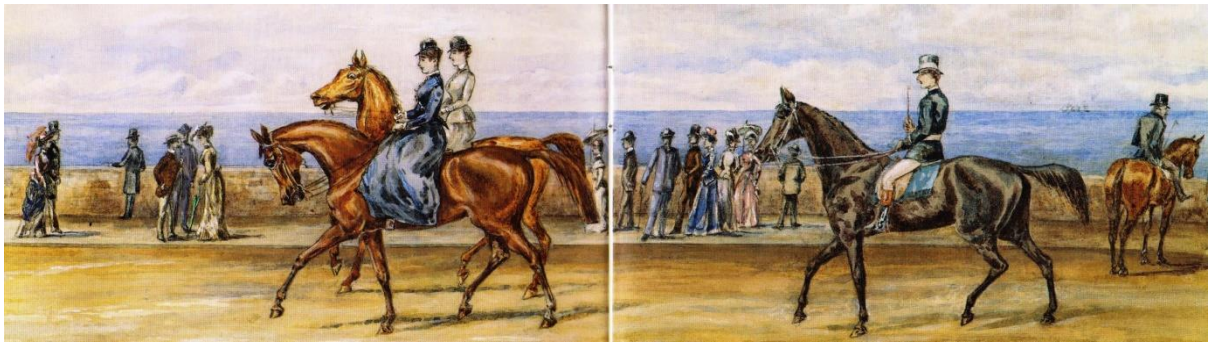
Equinity



Promenade Coogee Beach c. 1870 – 1895, Harold Brees

Acknowledgements: © State Library of New South Wales; Equinity in the Picture Gallery; Free Exhibition from 8 October 2007 to 13 January 2008.

The first documented members of the genus, *Equus* to set foot on the continent were nine horses obtained from the Cape of Good Hope and transported to Port Jackson with the First Fleet in January 1788. Seven were government owned (one stallion, three mares and three foals), with two owned by marine officers.

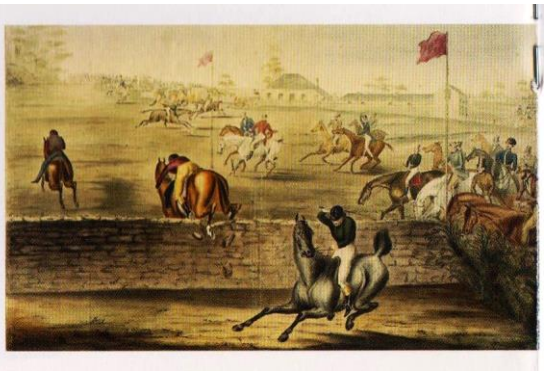
The horse population of the colony increased – slowly at first – through quality imports and local breeding to number 4532 by 1822, significantly less than the number of people of European origin at the time (approximately 26,500). The early horse imports were driven by the enormous passion for horse sports, the suitability and profitability of breeding, and the need for reliable horses to assist with developing the colony. Horses had become so plentiful by 1870 that the Hon John Creed observed: 'almost everyone in the country had a saddle-horse'.

Pictorial records featuring the horse can be found from as early as 1804 in a depiction of the Castle Hill uprising. Horses featured in almost every aspect of nineteenth century life and appear within narrative artworks depicting scenes of exploration, trade and bush and city life. The demand by owners to have prized horses documented, and to acquire works depicting horse sports, saw professional artists produce a significant number of such works.

Although the content of these works is Australian, the form is predominantly British, adhering to the pictorial conventions for sporting and animal art widely promulgated through engraving and prints that were readily available in the colony. The majority of professional artists working in the colony during the period were born and trained in Europe.

