

# Softgoods, Engineering and Sport

J. S. M. THOMPSON IN NEW ZEALAND AND VICTORIA 1868-1910

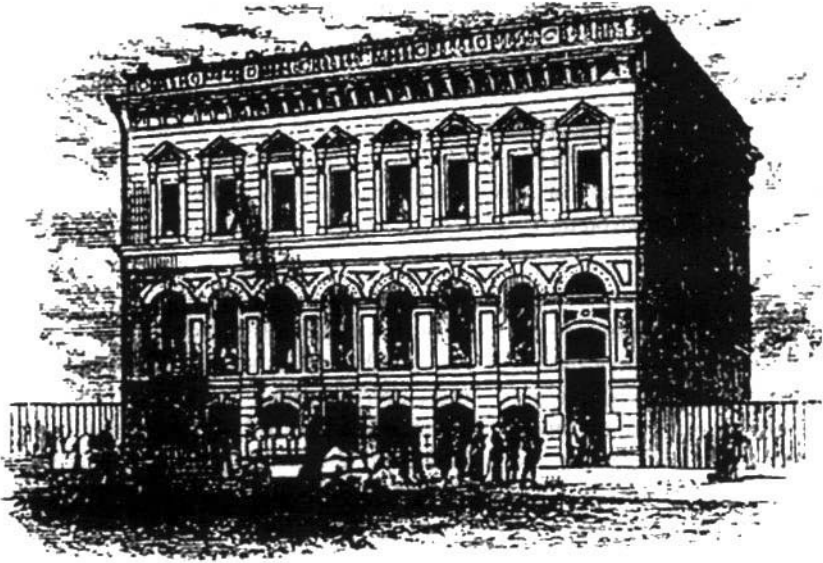
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Trotsky's well-known insistence on sport as a means by which the bourgeoisie instilled false consciousness in the British worker seems to anticipate the current commercialisation of almost every competitive activity.<sup>1</sup> The nineteenth century can no longer be regarded as a period of relative amateurism when sport was compartmentalised from the wealth-producing activity of society.<sup>2</sup> Since Brian Stoddart in the 1980s, there has been much written on Australian sport as a means, not only of mobilising an effective workforce, but also of managerial control. Most examples are, however, taken from the period after the 1914-18 War.<sup>3</sup>

John Smylie McDewell Thompson, from Maghera in the Irish County of Derry, is a valuable example for analysis in an earlier period. During his long career of warehousing softgoods in New Zealand and foundry production in Australia, Thompson was associated with so many games and athletic organisations as to appear a sporting fanatic. But records of his physical involvement are limited. Was his sporting interest, associated with a number of business directorates, intended to boost his commercial interests?

Thompson was born in 1840, shortly before the outbreak of the great Irish Famine, 1845-49, to a middle-class Presbyterian family, possibly landed. His older brothers, David and James, with some training in engineering, emigrated to the Victorian gold rush of the early 1850s. After successful ventures into gold prospecting, machine processing of ore and flour milling, the Thompson Brothers in 1875 set up an iron foundry at Castlemaine. They extended their interest from producing crushing and sluicing machinery for local mines to manufacturing rails for Victorian locomotives and sewage systems for Melbourne.

In 1863, their younger brother, John, who then travelled on to the latest gold rush on the west coast of New Zealand, joined the Thompsons. Partnered by a cousin, James Barkley, Thompson established a softgoods warehouse in Greymouth. When the gold petered out ten years later, John,



*Thompson, Shannon & Co. Building, Wellington, New Zealand. Courtesy of Richard Davis.*

usually denoted as J. S. M., Thompson moved to the New Zealand capital, Wellington, on the eve of an economic 'takeoff'.<sup>4</sup> In partnership with George Vance Shannon, a slightly younger emigrant from Antrim, Thompson initially warehoused imported softgoods. In the 1880s, Thompson, Shannon & Co. expanded their operations to include the manufacture of clothes and eventually retailing. With branches at Christchurch, Napier and Auckland, they employed, during a period of economic stringency, several hundred persons. The partnership was dissolved in 1888, with Thompson carrying on alone until 1891. As his brother David had died, J. S. M. sold out his New Zealand interests and took over the Thompson & Co. iron foundry in Castlemaine, working closely, until his death in 1910, with his other brother James and nephews, David junior, Robert A. and Dr John L.

In Wellington, Thompson and Shannon, like most ambitious businessmen, involved themselves in local politics and the boards of other companies, but Thompson also turned to sport. Back in Ireland, while Thompson and Shannon were growing up, horse racing had been particularly popular with all classes. Cricket was enthusiastically played by the gentry and more surprisingly, after the famine had disrupted traditional sports like hurling, also by country folk before the Gaelic revival. In Wellington of the 1870s, cricket was gaining ground in the summer, while rugby football was shaking off the attractions of Australian Rules, whose influence was spreading from Victoria.

