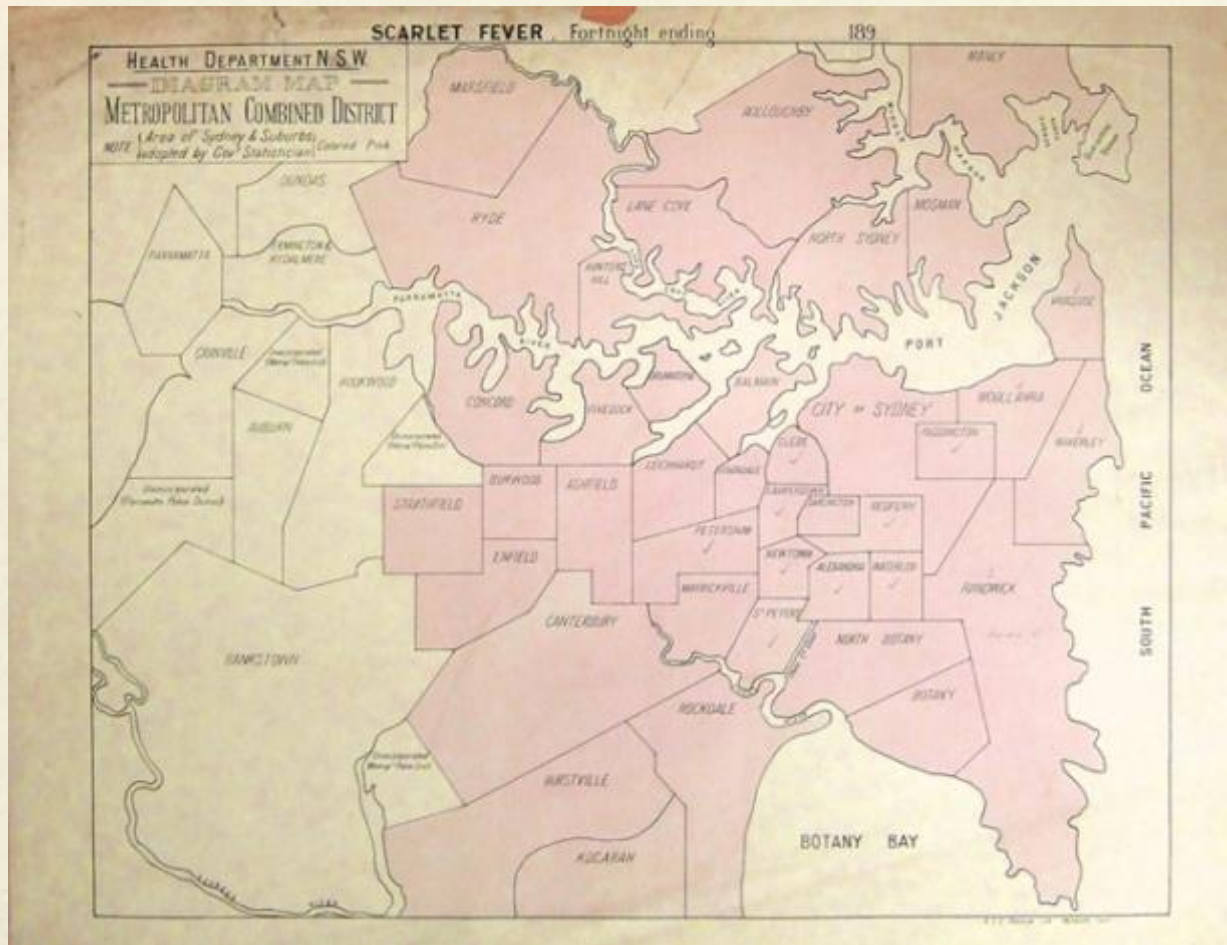


# Race, place and disease



State Library of New South Wales, ML PXE 1467

# Surveilling the sick city



University of Sydney Department of Archaeology map store



# Cleansing and clearing Sydney



State Library of  
New South Wales  
ML PXE 90 & 93



# Humans and nonhumans

- Human settlers never arrived alone
- Creatures carry, suffer or represent disease
- Microorganisms emerge as prime threat
- Animal trades are forced from the city
- Vaccination never mandatory, always contested
- Germ theory follows rather than leads health



# Health and sickness, 1880–1950

- Climate and cleanliness
- Germs and pandemics
- Vectors and disease ecologies
- Immunisation and medication
- Infant and maternal welfare
- Cancer