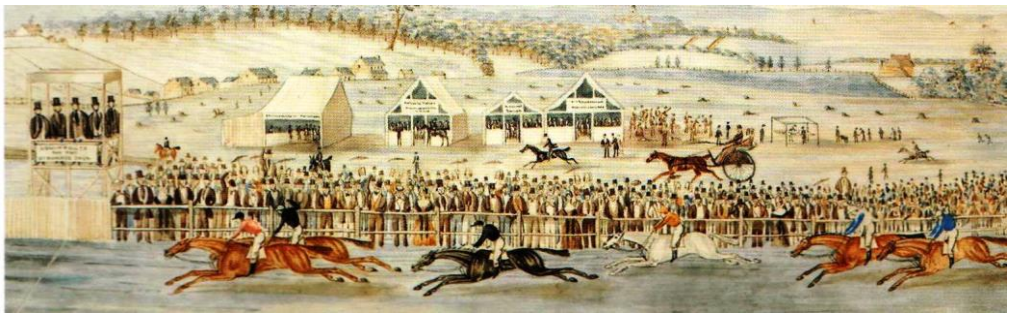
The first recorded steeplechase event in the colony was staged over 5 miles (8 km) between the Sydney suburbs of Botany and Coogee in 1832. The popularity of this sport saw a series of three annual steeplechase events being held in the 1840s, the Hawkesbury Stakes. This race was held over a three-mile (4.8 km) course at Mr Charles Abercrombie's estate, located at present-day Birkenhead Point. Scenes from the first race are seen in *Five-Dock grand steeple-chase, 1844*.

The scenes depicted in *Five-Dock grand steeple-chase* reflect stages usually included in British works of similar race events, including the start or first leap, floundering in the brook, clearing a fence or wall, and the finish.



The brook, Five-Dock grand steeple-chase, 1844 Thomas Balcombe after Edward Winstanley

The Stone Wall, Five-Dock grand steeple-chase, 1844, Thomas Balcombe after Edward Winstanley



Petersham Races c. 1845, W. Scott

Sporting artists also developed a style of treatment for a group of horse galloping called the 'rocking horse' or 'hobbyhorse' gait, with front and back legs fully extended. W Scott's depiction of *A race meeting at Petersham* is a good example of this treatment. This work also shows the common practice of flattening and elongating the horse to suggest speed, while stretching the head and neck to emphasise effort.

During the early nineteenth century, Arab horses and thoroughbreds were brought to the colony in significant numbers for breeding and sports such as racing, steeplechasing and hunting. There was a sharp increase in thoroughbred arrivals from the 1830s when these pursuits were well established.

This increase in blood or pedigree horse ownership generated a significant market for professionally painted equine portraits by English specialists such as Edward Winstanley, Joseph Fowles and Frederick Woodhouse Senior. All arrived in the colony between 1833 and 1858. One British artist Ben Marshall claimed he went to Newmarket because *"A man will pay me fifty guineas for painting his horse, who thinks ten guineas too much for painting his wife".*

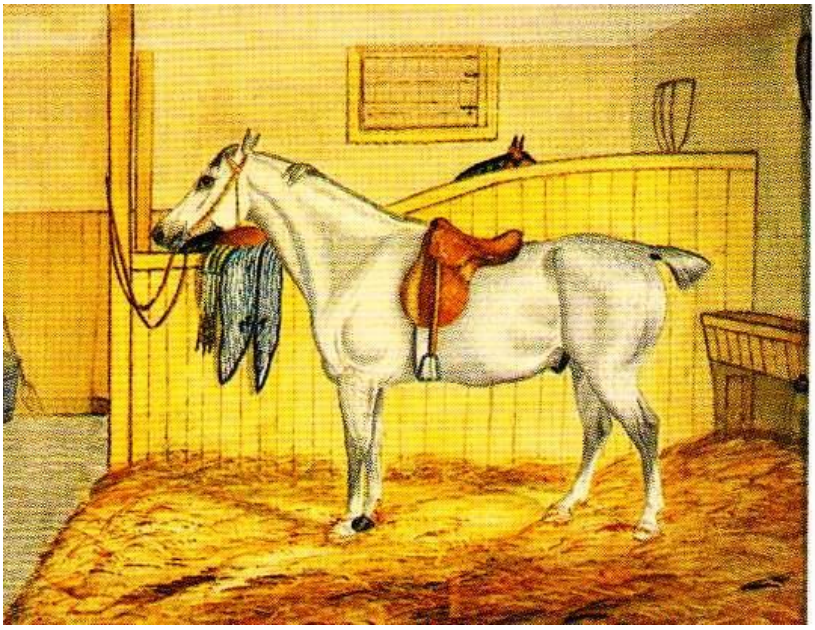
The demand for such works, by owners keen to celebrate their equine possessions and document important sporting achievements, is evident in the way artists advertised their services in the press. For example, Joseph Fowles stated in 1858 that he would 'paint pictures of Australian "cracks" and will dispose of engravings of horses from his own pictures'.

