Contents

Preface
Malcolm Allbrook iii

ARTICLES
Chinese women in colonial New South Wales: From absence to presence
Kate Bagnall 3

Heroines and their ‘moments of folly’: Reflections on writing the biography of a woman composer
Suzanne Robinson 21

Building, celebrating, participating: A Macdougall mini-dynasty in Australia, with some thoughts on multigenerational biography
Pat Buckridge 39

‘Splendid opportunities’: Women traders in postwar Hong Kong and Australia, 1946–1949
Jackie Dickenson 63

John Augustus Hux (1826–1864): A colonial goldfields reporter
Peter Crabb 79

‘I am proud of them all & we all have suffered’: World War I, the Australian War Memorial and a family in war and peace
Alexandra McKinnon 103

By their words and their deeds, you shall know them: Writing live biographical subjects—A memoir
Nichola Garvey 117

REVIEW ARTICLES
Margy Burn, ‘Overwhelmed by the archive? Considering the biographies of Germaine Greer’ 139
BOOK REVIEWS

Kim Sterelny review of Billy Griffiths, Deep Time Dreaming: Uncovering Ancient Australia 163

Anne Pender review of Paul Genoni and Tanya Dalziell, Half the Perfect World: Writers, Dreamers and Drifters on Hydra, 1955–1964 167

Susan Priestley review of Eleanor Robin, Swanston: Merchant Statesman 173


Sophie Scott-Brown review of Georgina Arnott, The Unknown Judith Wright 191

Wilbert W. W. Wong review of Philippe Paquet, Simon Leys: Navigator between Worlds 197

Jennifer Bird review of Kirsten McKenzie, Imperial Underworld: An Escaped Convict and the Transformation of the British Colonial Order 203

Darryn Ansted review of Rex Butler and Sheridan Palmer (eds), Antipodean Perspective: Selected Writings of Bernard Smith 209

Notes on contributors 213
Australians have always been great travellers, not only internationally but between Australian states and territories. Writing about Australian lives is thus a biographical challenge when they transcend national and internal boundaries. It means that, when dealing with mobile subjects, biographers need to be nimble diachronically, because of changing locales over time, and synchronically because many Australians have not always seen themselves as bound to a particular place. Nonetheless, despite the problems of writing about mobile lives, the deft use of biography appeals as a means of examining individual life paths in their immediate contexts within the larger scales suggested by transnational historical practice.

An abundance of books, edited volumes, and articles have followed individuals, families, and other collectives as they ‘career’ (to use the term adopted by Lambert and Lester in their influential 2006 volume, *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire*) around the globe.

Over its 60-year history, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (*ADB*), like its British equivalent the (Oxford) *Dictionary of National Biography*, has been characterised by many as a ‘classic instance of national self-regard’. Yet in a similar way to its predecessor, the *ADB* has been fluid in its conception of the ‘national’, and thus has endeavoured to recognise Australians who have been active overseas, as well as foreign nationals who have contributed, even fleetingly, to Australian life. Nonetheless, various factors have meant that such an aspiration has tended more toward the ideal than the reality, and that ‘the shadow of the nation’ has continued to affix itself to biography. Not least of these is the nature of the personal archive, which generally reflects a cultural, social or political contribution to a particular nation state, rather than a life of movement and transnationality. Added to what will often emerge as practical and methodological problems in biographical writing, the most popular biographical subjects, and those generally favoured by publishers, are often the ‘towering national figures’ whose significance is defined by their contribution to the particular nation. In over 13,000 published biographies since its first volume in 1966, the *ADB* corpus reflects this tendency towards the national in biographical writing, at least at a *prima facie* level. The vast majority of subjects (87.5 per cent) are male,
and 63 per cent are public servants, federal, state or local government politicians, army officers, soldiers or academics, whose lives are likely to be documented, often in detail. Nearly half (48 per cent) were born overseas, although in later volumes this proportion has fallen significantly, while only 11 per cent of those born in Australia died overseas, many of them military personnel. For those who were born and died in Australia, the ‘faceted browse’ function on the ADB website yields some interesting results, demonstrating a significant level of mobility within Australia and between Australian jurisdictions.3 Thus there is the possibility that those who are prominent in the ADB might also be anomalous, reflective of their social status and occupation but not of the majority population. Furthermore, they also tend to have been significant in a single jurisdiction, their personal archives held in the single sphere, and thus presenting a coherent record of career, contribution and significance. Biography in general, and the ADB in particular, has had greater problems dealing with those who have lived across borders and jurisdictions, and particularly those whose records are scattered and austere.

The articles in this issue of the Australian Journal of Biography and History consider subjects who have lived across and between national and internal Australian boundaries, and the authors have thus been compelled to address the methodological and theoretical problems of mobility. Kate Bagnall addresses the seemingly insurmountable problem of writing about Chinese women who settled in Australia in the second half of the twentieth century. In seeking to ‘give a name to some of the earliest Chinese women who made New South Wales their home, and to understand something of their lives’, she confronts the absence of evidence about a population which was vastly outnumbered by Chinese men in colonial Australia, a population which is itself difficult to trace in the historical record. In seeking to pursue a methodology of ‘global microhistory’ to uncover the lives of those in effect erased from history, Bagnall’s article is a rejoinder to histories that fail to consider the women who migrated as well as those who stayed at home.

Contrasting with the dearth of information on Chinese women immigrants to colonial New South Wales, Jackie Dickenson’s chapter on the Hong Kong–based merchant and trader, Melbourne-born Elma Kelly (1895–1974), benefits from an abundance of documentation, both in the realm of the personal and official. After having been a prisoner of war in Hong Kong during World War II, Kelly returned to the island to pursue ‘splendid opportunities, particularly for Australians’, who she believed would flourish in the commercial world because of their ‘poise’ and their ‘liking for the life’. In an attempt to exploit the prospects, she formed a partnership with Sydney-based woman Belle Robilliard, and launched an import-export business which, although it thrived for a time, eventually failed. The correspondence on which the article is based vividly recounts the way Kelly and Robilliard looked

---

3 See faceted browse function: adb.anu.edu.au/facets/.
back on their pre-war lives, their expectations that they might recover the security and privileges they had once enjoyed, while looking towards a postwar order that promised them, and privileged white women like them, more autonomy than they had ever before experienced.

In her article on the Corney family in the aftermath of World War I, Alexandra McKinnon considers the record of loss and sorrow preserved in the archives of the Australian War Memorial. Four of Rebecca Corney’s children served in the war, and a son, Hume, was killed on the Western Front. The newly established memorial, seeking to preserve the experiences of war both on the European and home fronts, wrote to many Australian families asking them to help establish their collections. McKinnon charts the long and tumultuous correspondence between Corney and the memorial, reflecting the dynamics of a family profoundly affected by war, experiencing grief and trauma that extended well beyond the years of the conflict. By examining the experiences of one family, the article explores the impact of grief on the development of archival records of World War I.

In her reflections on writing a biography of the Australian composer Peggy Glanville-Hicks (1912–1990), Suzanne Robinson explores very different methodological questions. Born in Melbourne, Glanville-Hicks left Australia at the age of 20 and lived in England, the United States of America, and Greece until she returned in 1975. A much admired figure, three biographers had tackled her life before Robinson decided to take a different path, and consider as many archives and personal recollections as she could find. In the process she discovered not only ‘wit, humour, passion and stoicism’, but artifice, a life Glanville-Hicks conjured to create ‘her concept of the life of a significant creative artist’. Some of what Robinson found horrified and dismayed her, and she found herself having to consider how (or whether) to represent the ‘unedifying details’, including the ethics of intervening in the narrative by offering authorial interpretations, responses, even apologies. As a feminist biographer, the most ‘troublesome question’ was whether her subject’s considerable imperfections, which became evident during research, risked undermining her status as a composer, particularly one whose reputation was yet to be fully established.