In his sojourn at Greymouth, 1867-74, Thompson became associated with

what Leslie Hobbs declared 'the natural life of the true West Coaster' — the love of horses and gambling. Enthusiasm for betting was, with characteristic exaggeration, attributed to the Irish population. Similar claims on the Irishman's roistering and betting proclivities have been made in Australia, where the running of the Melbourne Cup became a major annual event for almost all citizens.<sup>5</sup>

When J. S. M. Thompson arrived in Greymouth, the local Jockey Club had been set up with a racecourse a mile and a half from the town, attracting miners to its annual races from nearby claims. As in Ireland and elsewhere, racing on the New Zealand South Island West Coast fulfilled the needs of both lower orders and elite. On the one hand, there were the 'the usual cloud of camp-followers in the shape of thimble-riggers, trick-o'-the-loop men, over-and-under conjurers, pitch-and toss players'<sup>6</sup> while the grandstand protected the dignity of the local gentry and provided an opportunity for sartorial display, giving ladies a chance wear the latest fashions.<sup>7</sup> Charlton demonstrates that in Australasia, as in Ireland, racing, though popular with all classes was a hierarchical sport with the affluent well insulated from the masses.<sup>8</sup> Thompson was soon involved in Greymouth. Between 1868 and his departure in 1874, Thompson at different times acted as steward, treasurer, clerk of the scales and sole judge for the Greymouth Jockey Club.<sup>9</sup> Stewards had no connection with horses before the races, or with betting, and comprised the elite of the region, headed by the goldfields' magistrates. To be included as a steward of the local races was an obvious boost to the reputation of a local businessman.

But there was a more pressing reason for a draper to take racing seriously. The contrast between the Thompson, Smith and Barkley's assurance to the local ladies of the 'very LATEST NOVELTIES, as worn in London and Paris'<sup>10</sup> a few months earlier and the extremely raw state of the new town of Greymouth could not be greater. The local newspaper was itself disgusted with the 'terrible filthiness' and the 'seas of stagnant water that lie around' Mackay Street in the centre of the township, while the atmosphere was 'tainted with the effluvium from piggeries and stables to a degree almost intolerable.'<sup>11</sup> The 'gracefully garmented'<sup>12</sup> ladies who did not quite fill the grandstand at the Greymouth Races were doubtless grateful for the latest dresses from Paris and London. Thompson's firm reinforced this connection in an 1870 advertisement for an 'immense arrival of new goods', surprisingly headed, 'Greymouth Annual Races, 1870'.<sup>13</sup> Sport clearly appeared an excellent selling point.

Horseracing was not the only sport helpful in building up a local profile. Cricket was growing in popularity on the Coast. Arthur Guinness a local Indian-born lawyer of Irish extraction, later knighted as Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives, captained the Greymouth cricket team. There were also pedestrian sports and boating regattas organised by

prominent local men at this time. J. S. M. Thompson, still in his early thirties, took no part in such activities.

On arrival in Wellington in 1874 to establish a new softgoods company, Thompson moved beyond the sporting interest he had shown in Greymouth. Racing, not developing as rapidly in Wellington as in other New Zealand centres, was again an early preoccupation. Though he claimed 'he had taken to racing for pure sport',<sup>14</sup> Thompson had a flair for organisation over and above any passion for horseflesh or love of financial flutter, inappropriate in a steward.

Once again, the racing club organisation provided entree to the best circles. In the year after his arrival in Wellington, Thompson was elected a steward of the Wellington Jockey Club,<sup>15</sup> which became Wellington Racing Club in 1878. The president was a local grandee, the Hon. William Fitzherbert, Speaker of the New Zealand Legislative Council, or Upper House of Parliament. A long-term New Zealand politician, originally qualified as a doctor in England, Fitzherbert had been a cabinet minister, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Superintendent of the Province of Wellington. As Thompson himself said, after persuading Fitzherbert in 1881 to remain president, his name 'in connection with the club gave it a tone which it otherwise would not possess.'<sup>16</sup>

Also active in the Jockey or Racing Club were George Hunter and Edward Pearce, eminent local businessmen and Members of Parliament, representing Wellington electorates. Hunter was a director of the local morning daily, the *New Zealand Times*. Thompson and his partner G. V. Shannon joined the list of their political supporters. In the dignified role of Racing Club steward, Thompson soon took the lead in procedural matters. A fellow steward was W. H. Levin,<sup>17</sup> another leading businessman and MP, recognised as the richest person in Wellington at that time.<sup>18</sup> In 1881, Thompson chaired meetings of the stewards and the Racing Club itself.<sup>19</sup> By 1883 he was a vice-president,<sup>20</sup> often deputising for the president, Edward Pearce.

Thompson confronted many problems, the most important being the finding of a suitable racecourse and public access to it. This need resulted in the establishment of a rival Jockey Club, which demanded a course at Island Bay, more convenient for Wellingtonians than the Racing Club's more distant alternative at Lower Hutt. Though an opponent of Thompson's, Mayor and fellow Irishman George Fisher supported the Jockey Club,<sup>21</sup> Thompson appears to have calmed the hot heads on his side, who believed their opponents sought 'war to the knife'. His conciliatory approach ultimately enabled his organisation's venue to prevail.<sup>22</sup> The Racing Club, moreover, improved the access to the Hutt, widening the road and providing a better rail service, including the formation of the Hutt Railway Company, of which Thompson became a director.<sup>23</sup> At a Racing Club farewell banquet in 1891,

Thompson was eulogised by the future Prime Minister, Francis Henry Dillon Bell, as the 'moving spirit' who had brought an impecunious club 'to its very satisfactory position' through his 'sagacity, energy, shrewdness and courage'.<sup>24</sup> According to the *Evening Post*, 'the Racing Club may be said to owe almost all its existence, certainly in its present satisfactory position, to his exertions'.<sup>25</sup> The moderation with which he handled the disastrous rivalry with the Jockey Club may well have been one his greatest achievements in New Zealand.