George Stubbs was particularly influential in developing the British approach to equine portraiture and documenting the emerging English breed, the thoroughbred, during the second half of the eighteenth century. The portrait of *Flying Buck*, based on a work by Frederick Woodhouse Senior comfortably fits within the genre's parameters.

'Flying Buck': The winner of the first Australian Champion Sweepstakes, October 1st 1859; c. 1859 De Gruchy and Leigh after Frederick Woodhouse Senior. The horse was usually presented in full-length side-view with head in profile, sometimes including informative props or background. The jockey is mounted at a racecourse with groom or owner in attendance.

'Flying Buck': The winner of the first Australian Champion Sweepstakes, October 1st 1859; c. 1859 De Gruchy and Leigh after Frederick Woodhouse Senior.

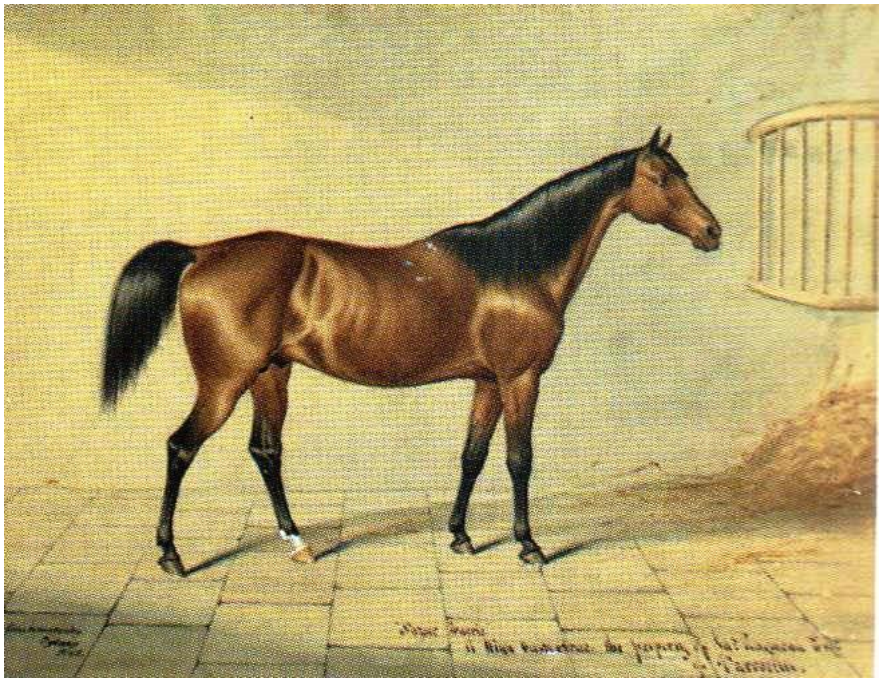
Portrait commissions of champion racehorses, prized steeplechasers, hunters and blood horses were obtained from the *petit bourgeois*, the wealthy, and high ranking government officials. These works of portraiture – along with lithographic prints that could be mass-produced and sold to the general public – provided a reliable source of income for a number of artists.



Beagle, an Australian bred horse by Skeleton, the property of Capt. P P King RN 1839

James Lethbridge Templar

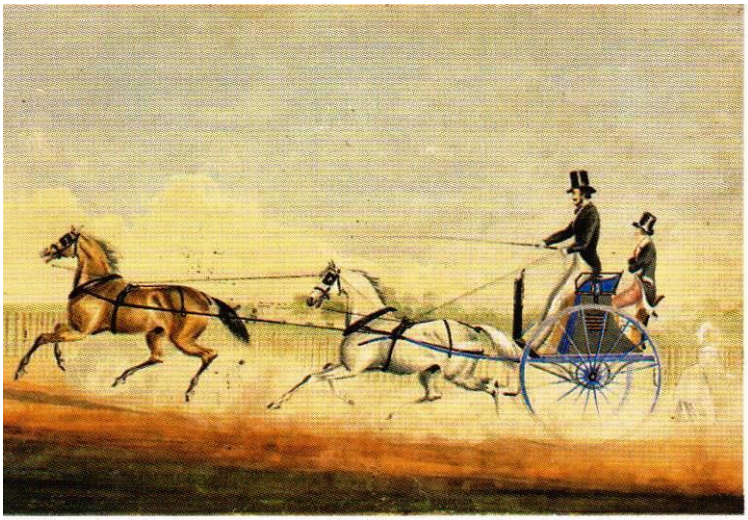
Stephen Butts on a white horse, Macquarie Street, Sydney, c. 1850 Joseph Fowles



Nazeer Farrib: A high caste Arab, the property of James Raymond Esqr. of Varroville

The horse in colonial Australia was employed as a draught animal for agriculture and industry, and as a saddle, pack and carriage animal for leisure, transportation, exploration and livestock management. Artworks by both professional and amateur artists extensively document the horse in these roles. The mounted bushranger and stockmen were particularly popular, along with scenes of the working carriage horse.