A different form of methodological question is posed by Pat Buckridge in his article on three generations of Macdougall men, each of whom became journalists—Dugald (1833–1879), who also excelled in business and politics, Dugald the younger (1872–1947), and James (1903–1995). The question Buckridge considers is whether his subjects can ‘usefully be considered as a grouped biographical entity signifying more than the sum of its parts, which is to say more than the three separate lives’. By examining the sequence of three careers in successive generations of a family, he discerns that they are ‘progressively enabling’, in that each career was
partly performed on the legacy of the previous generation(s), and ‘thus modified by its relation to the others’, constituting what the author calls a ‘Macdougall mini-dynasty … across three generations and 120 years of Australia’s history’.

By contrast, Peter Crabb’s article on the colonial goldfields reporter John Augustus Hux (1826–1864) relates the story of a single figure who, having made connections in his English homeland that would serve him well in Australia, worked as a digger, and provided eye-witness accounts of a number of significant goldfields in New South Wales, including the Snowy Mountains field at Kiandra, and Lambing Flat (Young). As well as recording his observations of the anti-Chinese riots at these centres, Hux provided a current, vibrant, and acute account of a formative period in Australian social and economic history which is not only important historically, but helped to form popular images and understandings of an important colonial industry.

Finally, in a departure from the theme of mobility characterising the other contributions, Nichola Garvey documents her experiences of working with the Western Australian iron ore magnate Andrew Forrest to research and write his biography. In an interesting combination of autobiography, biography, commentary and reflection, this is an unusual account in that it considers, and in the process gives the inside story of, a biographical project that never saw the light of day. In what was conceived by both the author and the subject as an ‘authorised biography’, Garvey’s article raises some fundamental questions about biographical writing of living persons, including the utility and pitfalls of what she calls ‘expressivist anthropology’, as well as the scope of authorisation in biographical writing.
ARTICLES
Chinese women in colonial New South Wales: From absence to presence

KATE BAGNALL

Introduction

The history of early Chinese migration to New South Wales, and the other Australasian colonies, is usually told as a story of men. It is not hard to see why. Founded as a British penal colony in 1788, New South Wales became, over the next 60 years, home to a small and scattered number of Chinese men—mostly sailors, carpenters, cooks and labourers. Then, in 1848, a group of 120 Chinese men and boys arrived in Sydney—the first of around 3,500 indentured labourers from Amoy (廈門) who came to the colony over a six-year period to 1853. After the discovery of gold in New South Wales in 1851, this small Chinese population grew significantly, with as many as 12,000 Chinese arriving in New South Wales in one year alone (1858). Legislation restricted the number of Chinese immigrants between 1862 and 1867, yet over the 25 years from 1856 to 1880, almost 40,000 Chinese entered New South Wales. These goldrush immigrants were characterised by two things in particular: they were predominantly Cantonese and they were overwhelmingly male.

Colonial census statistics, which first differentiated ‘natives of China’ in 1856, give an indication of the imbalance of women and men in the Chinese population of New South Wales (Table 1). In 1856, the census recorded six female Chinese and 1,800 male Chinese in the colony. Five years later, in 1861, the male population had increased to 12,986, while there were only two females. By 1871, the number of female Chinese had grown to 12, among a population of 7,208 males. Over the

---

3 Wang, ‘Chinese Emigration to Australia’, 268.
4 Wang, ‘Chinese Emigration to Australia’, 316.
following decade—a period during which there were no restrictions on Chinese migration to the colony—the proportion of women to men grew significantly, even though numbers remained small; in 1881, the female Chinese population was 64, while the male population was 10,141, making a ratio of one woman to 158 men. Census figures for the colonies of Victoria and Queensland record a similar imbalance in the sexes.

Twenty-eight years ago, writer Eric Rolls discussed the 1861 Chinese population statistics for New South Wales in *Sojourners*, the first of his extensive two-volume history of the Chinese in Australia. Rolls noted the presence of the two Chinese women living in New South Wales in 1861—‘one on her own in Balmain’ in Sydney, and the other living at East Maitland along with three Chinese men. Of the woman at Balmain, Rolls wrote: ‘The lone woman is exceptional and inexplicable. What was she doing and how difficult was her life?’ This chapter is a step towards answering that question.

### Table 1 Chinese population in the eastern colonies of Australia, 1856 to 1881

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>New South Wales</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Queensland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856a</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>1,806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12,986</td>
<td>12,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871b</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7,208</td>
<td>7,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>10,141</td>
<td>10,205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a* Figures for Victoria are for 1857. No separate figures for Queensland are available for 1856 because, until 1859, it was part of the colony of New South Wales.

*b* Figures for Queensland are for 1868.


In this article, I present short biographical sketches of four Chinese women—Ah Happ, Ah Fie, Kim Linn and Sam Kue—who arrived in New South Wales from Hong Kong during the 1860s. These women were resident in New South Wales when the census was taken in 1871 and so together represented one-third of the officially recorded female Chinese population. My aim in compiling sketches of their lives is, at heart, a simple one: to give a name to some of the earliest Chinese women who made New South Wales their home, and to understand something of their lives. Social and historical conditions have meant that knowledge of these women, and others like them, has been both forgotten and overlooked within historical scholarship to date; indeed, recognition of their very presence within the

---

colonial population of Australia has been overwhelmed by the numerical dominance of Chinese men. To date, there is still only a handful of histories that explicitly consider Chinese women in nineteenth-century Australasia.

In the face of this erasure of Chinese women from the early history of the Chinese in colonial Australasia, and more broadly from the global history of Chinese migration during the nineteenth century, uncovering their identities and compiling even fragmentary microlevel accounts of these women's lives does something important. Their lives may be insignificant in the broad sweep of history, but, as Tonio Andrade and others have suggested, microhistorical and biographical approaches such as those used in this article populate the models and theories of global history with real people, anchoring the study of global processes to the reality of people's lives.

In the words of Heather Streets-Salter: 'The stories that result demonstrate in concrete ways that the currents of world history have always involved ordinary people engaged in their own stories of survival, tragedy or victory.' An approach such as Andrade's 'global microhistory' is also particularly useful when we consider questions of gender. The global phenomenon of nineteenth-century migration from southern China—which extended to sites across the Pacific including Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States, and to elsewhere around the world—cannot be fully understood without considering women, both those who migrated and those who remained at home, yet women's role in these migrations and the effects on their lives are often marginalised.

Global microhistories therefore offer an alternative methodology for a gendered history of the nineteenth-century Chinese diaspora, one in which women's lives can come more clearly into sight.

---


Researching women: Sources and methods

Researching the lives of Chinese women in colonial Australia has long seemed a near impossible task, for three main reasons. The first concerns colonial population statistics and the small numbers of Chinese women recorded therein. As historian Henry Chan noted more than 20 years ago, the topics of women, marriage and the family in Chinese Australian history were hardly touched on ‘because of the assumption that there would not be a … history [to write] given the demographics of the nineteenth-century Chinese communities in Australia’. The second reason concerns the question of for whom exactly we should be searching in the archives, and how. Searching for biographical information by name is a common practice within historical research, yet many individual Chinese women went unnamed in the historical record. How do we search without names, but how do we find names without searching? The third and closely related reason concerns the availability of and access to sources. It has long been acknowledged that the task of writing Chinese Australian history can be challenging because of the difficulty in locating sources, particularly those that present a Chinese perspective, and finding sources in which women’s actions and voices are seen and heard is even more of a challenge. As Ann Laura Stoler notes in Along the Archival Grain: ‘Knowing what one is after is not always enough.’