# Rats, lice and history

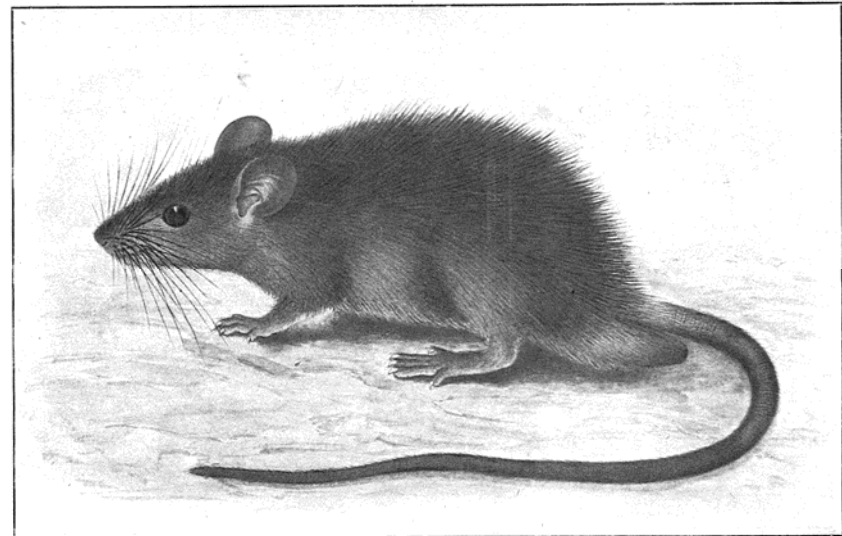
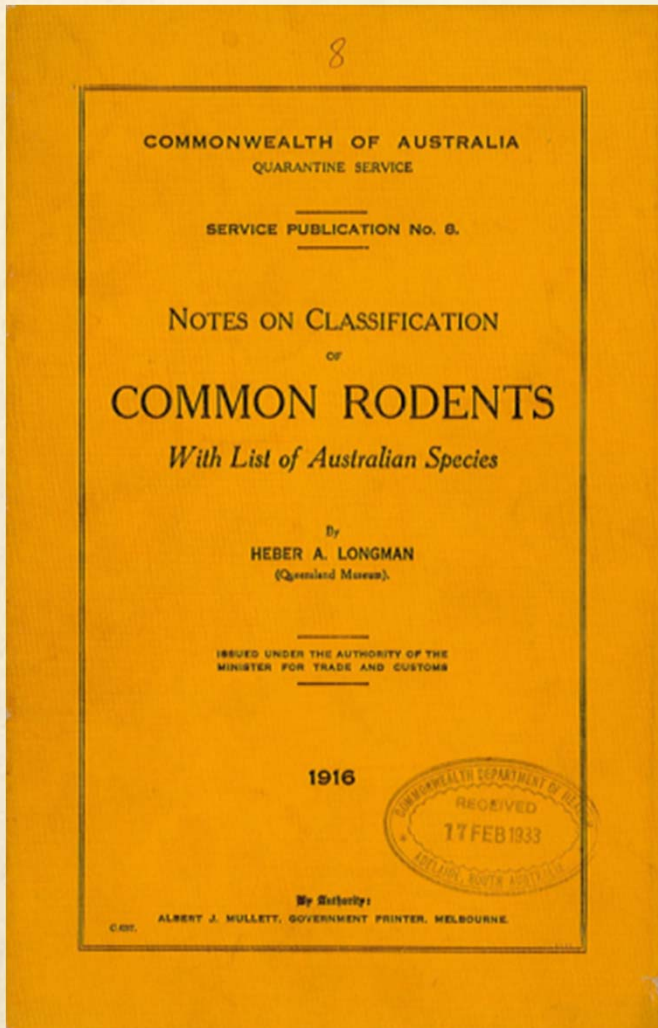


PLATE III.—*RATTUS RATTUS*, Linn. The Black Rat.

[After Haswack.]