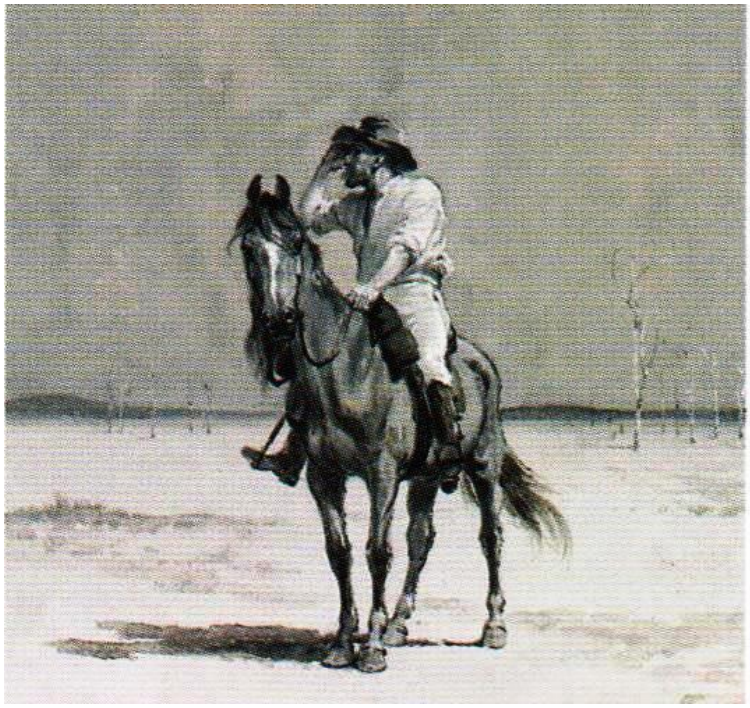
Artists depicted the variety of horse-drawn passenger vehicles for Cobb & Co coaches traversing the countryside, to private gigs going about the town. Many of these images reference the composition of British artists whose works were widely available as prints and engravings. For example, F G Lewis and Edward Winstanley's *New Post Office, George Street, Sydney* is derived from James Pollard's coaching prints.



Mortimer William Lewis out driving c. 1838 0 1840, Edward Winstanley (attributed)

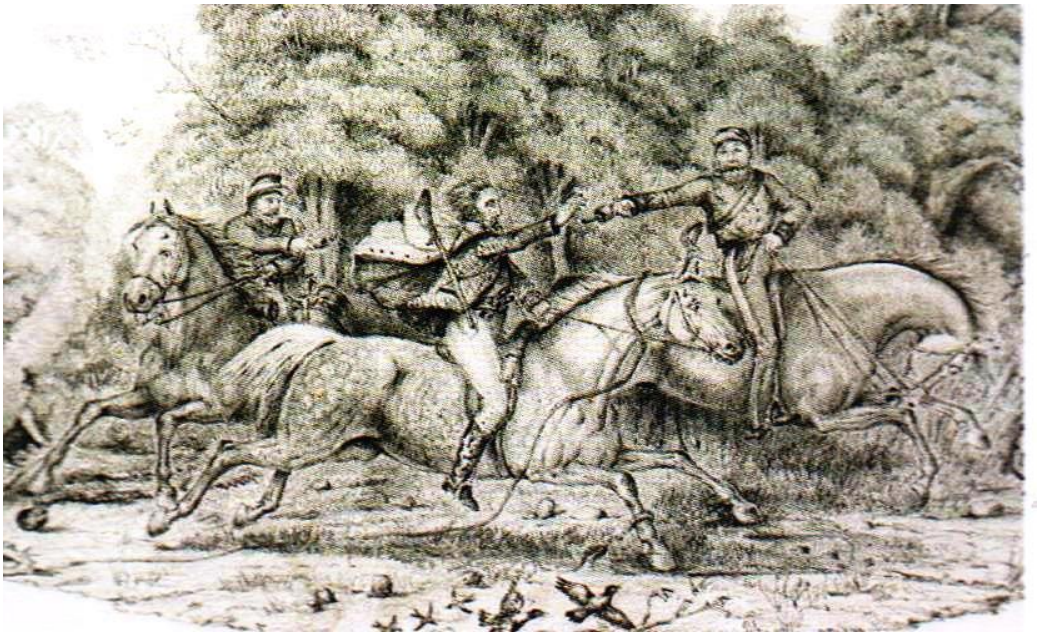
The driving of horse-drawn vehicles was considered a sport when undertaken by a gentleman and was regularly included in the repertoire of colonial artists. Works focusing on other aspects of colonial life, particularly stock work and bushranging, also reference conventions of sporting art in the depiction of the horse in motion.