There are, however, historical records that do document Chinese women’s presence in nineteenth-century Australia, and we should not ignore the traces, or ‘historical sediments’, left by Chinese women and girls, even if these traces were not written by the women themselves. Instead, the fragmentary records of Chinese Australian women’s lives necessitate different approaches. In this article, I demonstrate how the lives of Chinese women in colonial Australia can be recovered using three particular groups of sources: colonial censuses, historical newspapers and official records of births, deaths and marriages.

---

Chinese women in colonial New South Wales

Census
New South Wales took a colony-wide population census each decade from 1861, in which Chinese people were counted based on their ‘birthplace’, ‘nationality’ or ‘race’. These population figures are usually taken to demonstrate the absence of Chinese women from the colony, but they are also evidence of the presence of some women and of where they lived. The census shows that before 1881 most Chinese women in New South Wales were living beyond Sydney, the colony’s capital and metropolitan centre. In 1856, the colony’s six Chinese women lived in the districts of Parramatta/Liverpool, Goulburn, Hartley, Maitland (where one of the two women lived in the town of West Maitland) and Ipswich (where the woman lived in the town of Ipswich itself). Five years later, in 1861, one Chinese woman lived in the town of East Maitland and another in the Sydney suburb of Balmain (this is the woman Eric Rolls found ‘inexplicable’ because no Chinese men lived in Balmain along with her). In 1871, the population was divided between five female Chinese in Sydney and its suburbs and seven in rural districts. Of those in rural districts, one each lived at Dubbo, Orange and Raymond Terrace, while four lived on the goldfields: two at Jembaicumbene near Braidwood, one at Nerrigundah and one at Peel River near Nundle. The 1881 census does not provide details of the locations of the 64 Chinese females in the colony, other than to divide them thus: 41 in Sydney and its suburbs, eight in towns and villages of more than 100 inhabitants and 15 in rural areas.

Colonial newspapers
Alongside the census, newspapers and journals published across New South Wales—both in Sydney and in country towns—documented the presence of Chinese women in the colony. Because of their small numbers, Chinese women were a curiosity and newspapers reported their presence with a deal of interest. Consequently, historical newspapers provide one of the most significant sources for locating and identifying early Chinese women in the colony and learning about their lives. At their most basic, reports on Chinese women in the colonial press

---

15 The figures that follow are taken from NSW Census 1856 (Native Country), NSW Census 1861 (Nationality of the People), NSW Census 1871 (Nationality) and NSW Census 1881 (Birthplaces of the People). These historical censuses are available from the Historical Census and Colonial Data Archive at: hccda.ada.edu.au/regions/NSW.
16 The town of Ipswich, south-west of Brisbane in what is now Queensland, is included in the 1856 population figures for New South Wales because Queensland did not become a separate colony until 1859.
17 Many colonial newspapers are available in digital form through the National Library of Australia’s Trove discovery service (trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/). The full text of newspaper articles is searchable, meaning it is possible to search for relevant articles by using various terms for ‘female Chinese’ (such as ‘Chinese woman’, ‘Chinese ladies’, ‘wife of a Chinaman’, ‘Chinese girl’) or names (such as the names of women’s husbands or their businesses).
simply noted that a woman lived in a particular place. At other times, newspapers reported sightings of Chinese women in public—such as when they arrived to live in a particular town or when they travelled through a particular place, or even during a local natural disaster—with reports often commenting on their appearance, including their complexion, hair, clothes and, sometimes, their bound feet. Chinese women were also noted in the press because of the birth of a baby—often the ‘first Chinese baby’ born in a particular town. Newspaper correspondents, some of whom were women, also gained entrée to the households of well-to-do Chinese merchants in the city, and portrayed their wives, daughters and maid servants living cloistered lives, wearing exquisite outfits and elaborate hairdos, and being shy even among their female neighbours (see Figure 1).

While colonial newspaper reports provide evidence of the presence of Chinese women and girls in New South Wales from the 1860s, many of these articles provide no easy way of identifying women as named individuals. Fortunately, however, some articles do provide personal names—albeit usually a husband’s name—and with them the prospect of confirming women’s identities through other records. The four biographical sketches I present in this article result from successfully correlating names and other personal details found in newspaper reports with the third group of sources—official registrations of births, deaths and marriages.

Birth, death and marriage records

Official records of births, deaths and marriages—and other records relating to these major life events, such as baptism records, burial registers, wills and probate papers—provide fundamental pieces of biographical and genealogical information about Chinese women in colonial New South Wales. Birth records are particularly important as they are primary evidence of an individual woman’s presence in the colony, providing not only biographical data, but also information about her marriage, the birth (and sometimes death) of her children and her mobility within the colony. Civil registration of births, deaths and marriages was introduced in New South Wales in 1856, and we see in these records the efforts of colonial officials to regularise the names and identities of Chinese women, men and children and to record on paper chronological points in their personal biographies. The information provided by birth, death and marriage records can be inconsistent and incomplete, as shown in the women’s stories that follow, but despite their imperfections, the information they provide is significant in the process of inserting individual, name-identified women into the early history of migration from southern China to Australia.

24 On the peculiarities of Chinese Australian names, see Wilton, Golden Threads, 49–50.
The biographical sketches that follow focus on the everyday lives of four name-identified Chinese women who lived in New South Wales during the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s, pieced together from newspapers and records of births, deaths and marriages, together with other colonial sources. The earliest of these women to arrive in New South Wales, Ah Happ, was certainly in Sydney by 1863, while the latest, Kim Linn, arrived around New Year in 1869. All four—Ah Happ, Ah Fie, Kim Linn and Sam Kue—were present when the colonial population was counted on 2 April 1871, so it is possible to match them to locations noted in that census. In 1871, Ah Happ was at Nelson’s (Nelson) Bay, Ah Fie at Nundle, Kim Linn at Jembaicumbene on the Braidwood goldfields and Sam Kue at Sydney (Figure 2). The identities of the other eight female Chinese recorded in the 1871 census are yet to be confirmed. The census captured a record of each of these women at a particular time and a particular place, but their lives were not static. Like the many thousands of male migrants, these women were mobile and leaving their homes in southern China was just the beginning of a journey that would take them into some of the remotest corners of colonial New South Wales.
Ah Happ of Balmain and Nelson’s Bay

Ah Happ’s name first appears in the colonial record in a brief article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* reporting on proceedings held at the Sydney Water Police Court. The article noted that, in April 1863, Ah Happ, a Chinese woman, took her employer, Cyril Cecil, to court for unpaid wages, claiming £8 9s. 6d. for her services as a nurse in his household at Snail’s Bay, Balmain. Yearly wages for a domestic servant at the time were between £20 and £30, so this was a substantial sum, likely earned over a number of months. The court dismissed her claim, but the events surrounding the case were perhaps what propelled Ah Happ’s life in a new direction. A year after the court case, Ah Happ had moved from suburban Balmain to the isolated shores of Port Stephens, about 160 kilometres to the north-east of Sydney, and she was no longer a nursemaid but a mother.

Ah Happ gave birth to her first baby, a son named George, at Port Stephens on 22 May 1864. She was 28 years old and the baby’s father, a fisherman named Ah Jong, was 40 years old; they were both from Canton. At Port Stephens, Ah Happ and Ah Jong lived in a small fishing village, not far from the Nelson’s Bay lighthouse; it was a remote settlement comprising one European family and about 80 Chinese residents who lived in bark and logs huts near the beach. The Chinese fishermen cured the fish they caught, sending it by coaster to Chinese merchants in Sydney for sale to their countrymen who were on the way to the goldfields.