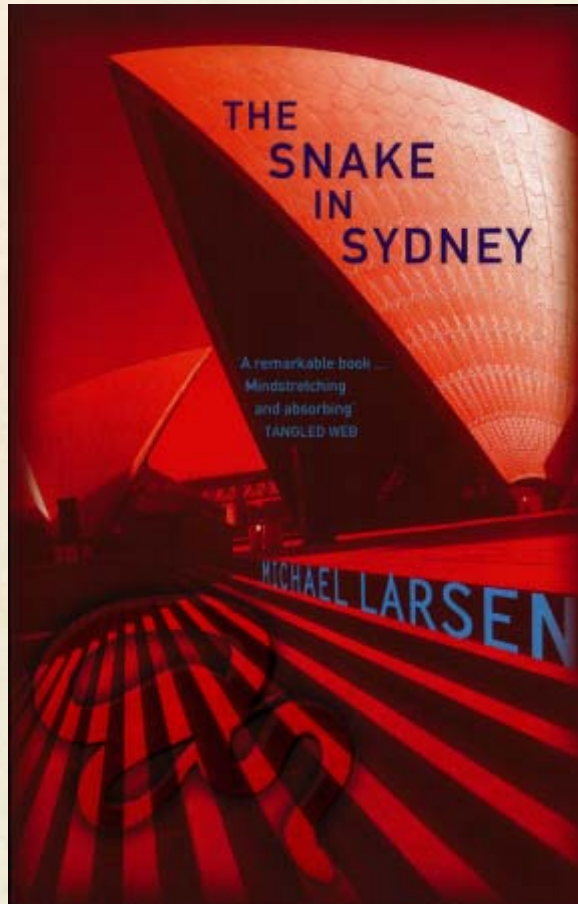
## INSPECTION OF VESSELS FOR EVIDENCES OF RATS AND MICE.

The following places should receive special attention whenever a vessel is examined for traces of infestation by rats and mice :—

1. Galley, bread lockers, and bakehouse (if any).
2. Store, pantry (if any), and vegetable lockers.
3. Food store rooms, particularly bread stores, flour stores, and other places where soft stores are kept or handled.
4. The disposal of food refuse should be inquired into and the garbage receptacles inspected.
5. Saloons and mess rooms.
6. Boats, casings of steam pipes, rudder chains, &c., vegetable lockers on deck, and other possible shelter places on deck or in upper works.
7. Bulkheads and partitions for traces of runways along pipes or otherwise.



# Local threats?



When a young woman is rushed to a Sydney hospital suffering from a snakebite, she's lucky to be treated by Annika Niebuhr, a doctor whose fascination with serpents began with the Norse myths of her Danish childhood. Annika recognises the bite of a taipan - the world's most poisonous snake, but not one native to Sydney - and realises it can only have been planted.



George Barrington, *The History of New South Wales*  
(London: Printed for M. Jones, 1810), p. 448 & facing.