In view of the demands of Thompson, Shannon & Co., and his other businesses and insurance company directorates, J. S. M. could hardly have given so much time to the Wellington Racing Club had it not provided collateral benefits. Later in Castlemaine, when he headed the town's leading business, Thompson took no part when citizens endeavoured to set up a racing club.<sup>26</sup>

In Wellington, unlike at Greymouth, horse racing was not the only sport on Thompson's agenda. Emphasising the Scottish, rather than the Irish side, of his Scotch-Irish background, in December 1875 he became an elected director of the Wellington Caledonian Society, founded in emulation of an original organisation in Otago in 1862 and of similar bodies springing up in other parts of New Zealand.<sup>27</sup> The Society conducted popular annual athletic competitions.<sup>28</sup> It was ecumenical in that it provided challenges in cricket and Irish jigs,<sup>29</sup> along with the more obviously Scottish activities such as sword dances and tossing the caber. Thompson acted as timekeeper in the foot races.<sup>30</sup> The Members of Parliament, George Hunter and Edward Pearce, were again prominent in this organisation, as were other leading businessmen, such as Joe Dransfield, a wine merchant who became Mayor of Wellington. Andrew Young, the hotheaded Racing Club stalwart from Dungannon, was another leading figure. As well as judging in the Caledonian Society's annual summer sports, Thompson demonstrated his customary organisational flair. At the 1877 AGM, he seconded the election of the president, nominated the treasurer and chaired the committee to arrange the next sports programme, which again included tossing the caber and cricket as well as foot races. Gaelic events, previously dropped, were reintroduced.<sup>31</sup> The press pronounced the resultant sports the best ever. The New Zealand Governor, the Marquis of Normanby, patron of the society, arrived for the event of the day, the 440 yards foot race for the cup presented by Thompson, who was also the judge for the leaping and vaulting.<sup>32</sup>

Despite such good publicity the Society lost money after building one of the first stands at the Wellington Basin Reserve, for many years a venue for international sport. Thompson inevitably chaired the meeting to discuss the liquidation of the overdraft. A leading member pronounced the Caledonian Society 'practically defunct' and the *New Zealand Times* agreed that it was 'in extremis'.<sup>33</sup> The grandstand was sold to the Wellington City Council, of which Thompson was then an elected member. The following year, Thompson still

judged the running and walking.<sup>34</sup> When the organisation petered out after 1883, Thompson was one of those who worked for its revival in 1885 and secured election to its Finance Committee and the directorate.<sup>35</sup> Though it continued the annual sports, the new Society, like its Otago forerunner, placed greater emphasis on education and offered, in the absence of a Wellington University College, a wide range of general subjects: English, Latin, maths, geology, mechanics, political economy, and music.<sup>36</sup> Thompson grew less involved.

Encouragement of sport had other uses. During a Wellington fire brigade conference, Thompson, Shannon & Co. made available the yard behind their warehouse for sports, including a tug-of-war, thus adding to their reputation as an example 'of how Wellington merchants should receive visitors if the reputation of the city is to be maintained.'<sup>37</sup>

Cricket was increasing its popularity in Wellington as on the West Coast. Thompson obtained election to the committee of the Wellington Cricketers' Association and became president of the Rival Cricket Club and patron of the Rival Rugby Club, later succeeded by other well-known business and political identities, such as D. J. Nathan, H. D. Bell and J. Duthie.<sup>38</sup> Shannon, his business partner, showed less interest in sporting administration, but he had worked for Nathaniel Edwards & Co. in Nelson, which provided special concessions on its steamers for patrons of horseracing and cricket.<sup>39</sup> Shannon's son, Graham, who played for the Rival Rugby Club of which Thompson was sometime president, represented New Zealand.<sup>40</sup> Like Thompson, G. V. Shannon contributed his guinea to the Wellington Cricketers' Association.<sup>41</sup> His sons Graham and Willie were also notable cricketers.

Thompson, Shannon & Co. played an annual cricket match at the Basin Reserve, against a rival importing drapery, Harcourt & Co.<sup>42</sup> Such matches between commercial firms were common in Australia and New Zealand at the time. Annual picnics, which included races and other sports, were normal practices of organisations ranging from public servants to Orange Lodges in both Australia and New Zealand.<sup>43</sup> Although the local papers did not publicise them, it seems likely that Thompson and Shannon would have participated in activities useful for maintaining *esprit de corps* and a fellow feeling between management and worker. When Thompson took a trip 'home' he received a presentation from the company workers,<sup>44</sup> and after a disastrous fire in 1887, Shannon publicised the retention of all workers, even when they had little to do in the initial period of recovery.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, the company received at least one fine for working its girls beyond the legal hours. In New Zealand, as in Australia, sport, picnics and prizes organised by employers helped to create an identity of interest between bosses and workers, perhaps making strikes less likely.

This became even more apparent when Thompson sold out his New

Zealand interests and moved in 1891 to take over the management of the languishing Castlemaine Thompson Foundry after the death of his eldest brother, David. By 1888, Shannon had already left the partnership and gone into Government service as Customs Expert, a post not involved with sporting administration. In Castlemaine, Victoria, Thompson, working very closely with older brother James and his nephews, David junior and Robert, in the firm, with assistance in the community from a third nephew, Dr John L., operated a fully developed patriarchy.<sup>46</sup> As the largest business in Castlemaine, employing at various periods from 90 to 400 staff,<sup>47</sup> the Thompson Foundry was the lifeblood of the community and J. S. M. Thompson the acknowledged business leader. In Wellington he was only a rising businessman with many competitors; in Castlemaine he had few rivals. He did not now require the publicity of the local Council or membership of local organisations outside the auspices of his own business. His nephews, however, maintained the image of the company by activity in Castlemaine affairs. Castlemaine, however, was not the equivalent of Port Sunlight, up the Mersey from Liverpool, established by soap baron William Lever. The Thompsons had grown with the town and never possessed total dominance. A younger Ulster Presbyterian immigrant, Hugh Victor McKay, after J. S. M.'s death established a dominance in Ballarat, similar to the Thompsons at Castlemaine, with his Sunshine harvester works.<sup>48</sup>