An article in the *Maitland Mercury* newspaper in June 1865 noted the presence of Ah Happ and her baby among this population at Nelson’s Bay, saying:

> The settlement is honoured with the presence of a Chinese woman, and a young Australian-born Chinaman. The woman speaks a little English, and with evident pride told the Rev. Mr. Thackeray that she is Missus Ah Chong. The interesting youngster was introduced to the reverend gentleman by its fond mamma and proud papa.

At the time of this report, Ah Happ would have been pregnant with her second baby, another boy, Charles, who was born on 13 October 1865. Two more sons followed: Frederick, born on 23 December 1868, and William, born on 13 August 1870. The *Maitland Mercury* article noted that Ah Happ spoke some English—as might be expected if she had previously worked as a nursemaid for a British family—but it appears she could not write, in either English or Chinese. She signed baby Charles’s

---

27 NSW BDM, Birth registration for George Ah Jong, 22 May 1864, Port Stephens, 14199/1864.
30 ‘The Condemned Chinaman’, *Maitland Mercury*.
31 NSW BDM, Birth registrations for: Charles Ah Jong, 13 October 1865, Port Stephens, 14549/1865; Frederick Ah Jong, 23 December 1868, Port Stephens, 17290; William Ah Jong, 13 August 1870, Nelson’s Bay, 16342/1870.
birth registration with an ‘X’, as did Ah Jong when registering the births of their other sons. The boys’ birth certificates consistently stated that Ah Happ and Ah Jong were married in China in 1859.

Ah Happ’s first three babies were delivered by a Mrs Glover—presumably, Margaret Glover née Dow, wife of the Nelson’s Bay lighthouse keeper, William Glover. A Dr White also assisted with Charles’s birth in 1865, while the final baby, William, arrived with his father as the only other person in attendance. It seems Ah Happ and Margaret Glover may well have been the only non-Aboriginal women living in the Nelson’s Bay area during the 1860s. Margaret was mother to her own large family, the youngest four of whom were born at Port Stephens at a similar time to Ah Happ’s children.\(^{32}\)

After the birth of Ah Happ’s youngest son in 1870, there is little further evidence to be found of her or her husband, Ah Jong, in New South Wales. It is most likely that the Chinese woman recorded in the 1871 census in the Raymond Terrace police district—an area that included Port Stephens—was Ah Happ. Then, there was a list of unclaimed telegraph messages in Sydney in 1874 that included one for ‘Ah Chong, Nelson’s Bay’.\(^{33}\) Beyond that I have uncovered nothing else. With no satisfying conclusion to the story of Ah Happ’s life in the colony, what, then, of its beginnings? When and how did she arrive? How did she come to be working for the Cecil family? And, if she was living in Balmain in 1863, could she also be Eric Roll’s ‘inexplicable’ lone Chinese woman living there in 1861?

Ah Happ’s employer, Cyril Cecil, was an English-born merchant who, in the late 1850s and early 1860s, was engaged in trade between Hong Kong and New South Wales.\(^{34}\) He had married Louisa Walker, an Englishwoman, in Melbourne in 1859\(^{35}\) and, in the early years of their marriage, they made their home variously in Melbourne, Sydney and Hong Kong. Louisa gave birth to their first child in Sydney in 1860.\(^{36}\) A second child was born in Hong Kong in July 1861, before the family returned to Sydney in 1862.\(^{37}\) A pregnant Louisa Cecil, together with an infant


\(^{36}\) NSW BDM, Birth registration of Martha E.M. Cecil, Sydney, 752/1860.

\(^{37}\) Bryan Kinna, Correspondence with the author, 18 June 2012. For an illustration of nursemaids in Hong Kong, see ‘Chinese Nursemaids on the Parade-Ground, Hong Kong’, Illustrated London News (17 October 1857): 385.
and servant, arrived in Sydney in mid July 1862 on the Madras from Hong Kong. Cyril Cecil, also with a child and servant, arrived in Sydney three months later on the Bombay, just in time for Louisa to give birth to their third child at Balmain on 23 September 1862.

The scant details from Ah Happ’s court case have her working for the Cecils at Balmain prior to April 1863, so it is possible she was one of the two servants who arrived with the family on their return from Hong Kong in 1862. Conversely, Ah Happ may have already been working as a domestic servant in Balmain and was employed by the Cecils as a nursemaid following their arrival from Hong Kong and the birth of their third child. In the first scenario, the dates do not match for Ah Happ to be the lone Chinese woman living at Balmain in 1861; in the second, they do. Either way, despite the little we know about the beginning and the end of Ah Happ’s life in New South Wales, her story provides a possible explanation for the ‘inexplicable’ Chinese woman in Balmain in 1861: she could have been working as a servant in a white household. Another possibility is that this ‘lone’ Chinese woman was, in fact, married to a British man.

Ah Fie of Happy Valley, near Nundle, and Upper Bingara

In September 1864, three months after Ah Happ became a mother at Port Stephens, the Chinese community at Bowling Alley Point, on the Peel River goldfields near Nundle in the north-east of New South Wales, celebrated the arrival of a Chinese woman in their midst. According to a report from the Tamworth Examiner republished in various colonial papers, she was the wife of a storekeeper at nearby Happy Valley. The couple had come to Bowling Alley Point to celebrate their ‘re-marriage’—one might guess after the woman had come out from China to join her husband. She was described as being ‘rather low in stature’ (that is, short) and dressing ‘remarkably well, neat and fashionable—quite in English style’. The local Chinese held a great celebration in her honour—with roast pigs, fowls and ducks, and much wine and spirits—and took up a subscription of the remarkable sum of £180 as a gift to her.

40 Such a situation was quite possible. Historian Pauline Rule has identified that the first Chinese woman in the colony of Victoria was a Christian woman from Macau who was married to an English sailor. She arrived in Melbourne in 1856. Pauline Rule, Personal communication with the author, January 2013.
The following year the Chinese at Nundle celebrated again, after the birth of a baby boy to ‘Mrs. Ah Foo, wife of Mr. Ah Foo, storekeeper, of Nundle’. According to the *Tamworth Examiner*, this baby was ‘no half and half affair, but a thorough Mongolian’, and it seems likely therefore the baby’s parents were the same couple whose marriage was celebrated a year earlier. The *Examiner*’s report on the baby’s birth noted that he was only the second baby born in the colony whose mother and father were both Chinese. If Ah Happ’s oldest son, George, born in May 1864, was the first Chinese baby in New South Wales, this claim may well have been true. According to the baby’s birth registration, he was Ah Cong Ah Foo, born on 24 April 1865 at Happy Valley, Nundle, the son of Ah Fie.

At the time of Ah Cong’s birth in 1865, Ah Fie was 32 years old. Her husband, Sam Ah Foo, was 41 years old. They were both Cantonese and, according to Ah Cong’s birth registration, were married in Sydney in 1864. Working backwards from Ah Cong’s date of birth, it seems Ah Fie may have arrived in Sydney in the middle months of 1864. At age 31, she was not a young bride, suggesting she may have been betrothed or married to Sam Ah Foo in China in their youth, only coming to join him later in New South Wales.

