

**FOODWAYS UNFETTERED**

**EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FOOD IN**

**THE SYDNEY SETTLEMENT**

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## ABSTRACT

The received perception of food in eighteenth-century Sydney is that colonists survived on meagre and monotonous rations. Having failed to engage with the local environment, or to learn from Aboriginal people and utilise indigenous resources, the salt rations dependent newcomers found themselves victims of hunger and starvation. This view is largely due to the predominant historical interpretation of British penal colonisation in Australia, where New South Wales was settled in an atmosphere of ignorance and governmental neglect. This received view is overly narrow and simplistic. The colony developed from penal settlement to a vibrant commercial centre by the turn of the century. Food was a vital factor in this process. Rations, which were controlled by the authorities, underpinned the colonists' diet, however other foods, both introduced and indigenous, were used to supplement it. Primary sources reveal much about the foodways of the eighteenth-century settlers, and the factors that affected availability and distribution. Where most studies on food in early settlement focus on convicts and rations, this thesis takes a more comprehensive approach, which encompasses rationing and the broader, more liberated aspects of colonists' dietary patterns. It explores contributing factors such as established English cultural practices, governance, socio-political forces and the natural environment, which influenced colonists' consumption. This study provides a fresh interpretation of eighteenth-century food in Sydney, establishing that whilst having to work within a corporate victualling system, the early colonists were not passive victims of a food supply controlled entirely from above, but played an active role in food procurement and consumption, exercising individual and collective rights and preferences. The evolution of their foodways reflects the transformation from penal colony to a prospering colonial society, as the first settlers made new lives in New South Wales.

## DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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SIGNED: Jacqueline Anne Newling

DATE: December 31, 2007.

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