

A Lesson in Woodblocking

courtesy of City of Sydney, Australia Web site

Woodblocking Macquarie Street, 1925. There are many descriptions of the process of woodblocking, but perhaps the most revealing is that of L. C. Rodd, as it provides a sound economic motive for the interest, as well as insight into the relationship between residents and Council workers. Written in the early twentieth century, it could just as easily relate to the nineteenth:

The tarring machine slowly moved its way up Bourke Street. The woodblocks were passed by hand along an assembly line of men, fed into the hot tar, to slide out on a sloping tray. Other men with rough canvas gloves on their hands picked up the tar-dripping blocks, passed them to men in the lines that dropped the blocks into rows. A couple of men walked along the top of the laid blocks to give each new row a few deft taps with a sledge hammer. Several rows were laid at the same time, the men working from both sides of the street and leaving a broad triangle in the centre for the key man. He judged accurately the size of the block needed to fit the last place. With a sharp hatchet he cut a block to the exact size, fitted it and checked that the whole row was in alignment before he completed the next. I stood by with a sugar-bag, waiting for his nod. Those pieces of woodblock spiced with tar were a useful contribution to our fire. Wood was an expensive item.

(L.C. Rodd, *The Gentle Shipwreck*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1975, p.80)