With no other children born to her, we lose track of Ah Fie until the middle of 1871, when she was reported as living at Upper Bingara, a goldmining settlement about 200 kilometres further north from Nundle. The 1871 census, taken in early April, recorded a Chinese woman—presumably Ah Fie—living on the Peel River goldfields at Nundle, so it seems the family may have moved to Upper Bingara soon after. In July 1871, Ah Fie, Ah Foo and their son were travelling and stayed the night in the small town of Cobbadah, about 25 kilometres south of Upper Bingara. As this was apparently ‘a strange sight for all’, Ah Fie’s visit received a lengthy write-up by the local Cobbadah newspaper correspondent. Commenting on her appearance, the correspondent noted that she was small and quite fair and that her feet were ‘not as we have heard they are’ (presumably meaning they were not bound). She ‘talked English quite fluently’, understanding much better than did her husband. Their son, now aged six, spoke English and Chinese, went to school, could read a little and knew several hymns, which he sang to please his mother. Ah Foo was said to be ‘very attentive’ to his wife and ‘very fond’ of his son. The report noted that Ah Foo kept a store and butcher’s shop at Upper Bingara, but perhaps

---


43 NSW BDM, Birth registration for Ah Cong Ah Foo, 24 April 1865, Happy Valley, Nundle, 15489/1865.

with her better English skills, Ah Fie might have had a substantial role in running the business; a post office directory for 1872 lists both Ah Foo and Mrs Ah Foo as storekeepers at Upper Bingara.\footnote{Greville’s Official Post Office Directory of New South Wales (Sydney: Greville & Co., 1872).}

The 1871 report of the family’s visit to Cobbadah noted one other significant thing about Ah Fie—that she had, for some time, been suffering with bad eyes. Her eyesight was mentioned again, two years later, in a traveller’s account of Upper Bingara published in the \textit{Newcastle Chronicle}.\footnote{‘Newcastle to Bingera’, \textit{Newcastle Chronicle} (26 June 1873): 4, nla.gov.au/nla.news-article111145663.} This report is the last mention of Ah Fie that I have found in the colonial record. Writing in June 1873, the correspondent noted that the Chinese at Upper Bingara lived in a village of 50 or more residents, with gardens well stocked with fruit trees and vegetables. Among their number was ‘a Chinese lady—a real one, too’, who was blind. Despite this, the correspondent noted she had a ‘small, but happy family’ and ‘all around her treated her with more than ordinary kindness, in consequence of the loss she has sustained’. Ah Fie would have been about 40 years old.

**Kim Linn of Jembaicumbene and Sydney**

Nineteen-year-old Kim Linn came to New South Wales from Hong Kong in late 1868, travelling on the \textit{Sunshine} to Melbourne and then on the \textit{Hero} from Melbourne to Sydney.\footnote{For more on Kim Linn’s life in New South Wales, see Kate Bagnall, “To his home at Jembaicumbene”.} She travelled as part of a group of Chinese women: a woman aged 28, a three-year-old girl and three young women aged between 16 and 19. In Melbourne, Kim Linn was met by Ah How, a storekeeper from Jembaicumbene on the Braidwood goldfields south of Sydney, and together they travelled to his home as husband and wife. An article in the \textit{Braidwood Dispatch}, reprinted in a Sydney newspaper, recorded Kim Linn’s arrival at Jembaicumbene in January 1869, noting how a local Chinese storekeeper had ‘just returned from Melbourne with a Chinese lady whom his parents selected for him in his native land and sent out to become his wife’.\footnote{‘The Progress of Mongolian Colonisation’, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} (8 January 1896): 5, nla.gov.au/nla.news-article13187496.} Ah How was a well-known and respected member of the Chinese community at Jembaicumbene. He had arrived in the colony as a young man in the late 1850s and had subsequently gone into business as a storekeeper, profiting from supplying the substantial Chinese population who worked the diggings along Jembaicumbene Creek. In May 1872, Ah How was naturalised as a British subject under the name Ralph Ah How, and the following year he was granted a publican’s licence.
Kim Linn gave birth to her first baby, a boy, at Jembaicumbene on 19 August 1869. She was premature and died soon after birth. She lost her second baby, too—another boy, who was born on 7 June 1870 and died two days later. Both births, and that of her third child, were attended by an Irish neighbour, Mary Callaghan. Kim Linn’s third baby, a girl named Lune Zee, was born on 14 May 1871. Kim Linn would have been heavily pregnant with Lune Zee when the census was taken in early April 1871, and we can assume Kim Linn was one of the two Chinese females recorded at Jembaicumbene by the census that year (the other woman’s identity remains unknown). Baby Lune Zee was followed by two brothers, One King (b. 13 August 1873) and John (b. 16 January 1876), who were delivered by a local midwife, Jane Helman.

Kim Linn’s sixth baby was born not at Jembaicumbene, but in Sydney. It appears that, with Jembaicumbene’s waning fortunes, including a severe drought in the middle years of the 1870s, the family moved to Sydney, where they lived in Cambridge Street in The Rocks. It was there, on 30 September 1878, that Kim Linn gave birth to baby Albert, attended by a Dr Wright and a Mrs Hong. On the birth certificates of her Jembaicumbene babies, Kim Linn’s name was recorded as ‘Gum Leon’ or ‘Kim Linn’. By the time of Albert’s birth in Sydney, however, she had acquired a new name: Elizabeth Gum Lin. Documents dated the following year give her name as Mary Elizabeth Ah How.

Ah How died of lung disease, aged 48, on 24 October 1879, leaving Kim Linn a widow with four young children (aged one, three, six and eight) and not yet 30 years old. Ah How was buried at Sydney’s Rookwood Cemetery and his remains were later exhumed and returned to China. Ah How’s probate documents, which named Kim Linn as his beneficiary, are almost the last documentary record of the family in New South Wales. The final, intriguing trace of them comes in the form of a death certificate from 1925, which records that one Johnnie Ah Howe, aged 50, died at Lower Campbell Street, Sydney. Johnnie Ah Howe had been born at Braidwood to father Ralph Ah How and mother Mary, and it is almost certain he was Kim Linn’s final Jembaicumbene baby, born in January 1876. The death

49 NSW BDM, Birth registration for unnamed baby Ah How, Jembaicumbene, 1869, 7837/1869.
50 NSW BDM, Death registration for unnamed baby Ah How, Jembaicumbene, 1869, 3222/1869.
51 NSW BDM, Birth registration for unnamed baby Ah How, Jembaicumbene, 1870, 7591/1870; Death registration for unnamed baby Ah How, Jembaicumbene, 1870, 3050/1871.
52 NSW BDM, Birth registration for Lune Zee Ah How, Jembaicumbene, 1871, 8035/1871.
53 NSW BDM, Birth registration for One King Ah How, Jembaicumbene, 1873, 8183/1873; Birth registration for John Ah How, Jembaicumbene, 1876, 8747/1876.
54 NSW BDM, Birth registration for Albert Ah How, Sydney, 1878, 2756/1878.
55 NSW BDM, Death registration for Ralph Ah How, Sydney, 1879, 1804/1879.
56 NSW BDM, Death registration for Johnnie Ah Howe, Sydney, 1925, 15860/1925.
certificate stated that Johnnie had married in China at the age of 30 and had three children there, suggesting that, after Ah How’s death, Kim Linn had returned to China with her young family.

**Sam Kue of Sydney, Grafton and Tingha**

Described as ‘one of the first Chinese ladies to land in the Antipodes’, Sam Kue came to New South Wales in the late 1860s as the wife of a merchant, John Ah See (亞四), who was also known as Tse Yet Chong (謝日昌).\(^5^7\) At the time of Sam Kue’s arrival in New South Wales, her husband worked in the import–export firm of Tai Yick & Company (泰益) in Sydney.\(^5^8\) Sam Kue was more than a decade younger than her husband; she was born into a family named Kwok (郭) in Hong Kong in the later years of the 1840s, while he was born in Hoiping (開平) in Canton province in the early 1830s.