The Thompson Foundry approached sport at three levels — directly as the company itself, indirectly through semi-independent bodies loosely connected with the firm, and more remotely through the membership by individual partners of private clubs. The most important direct intervention, organised, as J. S. M. pointed out, by the workers themselves,<sup>49</sup> was the Thompson Foundry picnic, an annual event since 1882. Though other Castlemaine organisations also held picnics, the Foundry's event was the highlight of the local social calendar. Held at a suitable venue in a nearby town like Malmsbury, the Castlemaine Foundry picnic created its own ritual. Special trains were chartered. The mayor and councillors of the honoured township formally received the Thompson directors whose capacious marquee at the picnic grounds, anticipating the corporate tent city at modern Melbourne Cups, accommodated the family and dignitaries who included the local MPs. Such obvious class distinction, paralleled by that of racing, belied the local newspaper's claim that no hierarchy was observed during the picnic.<sup>50</sup> The Thompson family's noblesse oblige in timing or judging the foot and cycle races, dancing competitions and miscellaneous events, partly obscured social gradations. Interest was focussed on the competitive Foundry handicap, balanced by the comic old buffers' race. If the Miss Thompson who won the 1902 young ladies race was, as seems likely, one of J. S. M.'s three daughters, she played her part in creating the illusion of identity between workers and management.<sup>51</sup> If fact, the marquee is a good example

of Balnave's principle that managerial authority was strengthened by its benevolence. As she points out, organisation of activity by worker representatives did not alter the reality of social control.<sup>52</sup>

Lavish prizes helped to create general good will. Preparation began well in advance of the nominated day when well-wishers, including members of the Thompson family themselves, notified the press of their contributions. Most of the shops and smaller companies were happy to place themselves on the list, thus advertising their own products. A butcher offered half a sheep, a jeweller a cup or trophy, Fitzgerald's Brewery a cask of ale,<sup>53</sup> and an enterprising dentist a set of false teeth.<sup>54</sup> Amongst many others, the Thompson family regularly presented a double-barrelled gun as a suitable male gift. All those who paid a levy for the picnic ticket were in the draw. In 1894, distribution took place in a shed in the Company's yard. David Thompson called out the names of those enrolled, while his brother Robert listed the winners and their uncle, J. S. M., head of the firm, distributed the prizes, 17 of the total of 49 coming from the family itself. J. S. M. emphasised the requisite lesson. He 'expressed their pleasure in making the presentations, for they all took an interest in the welfare and comfort of their employés after leaving their work as when they were engaged in it. With other comments happily chosen, great cheering followed these kindly sentiments.'<sup>55</sup> The main business rival of the Castlemaine Foundry, the Woollen Mill, declined to canvas for prizes for its own picnic.<sup>56</sup>

Revisions to the gambling laws gradually created a difficulty for the operation of the picnic days. Victorian Premier George Turner in 1896 accepted the legitimacy of art unions, provided the prizes were not in cash.<sup>57</sup> But by 1907 the law had been tightened to prevent the usual draw. Prizes were retained but the decision as to their recipients was left in the hands of the committee.<sup>58</sup> By 1905, however, the distribution of prizes in a Company shed had metamorphosed into a full-scale concert in the Town Hall.<sup>59</sup> If the element of chance removed some of the thrill, the picnic and the social to follow still reinforced loyalty to the firm. The use of art unions by the Thompson family conflicted with their adherence to the local Presbyterian Church, the ministers of which were ardent opponents of gambling in this period.<sup>60</sup> Prevailing sentiment forced the Thompsons to allow a temperance booth at their Maryborough picnic,<sup>61</sup> while they still accepted gifts of alcohol for the occasion.<sup>62</sup> The family trouble-shooter, Dr J. L. Thompson, addressed the local Temperance Institute on the need to preserve clean sport from the encroachment of the drink and gambling evils, his remarks falling short of an absolute condemnation of both alcohol and games of chance.<sup>63</sup> J. S. M. unashamedly publicised his annual Christmas donation of a dozen bottles of wine to the local Benevolent Asylum.<sup>64</sup> The Foundry picnic, minus the prizes, survived into the 1970s.<sup>65</sup> Unlike William Lever at Port Sunlight, J. S. M. does not personally appear to have made much use of religion for cementing hierarchy.<sup>66</sup>

If the picnic was the highlight of the Thompson Foundry's worker liaison, it was supported by other Foundry sports and related activities, semi-detached from the management. Most significant was the Foundry Band, prominent at the picnics.<sup>67</sup> Founded in 1885, six years before J. S. M. Thompson's arrival, the Band, until the inception of the Borough Band in 1907, was the main source of musical entertainment in the town.<sup>68</sup> It played regularly in the Botanical Gardens, produced a sacred concert on Christmas night, and appeared regularly on hotel balconies, beside the Post Office and at various sports' meetings, often on behalf of charity. Notwithstanding the Ulster Presbyterian background of the Thompson family, the Foundry Band also accompanied the local Hibernians at sports held in opposition to those organised simultaneously by the Orange Lodges.<sup>69</sup> There was some tension with the local Presbyterian Minister, the Rev. Hume Robertson, who objected even to sacred concerts on Sunday afternoons.<sup>70</sup> Yet the sacred concert was surely a step towards the incorporation of religion into the commercial cause. The Band rarely played an Irish tune and inevitably concluded with *God Save the Queen*.