# Domesticates and disease

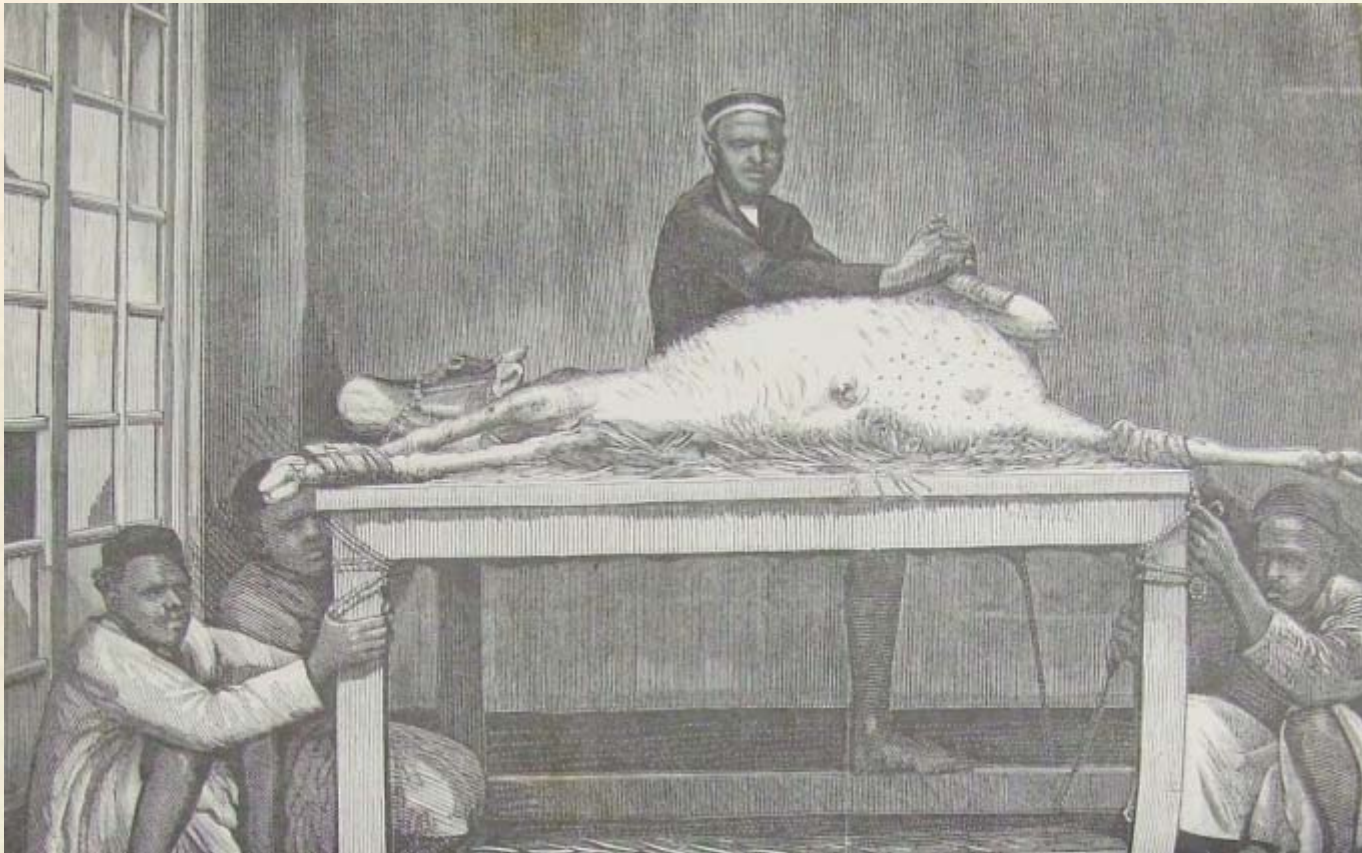


GLEBE ABBATOIRS.—KILLING AND DRESSING SHEEP.

*Australian Town and Country Journal*, 7 June 1879, p.1088.