Sam Kue was recorded as being 20 years old when she gave birth to the couple’s first child, a daughter (later known as Sarah), at George Street, Sydney, on 23 May 1870. The baby’s birth was attended by a Mrs Cavanagh.\(^5^9\) On census night in April 1871, baby Sarah would have been nearing her first birthday; was she perhaps counted alongside her mother as one of the four female Chinese in the City of Sydney? A second baby, a son named James (known as Tse Tsan Tai, 謝纘泰), was born in Sydney on 16 May 1872.\(^6^0\) From the birth certificates of these and subsequent children, it is not clear when or where Sam Kue and John Ah See had married, as the details given vary considerably. The 1870 birth certificate of their first daughter stated the couple was married in Sydney in 1866, while their last child’s birth certificate, from 1882, stated they were married on 10 July 1867 in Hong Kong. Sam Kue’s name was also recorded on these birth certificates in a number of ways: Sam Que, Sam, Mary Sangow and Sam Kue.


\(^{59}\) NSW BDM, Birth registration of Ah See, 23 May 1870, George Street, Sydney, 1438/1870.

\(^{60}\) NSW BDM, Birth registration of Tan Hi See, Sydney, 1366/1872. A number of newspaper reports noted that James Ah See/Tse Tsan Tai was born in Grafton, but this was not correct. See, for example, ‘Chinese Revolution’, *Glen Innes Examiner* (27 September 1932): 7, nla.gov.au/nla.news-article184600422; ‘Grafton Boy’, *Northern Star* [Lismore] (27 September 1932): 8, nla.gov.au/nla.news-article94302747.
In the mid 1870s, the family moved from Sydney to Grafton, a major town on the Clarence River in the far north-east of New South Wales. In fact, it seems likely they moved there in late 1874, as a shipping notice for the PS *Agnes Irving*, which arrived at Grafton on 3 December 1874, noted a ‘Mr. and Mrs. Ah See and 2 children’ among the paddle-steamer’s passengers from Sydney. In Grafton, John Ah See ran a fruit shop and general store in the town’s main street, Prince Street, and the family lived in a residence behind the shop.

In Grafton, John Ah See ran a fruit shop and general store in the town’s main street, Prince Street, and the family lived in a residence behind the shop.

In 1876, Sam Kue gave birth to a second son, Thomas (known as Tse Tsan Ip, 謝纘葉, and Tse Tsi Shau, 謝子修). When Thomas was still a small baby, at the end of July 1876, the family was caught up in the most disastrous flood in Grafton’s living memory. A report in the *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, the premises of which were next door to the Ah Sees’ store and home, told of the fearful night the family spent as the floodwaters rose along Prince Street:

> Even our next door neighbour, a chinaman, a chinawoman, and three children were to be seen through their window all the livelong night contending with the ruthless foe for life.

The following day the family was rescued by staff of the *Examiner* and they spent several days in the upper floor of the newspaper office, surviving on provisions salvaged from Ah See’s store, until the floodwater subsided enough for the Ah Sees to return to their own single-storey home. Ah See’s losses were calculated at £50.

Two more children were born to Sam Kue and John Ah See in Grafton: Samuel, born in 1878, and Lizzie, born in 1880. Around this time, the family became Christians and, on 1 November 1879, the eldest four children—Sarah, James, Thomas and Samuel—were baptised into the Church of England by Archdeacon C.C. Greenaway. Sam Kue and John Ah See were also later baptised.

In the early 1880s, the family moved to Tingha, a small town 200 kilometres inland from Grafton. Sam Kue’s sixth and final baby, a daughter named Mary, was born at Tingha on 30 March 1882. Sam Kue was then 32 years old. Mary’s

---

66 NSW BDM, Birth registrations of Thomas Ah See, Grafton, 12109/1876; Samuel Ah See, Grafton, 13251/1878; Lizzie Ah See, Grafton, 14995/1880.
67 NSW BDM, Birth registration of Mary Ah See, 30 March 1882, Tingha, 19861/1882.
birth was attended by a Mrs Suey—most likely Margaret Suey née Battersby.\(^{68}\) Little information can be found about the life of the Ah See family in Tingha, with a notable exception being a report of a visit to Tingha in March 1885. The writer noted:

> We interviewed one of the Chinese ladies (there being two) that live here, and saw two of her six children, the others going to the Public school. We found Mrs. Ah See very agreeable, anxious to tell about her family, and she seemed very fairly satisfied with her lot. I believe one of her sons is one of the brightest boys in the school.\(^{69}\)

It is likely the two children at home were five-year-old Lizzie and three-year-old Mary, and that the bright schoolboy was Sam Kue’s first son, James, then aged 13. Under his Chinese name of Tse Tsan Tai, James Ah See went on to become a leading political and social reformer in China in the 1890s and early 1900s. He also co-founded Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post* newspaper in 1903 and is reputed to have produced the first political cartoon by a Chinese.\(^{70}\)

In one of his many writings—a history of the Chinese revolution published in Hong Kong in 1924—Tse Tsan Tai described his family’s background and his early life in New South Wales, as well as the family’s eventual return to Hong Kong in 1887. We therefore know that Sam Kue—with her family of three daughters (aged five, seven and 17) and three sons (aged nine, 11 and 15)—left Tingha to return to Hong Kong, arriving there on 20 May 1887. The family was welcomed by John Ah See’s ‘old friends’ on their arrival and, according to Tse Tsan Tai, they soon found themselves ‘at home in a strange city with strange surroundings’. Although Tse Tsan Tai’s account does not provide further details of Sam Kue’s life after the family returned to Hong Kong, it does reveal that Sam Kue was still alive in 1924 and still a Christian: ‘As for my mother,’ he wrote, ‘she is a good and pious soul, and will soon see her 80th birthday, if God be pleased.’ By that time, Sam Kue had been a widow for more than 20 years, following the death of John Ah See in 1903 at age 73, at their residence on Praya East in present-day Wan Chai, Hong Kong.\(^{71}\)

---


\(^{71}\) ‘The Late Mr. Tse Yet Chong’, *Evening News* [Sydney] (16 April 1903): 7; nla.gov.au/nla.news-article113416883.
Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to bring the question of gender to bear on the history of Chinese migration to nineteenth-century Australia through the approach of microhistorical biography. The four biographical sketches of Chinese women in colonial New South Wales presented here contain frustrating gaps and much supposition, and they raise many unanswered questions, but even so, telling these stories remains important. In searching out and compiling even fragmentary narratives of their lives, we start to give these Chinese women, and others like them, a place within the history of the Chinese in colonial Australia. The small numbers of Chinese women in colonial Australia, and the scattered and fragmentary nature of our sources about them, mean there are particular challenges in uncovering and writing about their lives. To date, these challenges have meant Chinese women have been largely written out of Chinese Australian histories and of broader global histories of nineteenth-century Chinese migration.