The Foundry Band raised most of its own finance. David, J. S. M. Thompson's nephew, remained president and the other Thompsons were elected on the list of vice-presidents, later becoming patrons.<sup>71</sup> The Thompson executives contributed their annual pound or guinea to the organisation. The ecumenical flavour was maintained by the matching of Protestant clerics, such as the Rev. Hume Robertson, who sometimes preached at Orange gatherings,<sup>72</sup> and Fr James O'Neill, the local Catholic pastor, on the vice-presidents' list.<sup>73</sup>

Another semi-detached organisation was the Foundry Football Club. In England, the United States and Australia, company sporting teams have proved invaluable to business. The Sunlight Soccer Club was formed in Sydney shortly after a visit by William Lever himself to his company's soap works in Balmain. In addition to encouraging physical fitness, company sports clubs appear to have created a team spirit, easily extended to the shop-floor, and, when successful, to have provided excellent publicity for the firm.<sup>74</sup>

The Foundry football team certainly provided excellent publicity. Under various appellations it was a power in the area, frequently winning the local competition. On J. S. M. Thompson's arrival in 1891, he had no difficulty moving from patronage of Rugby Union in New Zealand to appearing as vice-president, president and patron of an Australian Rules side in Castlemaine, presenting trophies and appealing for funds. In 1892, he gave a dinner for the football team.<sup>75</sup> The Thompsons shared the presidency: J. S. M., his brother James, and nephews David and Dr J. L., all taking turns. The latter, born in Castlemaine, but graduating at Edinburgh University, publicly declared the well known hope that Australia's success at games would prove that the British race had not degenerated in a hot climate.<sup>76</sup> The Foundry sometimes

produced cricket teams, but not on such a professional basis as in football.<sup>77</sup> The Thompsons inevitably emerged as patrons of the Castlemaine Foundry United Cricket Club and Junior Cricket Club.<sup>78</sup> A regular opponent was the Castlemaine United Cricket Club and an annual match was played against the Bendigo Foundry team.<sup>79</sup> Later the emphasis was on the Castlemaine Borough team, well beaten by the City of Launceston in a match in 1907.<sup>80</sup> Cricket was also a popular amusement at Foundry picnics.<sup>81</sup>

These sports carried the Foundry name with the backing of the Thompson family. Other Castlemaine sports such as bowls, shooting, golf, tennis and even motor racing<sup>82</sup> were ostensibly independent. But, like J. S. M. in New Zealand, the Castlemaine Thompsons organised and sometimes participated themselves in a wide variety of activities. J. S. M. Thompson himself played golf. The club, playing on a course adjacent to the Thompson's house, elected him one of its patrons,<sup>83</sup> and later its president. According to his obituary, there was 'no more liberal supporter or more earnest worker' for the Golf Club.<sup>84</sup> Thompson's wife became ladies' captain and the wife of nephew David junior, a member of the committee.<sup>85</sup> The Foundry chief joined the Bowling Club in 1891, soon after arriving in Castlemaine, and donated a handsome trophy for its competition, but does not seem to have been an active member.<sup>86</sup>

The Castlemaine Rifle Club also elected J. S. M. its president and his brother James presented a Lee Enfield as a prize for competition.<sup>87</sup> Robert Thompson was a member of the Castlemaine shooting team and became president in 1906.<sup>88</sup> Balnave links rifle shooting in this period with patriotism and company loyalty.<sup>89</sup> A tennis club was formed in 1894, with J. S. M. and Robert as vice-presidents.<sup>90</sup> Dr J. L. served on the club's committee and Mrs David Thompson on the ladies' committee. There was little chance of avoiding the ubiquitous family in Castlemaine.

Thus J. S. M. Thompson in Wellington, New Zealand, made a persistent effort to participate as an administrator in horse racing, cricket, rugby and Caledonian sports. Cricket, at least, was used to create *esprit de corps* amongst the employés of Thompson, Shannon & Co. In a softgoods firm, with many of the employés' female, it was then difficult to promote equivalent games for women, though races for females were usually arranged at picnic sports.

In Castlemaine, Thompson's position was reversed. As the most influential businessman in what was almost a company town, he had no need to make his name in the community by appearing on a variety of organisations. His status, however, led to many requests that he become a dignified figurehead.<sup>91</sup> Apart from golf, Thompson's heart problems in the years after 1900 limited active involvement in pursuits such as tennis, shooting or bowls. His participation in the Foundry-directed band, football and cricket was similarly indirect, while he was more immediately concerned with the annual picnic and its sports. That the Foundry workers were nearly all men made their

recreation easier to encourage.