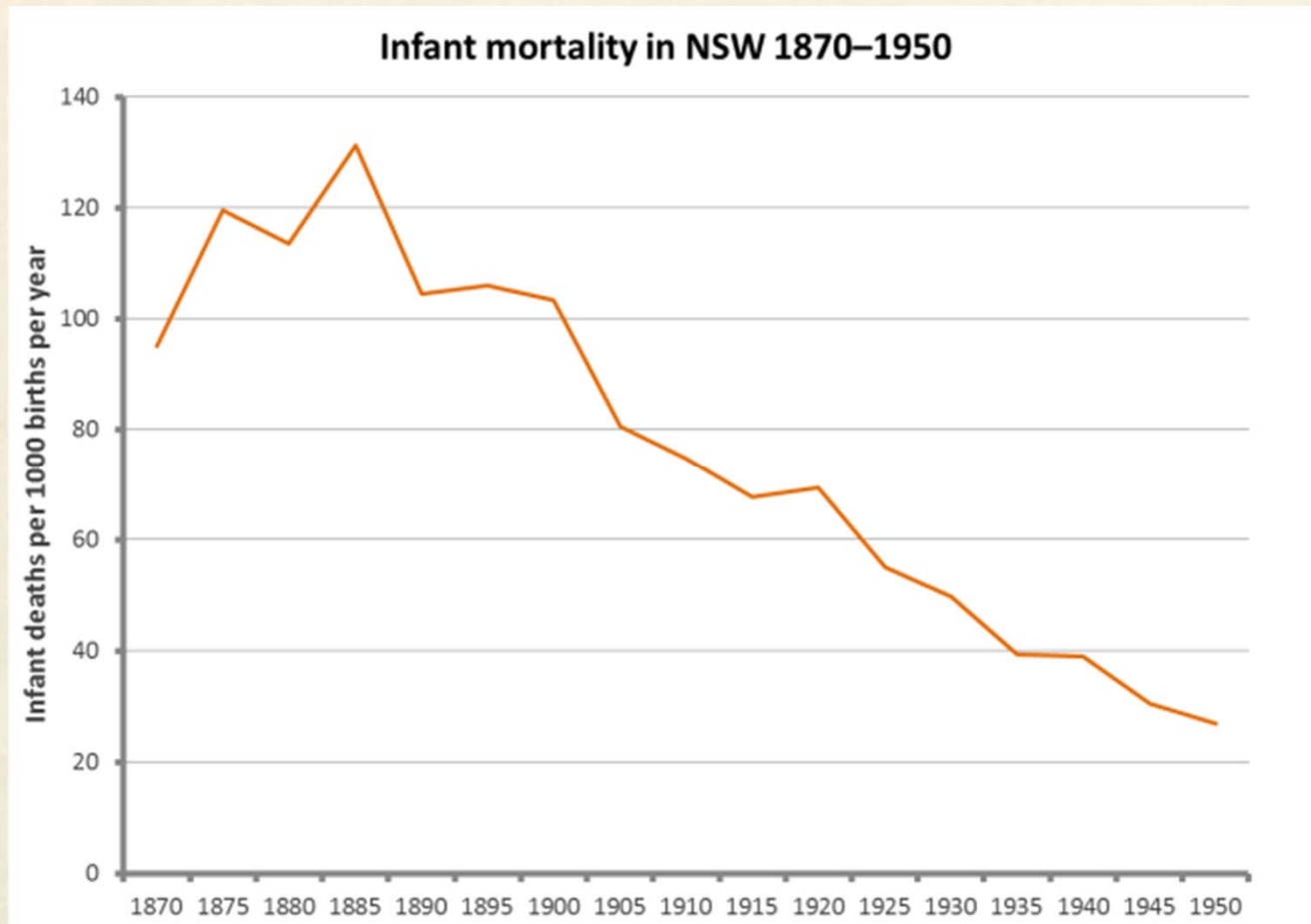


# Vaccination and voluntarism



Alex Cumming, *Animal Vaccination: Being Information Supplied by the Government of Bombay to That of New South Wales, on the Subject of Animal Lymph and Vaccination* (Sydney: Thomas Richards, 1882)

# The triumph of medicine?



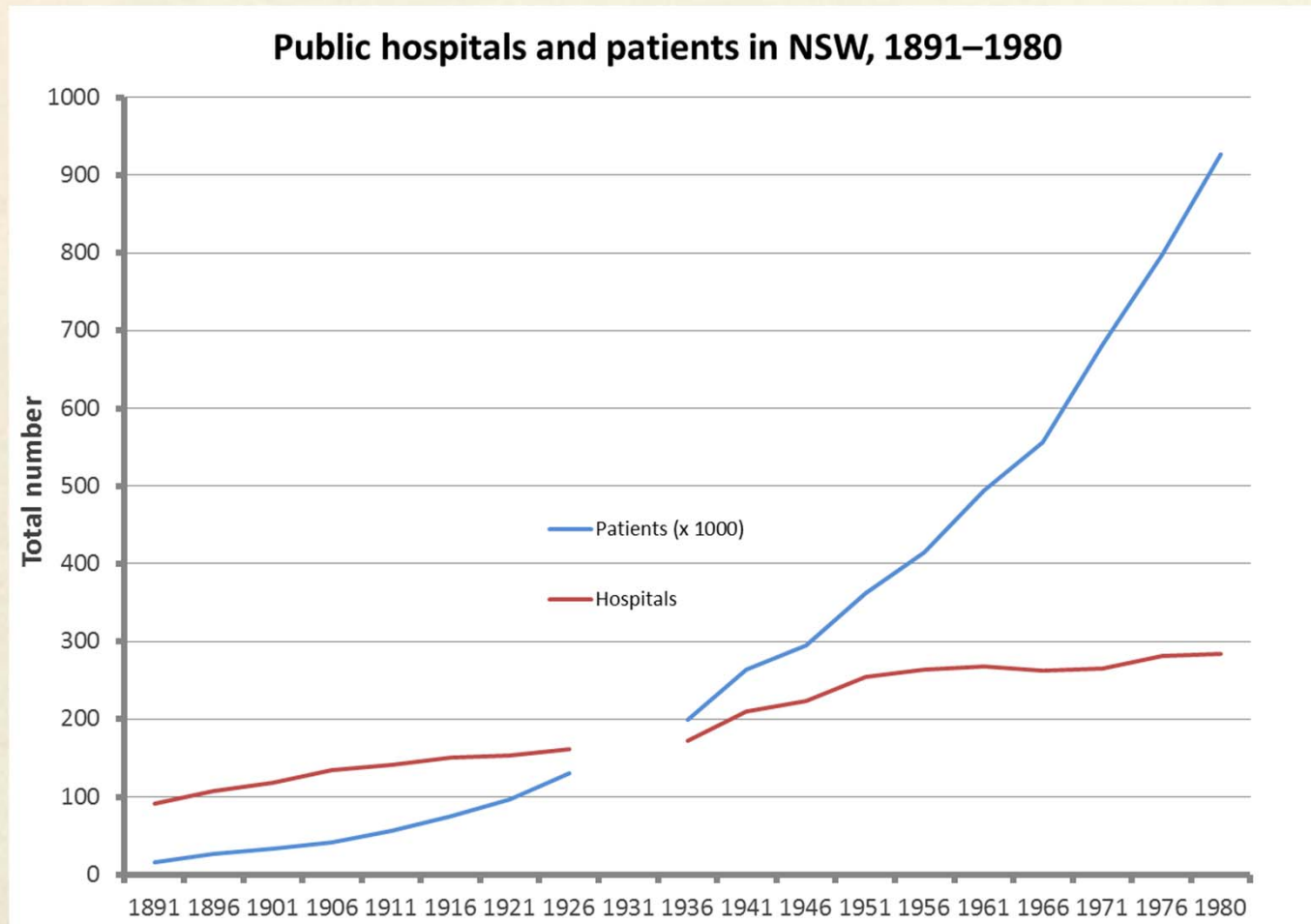
Data from *Australians: Historical Statistics* (1987), p. 58