As we seek to redress this omission as historians, it is particularly important to use women’s names, because when women’s names do not appear, in either our sources or our writing, we come to expect to be unable to find anything more about them. We stop looking for them, we stop asking questions and we fall back on stereotypes about women’s lives in the past. Most of the women whose lives were affected by migration from southern China during the second half of the nineteenth century—as migrants or as wives, mothers or daughters of migrant men—will remain anonymous. But naming their names and telling their stories as individuals where we can are powerful steps in shifting our thinking from unknown to known, and from absence to presence, as we continue to uncover the ways that women were part of the global history of the nineteenth-century Chinese diaspora.
Heroines and their ‘moments of folly’: Reflections on writing the biography of a woman composer

SUZANNE ROBINSON

In the book of essays titled *The Art of Literary Biography*, Jürgen Schlaeger recounts how a German colleague visiting the Dickens House Museum in London took particular interest in Dickens's study. There his friend watched an English schoolboy enter the room, carefully read through the words on an information sheet and then shout to his classmates: ‘Dickens’s chair! Dickens’s chair!’ Other children rushed in and began copying out the description, some of them also sketching the object itself.¹ For a German, Schlaeger reports, this form of ‘celebrity fetishism’ was astonishing. Yet, as he explained, it stemmed from a long history of hero-worship in the English-speaking world. Australians, for example, also revere their heroes through relics, with public collections preserving such items as Captain James Cook’s tea cup, Ned Kelly’s armour, Henry Handel Richardson’s ouija board and Dame Nellie Melba’s shoes.² In the case of the composer Percy Grainger, we have a whole museum housing clothing, handmade machinery, musical instruments, artworks and even his toy sailing boat.

No comparable mementos survive in the archives of the Australian-born composer Peggy Glanville-Hicks (1912–1990)—no personal library, no art collection, no wardrobe or furnishings. Nevertheless, in the space of 30 years, she has been the subject of three biographies and a bio-bibliography.³ This number in itself confirms the amount of interest in a career that spanned three continents and was intertwined with those of some of the most famous composers and virtuosos of the twentieth century. Accounts of her life justly celebrate international attention, unique artistry and triumph over adversity. When I began my own biography of Glanville-Hicks, however, I committed myself to burrowing in as many relevant archives as I could access, incorporating the voices of as many friends and colleagues as were willing or

---

² These are held in collections in Melbourne, of the National Museum, the State Library of Victoria, the National Trust and the Arts Centre, respectively.
able to contribute, paying attention to chronology, social and cultural circumstance and questioning what part gender played in her career. In sifting through several thousand letters, I discovered wit, humour, passion and stoicism, and that, despite many setbacks, the composer had very artfully conjured for herself a life that matched her concept of the life of a significant creative artist. At times though I also encountered mythmaking and storytelling—some of it stretching plausibility—and opinions or outbursts that were disagreeable enough to shock or horrify me. How does a biographer respond, as Dea Birkett and Julie Wheelwright did, to the involuntary cry of ‘How could she?’ I was forced to decide how to represent unedifying details (if at all) and whether or not to intervene in the narrative by offering my own response. Certainly, the ‘new’ biography encourages frankness. According to Hermione Lee, writing about ‘fallen idols’:

> Though contemporary biography has not always been artful and selective, it does pay a debt to modernist discussions and practice of the genre, in its belief in truth-telling, humour, and realism, its emphasis on childhood and sexuality, its explorations of inner lives as much as public achievements, and its reluctance (with a few notorious exceptions) to moralize, take sides, or cast blame.

These are challenging aims. For the feminist biographer to conform to such precepts as well as to write in the wake of outstanding musicologist-biographers who have single-handedly recovered the lives of women composer-heroines of the likes of Francesca Caccini (1587–1640), Clara Schumann (1819–1896) and Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901–1953), the troublesome question is whether the exposure of a woman subject’s imperfections undermines perceptions of her status as a composer. Claire Tomalin in her biography of Dickens committed herself to documenting his failings ‘with an unblinking eye’, but is that kind of commitment prudent when writing about a figure whose reputation is still to be fully established?

### On heroes and heroines

Biographies tend to be written about heroes and heroines (but mostly about heroes). Carlyle argued in a volume of lectures titled *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*: ‘We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man, without gaining something by him. He is the living light-fountain, which it is good

---

and pleasant to be near.’

He graded his heroes into types, such as poets and kings, and divined a life pattern, beginning in poverty and enduring through piety, as an inspiration to us all. While the tradition of writing about Great Men was repudiated in the early twentieth century by Lytton Strachey and others, and then ‘trashed’ by the poststructuralists, it lingers. Leon Edel has defined biography as ‘the life story of a man or woman whose uniqueness makes him or her a valid biographical subject’. The most highly reputed contemporary biographers in English are those linked to indisputably great Anglo-Saxon men or women writers: Peter Ackroyd to Dickens and T.S. Eliot, Victoria Glendinning to Vita Sackville-West, Hermione Lee to Virginia Woolf and Claire Tomalin to Jane Austen. Several of their books are monumental achievements—Lee’s biography of Woolf comes close to 900 pages—and in their level of detail, their stupendous marshalling of documentation, fact and event, as well as their perceptiveness, they may not be superseded for a generation. Lee’s publisher assures us that this is a biography worthy of ‘one of our century’s most brilliant and mercurial writers’ and that, conversely, Lee has had the courage to ‘leave all of [Woolf’s] complexities and contradictions intact’.

In my own field of music history, composers tend to be portrayed as Romantic heroes. Attitudes to biography have been shaped by landmark accounts of the lives of the great German composers: Otto Jahn’s *W.A. Mozart* (1856–59, 1867), Alexander Wheelock Thayer’s *Life of Beethoven* (1866–79) and Philipp Spitta’s *Johann Sebastian Bach* (1873–80). As Jolanta Pekacz points out in an essay on ‘musical biography and its discontents’, nineteenth-century biographies of composers such as these have tended towards hagiography. Our more recent zeal for uncovering the ‘truth’ and an assumption that new-generation scholarship is infallibly ‘truthful’ have led to numerous encyclopaedic revisions of ageing biographies. For all their erudition and masterful archaeology, many of these continue to uphold the ideology of the hero. Alan Walker’s three-volume biography of Franz Liszt, completed in 1997, devotes a section to the demolition of the possibility that Liszt fathered illegitimate children, the author clearly exasperated with the rumour mill’s tendency ‘to saddle

---


12 As, for example, in her discussion of Schubert. See Jolanta T. Pekacz, ‘Memory, History and Meaning: Musical Biography and Its Discontents’, *Journal of Musicological Research* 23 (2004): 55, doi.org/10.1080/01411890490276990.

great men with illicit offspring’. Christoph Wolff’s biography of Bach (2000), while at 600 pages a document of substantial scholarship, equates the greatness of the music with the greatness of the life, so that Bach becomes a pillar of the church, an exemplary entrepreneur, an intellectual who ranked with Newton, whose body of writings, if only they had not been lost, would testify to his superior intellect. Biographers—and their readers—want to continue to worship their heroes in music. So, when Paul Kildea in his 600-page biography of Benjamin Britten uncovered evidence to suggest that Britten’s fatal heart condition was caused by syphilis—a disease so unmentionable his doctors never divulged it—the biographer faced a storm of protest.

Biographers of women musicians also search for heroine subjects. Becca Anderson’s book profiling 200 ‘boundary breakers, freedom fighters, sheroes and female firsts’ names women painters, writers, dancers and singer-songwriters. Women composers have also been ‘boundary breakers’, though not always in ways that are readily recognisable. Susan McClary in an article on the intersections of musicology and feminism frames the dilemma of defining the woman composer as a heroine. Do we admire their works, she asks, ‘simply because they were composed by women’? Or can we find ways to approach them more critically? Should we elaborate on the factors that explain why the music might be of inferior quality, or can we claim greatness despite limited outputs and the predominance of domestic genres? Pekacz is sceptical that women composers can measure up, accusing biographers of women composers of a lack of scholarly rigour. On the basis of the biographies that have advocated for the ‘greatness’ of Felix Mendelssohn’s sister, Fanny Hensel, Pekacz argues that

feminist biographers manufacture stories of suppressed female geniuses in a way that demonstrates the unreflective adherence of these authors to predetermined explanatory schemes and political agenda, to familiar nineteenth-century plots of heroic and masculine biography, as well as their disregard for historical context, let alone evidence.