The motivation for this emphasis on sport is clear. The local newspaper in 1896 effectively stated the family's objectives and the image they wished to create:

The one great social event in connection with the extensive and well-organised Foundry of Messrs Thompson and Co. is the annual picnic of the employers and employés, for all unite in making the gathering the complete success it invariably is. As at work, so at play, or rather at the picnic, the same 'camarderie' feeling exists, thus giving a significant illustration, as it were, of the grand old motto, 'United we stand, divided we fall.' It would be superfluous to refer at any length to the thoroughness of the system adopted in the conduct of Thompson and Co.'s foundry, where everything goes along with clocklike regularity from one year to another. There is an entire absence of friction between the management and the employés; trade disputes are unheard of there, and it is sufficient to state that in this particular that the Foundry is a model of exemplary organisation and enterprise. Long may such continue at the establishment in question, and long may its progress keep expanding, for to Castlemaine, the Foundry is an indispensable adjunct to its general prosperity.<sup>92</sup>

How far did the ideal coincide with the reality? According to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in the last year of J. S. M.'s life, the Thompson Foundry with its long hours was 'the greatest sweating shop in Victoria.'<sup>93</sup> But during J. S. M. Thompson's nineteen years at the helm, 1891-1910, only one strike, over the sacking of a boilermaker for striking his mate when provoked, was publicised.<sup>94</sup> Yet the work was often dangerous and the local paper full of serious accidents at the Foundry.<sup>95</sup> When a worker was sucked into machinery and whirled to his death, his brother was 'fully satisfied with the conditions obtaining at the works for the safety of the employés'.<sup>96</sup> That executives shared the dangers of their workers was dramatically demonstrated when J. S. M.'s nephew, David, then head of the firm, was crushed to death by a falling boiler in 1916.<sup>97</sup> Even in the depressed 1890s the workforce oscillated between 200 and 400, and no serious strife occurred. While disapproving of the system, J. S. M. was elected an employer representative to the Victorian Ironmoulders' Wages Board and appointed to the kindred Brassworkers' Board.<sup>98</sup> His nephew David succeeded J. S. M.

But there were also other factors. J. S. M. did not often speak publicly on the value of sport but gave some indication of his views when complaining, at a meeting to set up a Castlemaine branch of the Employers' Federation, that 'the country districts were at a disadvantage by the workmen being called to Melbourne, where they had amusements, sports, cricket and footballing. These were carried on to a larger extent than they should be.'<sup>99</sup> On this analys-

is, company sports inoculated against the dangers of the metropolis. Dr J. L. Thompson, who sometimes lectured on sport, exhibiting the climatic degeneration fear,<sup>100</sup> declared: 'Those nations which enjoyed field sports stood highest on the plane of civilisation.' His notion of the queen of sport was not, however, cricket, but shooting, an idea clearly associated with empire maintenance.<sup>101</sup>

Dr Thompson, though not during the period of his uncle J. S. M.'s leadership a formal member of the Foundry management, helped to keep the family name before the public in numerous organisations. With the Orange Order active in a town where Ulster men and women made up a quarter of the 13.7% of immigrants from Ireland,<sup>102</sup> the Thompson family needed to avoid any hint of sectarianism. As Ulster Protestants, they might exhibit a slight inclination towards Catholicism, reinforced by their use of art unions and tolerance of alcohol, apparently at variance with contemporary Presbyterian culture. A Catholic temperance reformer, Fr Hayes, gave an impassioned address against alcohol at Castlemaine in 1905, inducing many residents to take the pledge,<sup>103</sup> but most temperance activity in Castlemaine was Protestant-based and frequently led by clerics sympathetic to Orangeism. Here Dr Thompson was invaluable to his family. The local branch of the Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society (HACBS or Hibernians) organised sports, as indeed did the Orange lodges. Despite being a leading Freemason when the Catholic Church banned the order,<sup>104</sup> J. L. Thompson not only acted as a Hibernian medical officer, but also judged for the 1906 Hibernian Boxing Day sports.<sup>105</sup> The energetic doctor also officiated at the Castlemaine carnival sports on New Year's Day, where the Hibernians were sometimes involved.<sup>106</sup>

In conclusion, while J. S. M. Thompson may have been an enthusiastic follower or participant in some of the many sports in New Zealand and Victoria associated with his name, his motivation was diverse. Personal recognition in Greymouth and Wellington and to a lesser extent in Castlemaine was gained through sport. In his own business it undoubtedly helped to win the reputation claimed in his obituary that his workers regarded him as a friend rather than an employer.<sup>107</sup> There were, however, more subtle factors. Stoddart has argued that Australian sport is fundamentally inegalitarian, conservative and inimical to modern developments.<sup>108</sup> J. S. M. Thompson and his family sought to resist the developing trade unions and the factory acts which cut across proprietorial authority. They were ultimately unsuccessful and accepted the need to operate the new wages boards. Despite their emphasis on sport to identify workers and management, they lived as merchant princes in splendid houses, such as J. S. M.'s *Kaweka*.

Was J. S. M. Thompson personally aware that he was using sport to increase managerial authority and social control? In the absence of private letters it is impossible to say for certain. Writers like Richard Cashman insist that 'sport is in itself neither conservative nor radical and can even be used by minority and

oppositional groups to advance alternative perspectives.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, Richard Flanagan has suggested, that if Trotsky 'had hit a six over the fence he might have had a more generous sense of the possibilities of the human spirit.'<sup>110</sup> Thompson may have genuinely enjoyed participation in the organisation of sport and considered it equally beneficial to worker and employer.