Settlement of outlying regions accelerated during the 1830s and the stockman was increasingly in demand. It is from this period that illustration of stock work begins to appear, mostly produced by amateur artists directly involved in station activities. The drawings in John Stirling's 'Sketches in the Station Wyong NSW 1884' are typical examples. Professional artists including Samuel Thomas Gill and William Strutt depicted this facet of colonial life from the 1860s.



View of man on horseback (detail), 1892, Percy Frederick Seaton

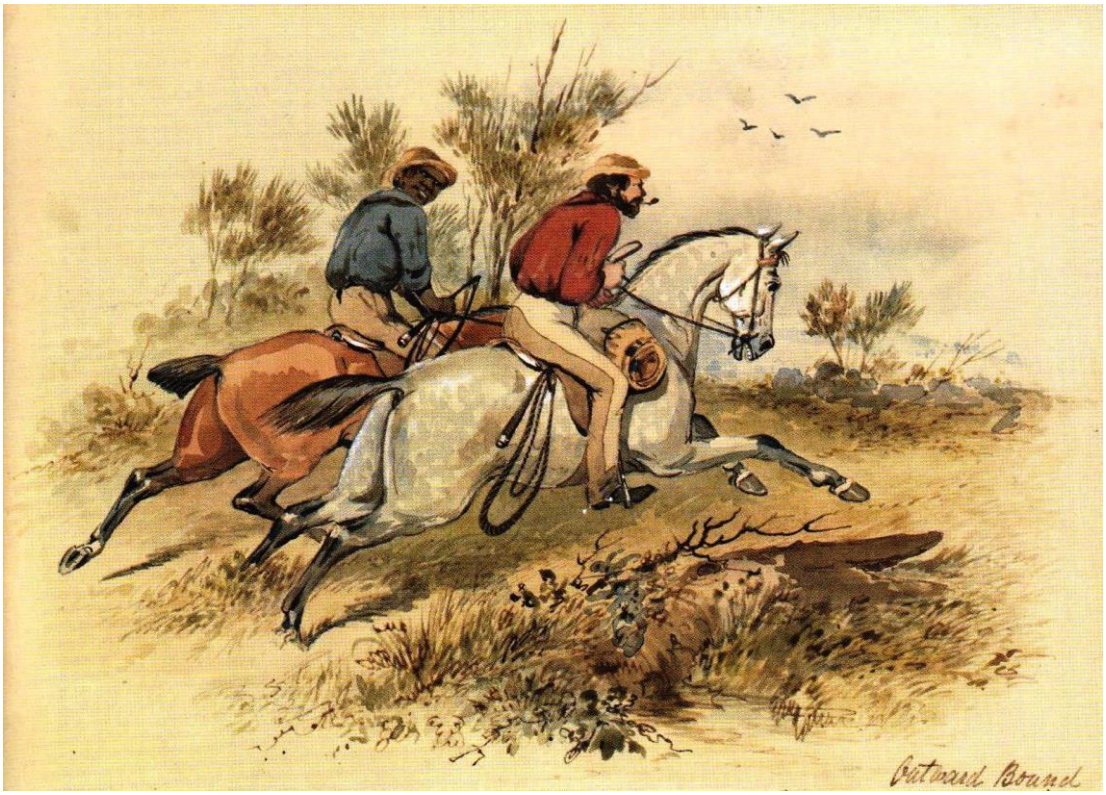
The stockman is often shown rounding up cattle, galloping down a hillside or over rough country, riding out to or returning from stock work, or undertaking duties in cattle yards. In such works as William Strutt's *Black Thursday 1850: The track of death*; the mounted stockman is depicted battling the harsh conditions of the Australian bush. Artworks of the late nineteenth century begin to show the stockman in an heroic manner, as in Percy Spence's *View of a man on horseback*.



