

9. SERVICES

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There are many aspects of services which are far too specialised and technical to be treated in a cultural survey such as this one, and will be dealt with briefly, if at all. Services such as mechanical and electric bells are amongst those aspects of building practice least likely to acquire any local cultural tinge, because they tend to represent the high technology of the time and to rely upon imported components. Moreover they are installed by specialists, and are beyond the competence not only of the amateur, but even of the small builder. Others, like electric wiring, may acquire some distinctive characteristics due to the nature of local regulations, but not to anything more fundamental. But there are some, at the opposite end of the scale, which give rise to multiple local innovations, and it is these that concern us here. The obvious example is ventilation, for the problems of a hot climate are self-presenting and of universal concern; the means of mitigating them are not necessarily specialised or technical; and there were useful lessons to be learnt from the tropical countries which were already familiar to many British settlers in Australia.

However, it seems desirable to make some mention of lifts because they were very much part of the interface of commerce with the public - and also because of their importance in making viable the skyscraper, something which distinguished the Melbourne of the 1890s from contemporary British towns and which made it seem American to so many observers. Some mention must also be made of cash transfer systems, and partly for similar reasons - that is, that is because they were publicly visible and understandable, and became very much bound up in the image of certain shops and department stores, especially in the country. The pneumatic system and the overhead cash railway were both marketed by the Lamson Paragon Company, presumably as agent for the Lamson Pneumatic Tube Co Ltd of London.¹ Hooper &

¹ J E Sears [ed], *The Architects' Compendium and Annual Catalogue* (50th ed, London 1936), p 515.

Co's store in the Melbourne suburb of Brunswick had a Detroit Cash Railway in 1908,² but the Lamson systems seemed to dominate the local market.

Some aspects of services are particularly mysterious in the sense that they are not well documented, not well understood, and are difficult to recognise or to interpret from the physical evidence. In this category fall lightning conductors, and the various types of water and drainpipes made from paper or wood.

² *Footscray Advertiser*, March 1908, quoted in *Footscray's First Fifty Years*, extract kindly supplied by Robert Green, 1996.