## Endnotes

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- 1 See Chris Bambery, 'Marxism and Sport', *International Socialism*, no. 73, December 1996, <http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj73/bambery.htm>, who quotes Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, vol. 2, New Park, 1974, p. 123. Another Marxist analyst, Jim McKay, *No Pain, No Gain? Sport and Australian Culture*, Prentice Hall, Sydney, p. 177, insists that 'sport is too important to be explained away as false consciousness, an opiate, or bread and circuses for the masses'.
- 2 See, for example, Brian Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport in Australian Culture*, Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1986, p. 13, contradicting 'the widely held view that sport is a social phenomenon that does not touch other areas of social life nor is itself touched by those areas.' Referring to the boom in sporting analysis since Stoddart, Richard Cashman, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Sydney, 1995, pp. vi, vii, 204, 207, takes a less dismissive view than Stoddart.
- 3 Nicola Balnave, 'Company-Sponsored Recreation in Australia: 1890-1965', *Labour History*, no. 85, November 2003, p. 147: 'Employers had two goals when introducing recreational programs - an improvement in the quantity and quality of labour supply, and the reinforcement of managerial prerogative'.
- 4 Brad Patterson, 'A "Half Australian, Half American" Town: The Economic Foundations of Nineteenth Century Wellington', in J. McConchie, D. Winchester, R. White, *Dynamic Wellington – A Contemporary Synthesis and Explanation*, Institute of Geography, VUW, Wellington, 2000, p. 196.
- 5 Leslie Hobbs, *The Wild West Coast*, Whitcombe and Tombs, Wellington, 1959, p. 25. Peter Charlton, *Two Flies Up a Wall: The Australian Passion for Gambling*, Methuen Hales, North Ryde, 1987, p. 85.
- 6 *Grey River Argus*, 24 February 1873 (Ahaura Races).
- 7 Years later when J. S. M. Thompson attended the Melbourne Cup with his wife, the *Argus*, 5 November 1902, gave a full description of Mrs Thompson's clothes ('blue spotted silk gown, pippings of black satin, Russian bodice, vest of net and lace, floral hat'), without mentioning the cut of J. S. M.'s tuxedo.
- 8 Charlton, *Two Flies Up a Wall*, p. 62.
- 9 *Grey River Argus*, 3 March 1868, 15 March 1870, 28 January 1871, and 5 January 187, 22 February 1873.
- 10 *Grey River Argus*, 9 September 1869.
- 11 *Grey River Argus*, 14 August 1866.
- 12 *Grey River Argus*, 18 March 1873.
- 13 *Grey River Argus*, 17 March-19 April 1870.
- 14 *New Zealand Times*, 20 August 1885.
- 15 *New Zealand Times*, 20 July 1875.

- 16 *New Zealand Times*, 28 July 1888.
- 17 *Evening Post*, 3 February 1881.
- 18 Graeme Hunt, *The Rich List: Wealth and Enterprise in New Zealand, 1820-2000*, Reed, Auckland, 2000, p. 120, estimates W. H. Levin as probably the richest man in Wellington in the 1870s.
- 19 *Evening Post*, 11 August and 29 September 1881.
- 20 *Evening Post*, 11 August 1883, 28 March 1891; *New Zealand Times*, 8 January 1885, 30 August.
- 21 *New Zealand Times*, 3 November 1883.
- 22 *Evening Post*, 30 July, 14 and 27 October 1884.
- 23 *New Zealand Times*, 8 January 1885, 30 August; *Evening Post*, 28 March 1891.
- 24 *New Zealand Times*, 17 April 1891 and *Mt Alexander Mail (MAM)*, 2 May 1891.
- 25 *Evening Post*, 28 March 1891.
- 26 *MAM*, 28 March 1905.
- 27 G. L. Pearce, *The Scots in New Zealand*, Collins, Auckland, 1976, pp. 163-4.
- 28 *New Zealand Times*, 9 December 1875.
- 29 *New Zealand Times*, 31 December 1878, lists sports for early 1879.
- 30 *New Zealand Times*, 30 October 1877.
- 31 *New Zealand Times*, 30 October and 6 November 1877.
- 32 *New Zealand Times*, 3 January 1878.
- 33 *New Zealand Times*, 19 and 21 March 1881.
- 34 *New Zealand Times*, 3 January 1880.
- 35 *New Zealand Times*, 28 August and 6 October 1885.
- 36 *Evening Post*, 16 April 1887.
- 37 *New Zealand Times*, 25 and 26 January 1881.
- 38 *New Zealand Times*, 9 October 1878; *Evening Post*, 5 September 1889 (cricket); *Cyclopaedia of New Zealand*, vol. 1, 1897, Wellington, p. 422; *New Zealand Times*, 20 February 1886 (football).
- 39 *Evening Star* (Greymouth), 15 March 1873 (half price on steamer to attend Greymouth races); *Colonist*, Nelson, 24 December 1872 (special boat for cricket interprovincial and regatta).
- 40 Geoff Miller, *The Reed Book of All Black Records*, Reed, Auckland, 2001, p. 18.
- 41 *New Zealand Times*, 27 October 1882.
- 42 *Evening Post*, 28 November 1885.
- 43 See Balnave, 'Company-Sponsored Recreation in Australia', p. 129.
- 44 *New Zealand Times*, 9 July 1877, some very handsome pieces of plate, consisting of a solid silver centre-piece and two silver side-pieces.
- 45 *New Zealand Times*, 16 June 1887.
- 46 Although 'patriarchy' has been annexed to gender relations, its original meaning is particularly relevant to family firms, like the Thompson Foundry at Castlemaine, where a number of relations participated under the direction of the leading member. 'Paternal', used interchangeably with 'patriarchal' by some analysts (David J. Jeremy, *The Enlightened Paternalist in Action: William Hesketh Lever at Port Sunlight Before 1914*, *Business History*, vol. 33, 1, January 1991, p. 58), is weaker in this context.
- 47 *MAM*, 19 April 1902.

