

Dunera Lives: A Visual History by Ken Inglis, Seumas Spark and Jay Winter, with Carol Bunyan

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The ‘*Dunera* Boys’ will be familiar to some Australian readers, particularly those who recall the 1985 television series of the same name. In July 1940, over 2,000 men of German and Austrian background living in Britain were deported to Australia as ‘enemy aliens’ on the HMT *Dunera*. It is these exiles, and their similarly interned counterparts who had arrived from Singapore on the *Queen Mary*, whose lives are the focus of this book. The cover art for *Dunera Lives* immediately establishes the story as one of captivity—the individuals of Emil Wittenberg’s painting from the Tatura internment camp are huddled, coat collars upturned, their dark eyes peering through the strings of barbed wire which dominate the image. But as its title suggests, the book goes beyond these migrants’ experiences of boats and camps, aiming to trace their life stories and highlight the way people adapted to lives turned upside down.

Dunera Lives is naturally transnational in scope, and highlights the multitude of individual choices that could be made amid Nazi persecution, Allied deportation and internment. It is no surprise, then, that this is to be the first of two volumes by the authors chronicling the lives of the *Dunera* and *Queen Mary* passengers.

This first volume is divided chronologically into eight sections. The first three sections contextualise these migrants’ journeys to Britain and Singapore, and the reasons for their secondary deportation. But, as the authors state, ‘there is no one *Dunera* or *Queen Mary* story’ (xxv). These sections weave together experiences of *Kristallnacht* and the *Kindertransports*, showcasing intensely personal moments recalled by internees’ families. Through family photographs, migrants’ artistic representations of their European

homelands, and a few scattered documents, it becomes clear that the *Dunera* and *Queen Mary* passengers each arrived in Australia with their own diverse backgrounds, baggage and experiences of persecution. About 80 per cent of these internees were Jewish, but the authors stress that this should not be viewed merely as a Jewish story, and indeed, this collection showcases a wide variety of family backgrounds and attachments to Jewish spirituality, culture and identity.

The fourth section details a topic more frequently covered in previous explorations of the *Dunera* experience—their time at sea. Here, the authors assemble paintings, drawings, cartoons and documents that convey the horrors of the internees' treatment onboard, but sometimes more strikingly, the sardonic humour they employed to survive the journey. One internee's drawing of 'Hitler swimming, bitten by a crab' with the *Dunera* steaming past in the background, the salacious underwater reality of which was not revealed until the image was placed against a light, was a particularly memorable piece. The internees' resourcefulness is also made more palpable by the authors' choices—images of the original camp constitution, written on precious sheets of stolen toilet paper, alongside its later, typewritten translation are worthy inclusions.

Representations of internment comprise the fifth and longest section. The authors divide this into subsections which move through each camp as many of the internees did, progressing through thematic topics that appear to reflect the emotional journey of internment—from waiting to bitterness, adaptation, longing, filling time, and others. Here we see the diverse artworks produced within the camps—sketches, paintings, designs for camp concert programs, camp currency, poetry, pin-ups and portraits. As the authors note, only official photographers were permitted to photograph internees, but in their own ways, the internees captured their experiences of camp life. Thus, this section is framed by the internees' many gazes, and guided by the captioned interpolations of the authors. Though the art forms are diverse, the authors point out that the collection is culturally cohesive, preserving a tiny pocket of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, the educated German and Austrian middle classes, in the most unlikely of places—the Australian bush.

The two penultimate sections of the book trace the post-internment lives of many former *Dunera* and *Queen Mary* passengers, documenting their wartime and postwar trajectories, experiences and achievements—from contributions to high culture and academia, to their lives as husbands, wives and new parents. Here, among the family photos and artworks,

are carefully selected documents that add texture to these stories—like the court martial records of a former internee who joined the Australian Army's 8th Employment Company during the war, and stood accused of 'insubordination' (some found the strictures of army life rather difficult after forcible internment). The connections maintained between the former internees are particularly striking—longstanding friendships, marriages and business relationships which lasted well beyond the war. The authors also take care to document the diverse paths of migrants who chose not to settle in Australia, some who returned to Germany or Britain, others who refused, and those who were reunited with family or made new beginnings for themselves in the Americas.

The final section examines memory and commemoration, which has kept former *Dunera* boys and their families connected to each other, and to the broader public, particularly at the site of their internment in Hay. The authors also explore myth-making through their inclusion of remembered 'stories' (perhaps based on real events) which circulated among the former internees after their release.

The internment camps of Hay, Orange and Tatura were a transitory space and represent a narrow temporal window, but through them, Inglis, Spark and Winter tell an interesting story about the upheaval caused by the Second World War, and the new trajectories upon which many were subsequently propelled. Although the *Dunera* (and other) lives examined in this book constitute a relatively small group, their stories are significant in teasing out the implications of forced migration during the Second World War, and of the awareness of human rights. When interviewed by *The Guardian* recently, Robert Manne stated that the next Australian book he intended to read was *Dunera Lives*, expressing his interest in whether the authors could 'convey a sad and curious rather than tragic second world war detention story'.¹ To my mind, they have.

We now eagerly await Volume 2, and though, of course, sadly Ken Inglis will not see its final publication, I feel confident that his contribution will be evident, and that Spark, Winter and Bill Gammage will continue his legacy, balancing the historian's critical rigour with the grace of the storyteller.

1 Robert Manne, cited in 'Bookmark This: Tim Winton, Geoffrey Robertson and Cynthia Banham on What They're Reading in March', *Guardian*, 24 March 2018, accessed at www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/24/tim-winton-geoffrey-robertson-and-cynthia-banham-on-what-theyre-reading-in-march.

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