# Practitioners and patients

- Social status of doctors rises only slowly
- Hospitals shift from community to government
- Wellness replaces health
- Individuals made responsible for wellness
- Healthcare expands but paternalism questioned
- Size and complexity of city threatens responses

# Intensive care



Data from *Australians: Historical Statistics* (1987), p. 326



# Health and sickness, 1950–2000

- Civic duties and national rights
- Physical and mental wellness
- Lifestyle and behaviour
- Medical paternalism
- Immunisation
- Cancer

# Patients – practitioners – publics



The 'Grim Reaper',  
NACAIDS / Gray Advertising, 1987



Jamie Dunbar,  
*Taking Centre Stage*, 1992

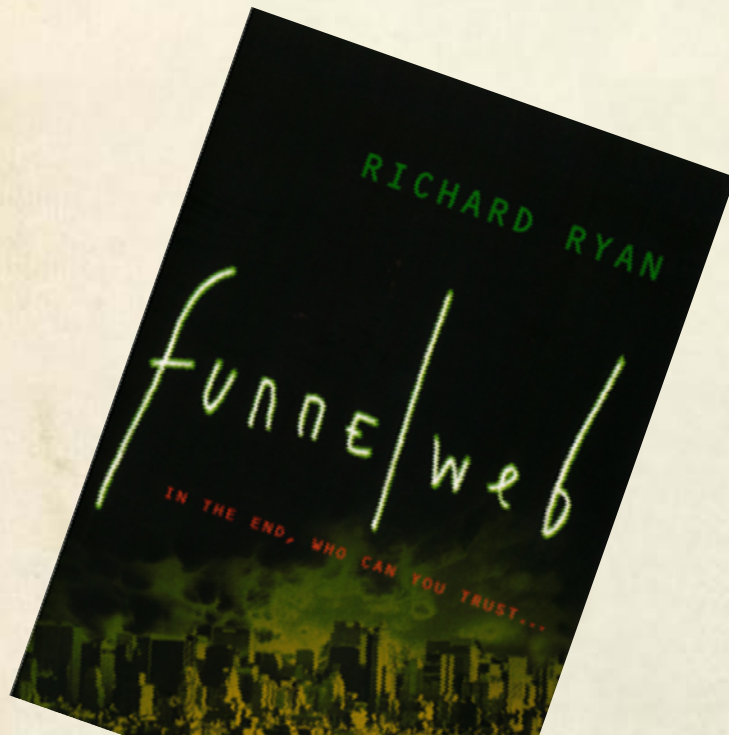


# Culture Jamming



[www.bugaup.org](http://www.bugaup.org)

# Global health, local restrictions



Sydney's funnelwebs are irradiated by contaminant from a US submarine and wreak havoc in a city of fear.

Scientist Jack Fitzgerald and journalist Helen Parkes join forces against the nationally spreading nightmare. But in the corridors of power as in the panic-stricken streets, the descent into barbarism is as chilling as the horror of the spiders.

- Spanish flu 1918–19
- Asian flu 1957
- Hong Kong flu 1968
- HIV/AIDS 1982–
- BSE/vCJD 1987–
- SARS 2002–03
- Equine flu 2007
- Ebola virus 2014?



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Peter Meldrum, *A Little Nest of Funnelwebs*  
(Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1983), cover