- 48 John Lack, 'Mackay, James Alexander Kenneth (1859-1935)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 10, pp. 291-294.
- 49 *Maryborough & Dunolly Advertiser*, 28 November 1907: The pic-nic was instituted solely by the employés of the Foundry, and as he was of the firm came almost in the shape of a guest.'
- 50 *MAM*, 3 March 1900.
- 51 *MAM*, 8 March 1902. Balnave, 'Company-Sponsored Recreation in Australia', p. 134, suggests that company-sponsored recreation for women was usually uncompetitive. Races for girls and the competitive tennis and golf patronized by the Thompson ladies provide a partial exception.
- 52 Balnave, 'Company-Sponsored Recreation in Australia', pp. 144-45.
- 53 R. Fisher (sheep), Fitzgerald's cask, *MAM*, 23 February 1999. Fitzgerald's Brewery was later taken over by Carlton Breweries.
- 54 G. Yandell, *MAM*, 21 February 1902.
- 55 *MAM*, 10 March 1894.
- 56 *MAM*, 10 October 1904.
- 57 *MAM*, 31 August 1896.
- 58 *MAM*, 29 October 1907.
- 59 *MAM*, 4 November 1905.
- 60 *MAM*, 6 November 1905 (the Rev. Hume Robertson) and 24 January 1910 (the Rev. F A. Hagenauer).
- 61 *MAM*, 29 October 1908.
- 62 *MAM*, 22 October 1908.
- 63 *MAM*, 19 June 1907.
- 64 *MAM*, 28 December 1908.
- 65 Information from George Milford.
- 66 See Jeremy, 'The Enlightened Paternalist in Action', pp. 58-81.
- 67 Bill Shaw, *100 Years of Brass, 1885-1985: A History of Thompson's Foundry Band*, Castlemaine, 1985.
- 68 *MAM*, 19 March 1908.
- 69 *MAM*, 28 December 1907.
- 70 *MAM*, 26 June 1896.
- 71 *MAM*, 20 September 1893.
- 72 *MAM*, 12 December 1904.
- 73 *MAM*, 31 July 1905.
- 74 See Balnave, 'Company-Sponsored Recreation in Australia', pp. 140-141, Phil Mosely, 'Factory Football: Paternalism and Profits', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 1, no. 1, November 1985, p. 26.
- 75 11 November 1892, LS 2/9/6, Box 1, Thompson Papers, University of Melbourne Archives.
- 76 *MAM*, 12 November 1892.
- 77 *MAM*, 9 January 1893.
- 78 *MAM*, 26 October 1894 and 30 August 1893.
- 79 *MAM*, 19 December 1898. This was the third annual game, won by the Thompson Foundry.
- 80 *MAM*, 4 April 1907. Presbyterian picnic.

- 81 *MAM*, 30 November 1893.
- 82 David Thompson entered a Beeston Humber for a 1000-mile race organised by Dunlop, *MAM*, 25 October 1906.
- 83 *MAM*, 9 April 1906.
- 84 *MAM*, 16 April 1910.
- 85 *MAM*, 7 March 1908.
- 86 *MAM*, 6 October 1891 and 21 December 1894.
- 87 *MAM*, 4 November 1902, 28 August 1903, 29 March 1904.
- 88 *MAM*, 8 August 1906.
- 89 Balnave, 'Company-Sponsored Recreation in Australia', p. 141.
- 90 *MAM*, 21 March 1894.
- 91 When proposed as vice-president of the Mount Alexander Horticultural Society in 1892, J. S. M. demurred that a longer-term resident would be preferable only to be told that no name in Castlemaine was better known than that of Thompson, *MAM*, 4 August 1892.
- 92 *MAM*, 7 March 1896.
- 93 T. M. Williams, 'Thompson's of Castlemaine', Unpublished MA thesis, Monash University, 1996, p. 116, quotes K. D. Buckley, *The Amalgamated Engineers in Australia, 1852-1920*, Sydney, 1970, p. 165.
- 94 *MAM*, 6 July 1896.
- 95 In 1905 44 workers received assistance from the Thompson Foundry Employé's Accident Fund, *MAM*, 9 October 1905.
- 96 *MAM*, 19 May 1908. Walter Millot.
- 97 Dying as a result of the same accident, Foreman J. Miller pleaded, 'Get the boss out first. His life is more valuable than mine.' Speech of Dr J. L. Thompson to Rotary Club, 15 August 1939, quoted in The Thompson-Byron Jackson Centennial Supplement', *MAM*, 4 October 1975. A similar supplement was put out by the Company itself, which differs in some respects from that of *MAM*.
- 98 *Victorian Government Gazette*, 1902, vol. 116, p. 1081; *MAM*, 19 March 1902, for J. S. M.'s criticism at a meeting establishing an Employers' Federation.
- 99 *MAM*, 19 March 1902.
- 100 *MAM*, 12 November 1892.
- 101 *MAM*, 19 June 1907.
- 102 Patricia Grimshaw and Charles Fahey, 'Family and Community in Nineteenth-Century Castlemaine', in Patricia Grimshaw, Chris McConville and Ellen McEwan, (eds), *Families in Colonial Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, pp. 87-88.
- 103 *MAM*, 14 February 1905: 'Such a stinging, crushing denunciation of liquor has never before been heard in Castlemaine'.
- 104 *MAM*, 19 April 1906 and 13 April 1905.
- 105 *MAM*, 6 December 1906.
- 106 *MAM*, 3 January 1902.
- 107 *MAM*, 16 April 1910.
- 108 Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, pp. 13-14.
- 109 Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 207.
- 110 Radio National, 25 July 2003.