Bushranger and police, Sep 17, 1875 (detail), 1875, George Hamilton

It was predominantly stockmen, with their superior horsemanship and bush knowledge, who became bushrangers.

Their horsemanship was central to the bushranging myth with bushrangers often depicted in flight at great speed on their impressive (and often stolen) mounts.



Outward bound, c. 1862 – 1863, Samuel Thomas Gill

Instances of bushrangers escalated form the mid-nineteenth century. This was due to the discovery of gold in the 1850s and later in the 1960s and 70s, to poor squatters' sons being drawn to the more exciting and profitable life of the bushranging. Passenger coaches such as Cobb & Co were frequently robbed.

Horsemanship was the key to successful land exploration for much of the nineteenth century. Horses were employed in this field from as early as 1802, when George Caley explored the region west of Sydney, although exploration parties were not usually fully mounted until the late 1840s. Horses participating in expeditions ranged from Timor ponies to the colonial saddle horse the Waler, named after its place of origin, New South Wales. By the 1870s camels were replacing horses to explore the arid inland.

Amateur on-the-spot works, such as Party landed from HMS Rattlesnake by Thomas Huxley, typically depict the horse as part of a significant milestone or novel event. Professional artists were most likely to feature the hose with a standard narrative sequence that may include the departure, early stages of the journey, expedition threatened by adverse conditions, and the return.

Party landing form HMS Rattlesnake, 1849, Thomas Huxley

Walers, predominantly a mixture of Arab and thoroughbred, were used in the colony and exported for use as remounts by the British Army. The first shipment of 32 left the colony for India in June 1834. These horses were in demand until the 1930s. Artworks such as *Landing horse from Australia* highlight some of the difficulties associated with this trade. 'Waler' became the term commonly used for an Australian horse abroad.

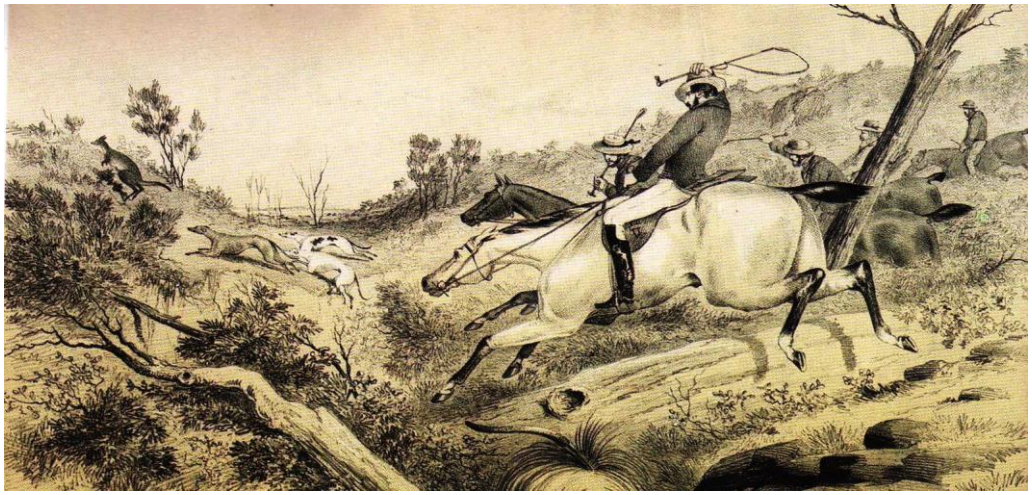
Walers landing through a difficult surf@ Madras c. 1834

These artworks reveal the spirit of colonial life and the significant role of the horse.

Horses were the focus of leisure and sporting pursuits, provided unparalleled assistance as working animals and attracted revenue to the colony through the export trade in Walers. For these reasons the horse was a valuable commodity throughout the nineteenth century and held in high esteem.

The settlers' desire to recreate aspects of the English lifestyle is also reflected in these works, highlighting the adaptation required to accommodate the unique environment of colonial Australia.

The influence of British cultural forms on depicting colonial life is evident, due in part to the ready availability of sporting prints and engravings by British artists, along with the fact that most professional artists working in the colony were born and trained in Europe.



The Chase (detail), c. 1856, Samuel Thomas