No-one would deny a biographer’s subjectivity, which in part explains why four biographies of Hensel have been published since 1981. But feminists attempting to promote the cause of Fanny Hensel have alleged that her talents were callously suppressed by her father and brother, and the simplistic distillation of this claim (as seen, for example, in the headline in *The Washington Post* in 2017 that alleged that ‘a Mendelssohn masterpiece was really his sister’s’) has led to a backlash that makes the recuperative project far more onerous. According to Marian Wilson Kimber:

> [T]he story of Fanny’s ‘suppression’ is neither accurate, new, nor feminist in its origins or construction … Centering Hensel’s biography on her brother’s comments rather than on her eventual publication of her music both denies her the power she did have in life and oversimplifies the historical situation for women composers, replacing the manifold issues surrounding gender and class with a single male villain.

In light of Kimber’s none-too-subtle attack on feminist scholars including Marcia J. Citron who have perpetuated the suppression story, declarations of the ‘greatness’ of a woman composer require more stringent tests.

Interestingly, Edel assumes that the biographer’s subject is always a personal hero or heroine regardless of public opinion. In the case of a composer—as for a writer, playwright or painter—biographers usually admit to liking their subject’s works, and it is admiration for the works themselves that more often than not compels their readers. This means, and Edel concedes, that biographers will inevitably struggle against ‘their own resistance to discovering unpleasant truths, and what their secret selves are up to in shaping the materials’. How, then, can the biographer balance between plots that authorise greatness and the revelation of personal foibles or errors of judgement that come with in-depth archival research and the demand for impartiality? Unpleasant opinions can be voiced by others. Selfish or egotistical acts can be dismissed as ‘moments of folly’ or excused by myriad emotional, physical,
social or cultural forces as the price they paid for being rebels.\textsuperscript{26} It would be easy to skip over anomalies, ignore them or, more deviously, admit them without comment. Hermione Lee, for example, reported in her biography of Virginia Woolf that Woolf’s remarks about Jews and ‘the lower classes’ were offensive but omitted to state who was offended, leaving the reader to wonder how much or whether her Jewish husband, Leonard Woolf, was indeed offended.\textsuperscript{27} Perhaps the biographer herself took offence. The conundrums themselves elucidate the complexities of identity. Sara Alpern and her fellow writers in \textit{The Challenge of Feminist Biography} urge biographers of women to adopt an active rather than neutral voice and to allow for contradictions and uncertainties.\textsuperscript{28} In my own experience of researching the life of a woman composer, I was repeatedly reminded of these injunctions.

**Peggy Glanville-Hicks as heroine**

The first book-length biography of Peggy Glanville-Hicks (1912–90) was published in 1992, two years after her death. Written by Wendy Beckett, a young Sydney journalist and playwright, it is based on interviews corrupted by Glanville-Hicks’s poor memory (the result of illness and old age) and her lifelong tendency to exaggerate.\textsuperscript{29} According to Beckett, Glanville-Hicks would create or recreate the dialogue and character for the telling … she teased me theatrically, never clearly distinguishing authenticity of fact … Together, as composer and playwright, we heard the most extraordinary stories, some real, some of Peggy’s making.\textsuperscript{30}

Unfortunately, this book has reified innumerable myths that will prove difficult to shift. It portrays Peggy the schoolgirl as a loner:

Peggy was single-minded about music and never doubted her destiny. She wrote a piece of music [at school] which she described as being a ‘completely unconscious act’. As if driven by some inner compulsion to write music, and imbued with a belief in herself as a composer, Peggy felt a sense of predestination.\textsuperscript{31}

In this narrative, the gifted young composer leaves the colonial wasteland for civilisation, meets and marries the man she alone recognises as a genius and establishes the two of them in a bohemian loft. When war intervenes, they successfully escape, first by visiting Australia and then by emigrating to New York—‘the centre of the

\textsuperscript{26} Birkett and Wheelwright, “‘How Could She?’”, 50.
\textsuperscript{27} Lee, \textit{Virginia Woolf}, 314.
Heroines and their ‘moments of folly’

universe’. There the composer is so impressed with her boss, the chief critic at the highly esteemed New York Herald Tribune, that she quickly learns to emulate him, becoming known for ‘bold responses’ that were ‘almost as notable as her reviews’. She falls in love with a promising American composer, whose ‘eccentricity, intellect and humour went unmatched’. Meanwhile, her ‘composition work continued to grow … and the rewards began to pour in’. In mid-century New York City concerts, ‘her name recurred in almost every program’.

This version of the life divulges the subject’s own opinion of herself and her gifts, and could just as well fit the story of a Great Man were it not for the succession of relationships in which Glanville-Hicks plays muse or handmaiden to just such a Great Man, as a kind of Alma Mahler–like figure intoxicated by the scent of masculine genius. Yet with a little more perspective, Glanville-Hicks undeniably warrants treatment as a successful woman composer: she was the first American woman to receive a commission for an opera and, in her time, was one of very few influential women music critics in the country. Her output includes operas, ballets, scores for films, chamber music and a frequently performed and recorded harp sonata. To a young and aspiring American woman composer, she may well have seemed a heroine, and when in old age Glanville-Hicks returned to Australia, she became a mentor to a generation of younger colleagues.

Glanville-Hicks and the ‘impulse to self-invention’

Like all modern musicological biographers, I embarked on a biography of Glanville-Hicks with the intention of debunking myths and restoring ‘truth’. But what happens when uncovering the facts and digging ever deeper lead us to see a heroine in a darker and more unattractive light? Carolyn Heilbrun pities biographers of the great women of the past who have had to struggle with the inevitable conflict between the destiny of being unambiguously woman and the woman subject’s palpable desire, or fate, to be something else. Except when writing about queens, biographers of women have not therefore been at ease with their subjects—and even with queens, like Elizabeth I of England, there has been a tendency to see them as somewhat abnormal, monstrous.

32 Beckett, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 70.
33 Beckett, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 76.
34 Beckett, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 108.
35 Beckett, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 108.
36 Beckett, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 101.
37 On the ‘muse paradigm’ that has infected biographies of male as well as female composers, see Wiley, Re-Writing Composers’ Lives, 232–51.
It is inevitable, Heilbrun suggests, that outstanding women of the past would be, in some way, deviant; they would not have succeeded otherwise.

By the time she reached her seventies, Glanville-Hicks was a notoriously eccentric figure who told outrageous stories, treated eminent composers like flunkeys and once kicked a well-known American composer out of her Sydney home for burning the toast. One of her closest friends, James Murdoch, a writer and music administrator who admired her ‘beautiful’ music and ‘insouciant humour’, decided in the last few years of her life to write an ‘authorised’ biography. By then, his subject’s mythmaking habit had led to the development of what he called ‘her repertory of oft-repeated, polished and revisionist stories’. So cagey was she about her past that Murdoch was forced to incorporate some of those stories alongside his own observations and suppositions. Based on his knowledge of her in her sixties and seventies (in the 1970s and 1980s), he alleged, for example, that in the early 1940s, when she was barely 30 and photos illustrated her taste and elegance, ‘her clothes were a concoction of fakery with a few pieces of family trinkets used as diversion’. Although her fondness for capes dated from her residence in Greece in the 1960s (and perhaps earlier), Murdoch claimed her outfits were ‘all disguised by a good cape or shawl and a toss of the shoulder’. Because he was both friend and biographer, Murdoch allowed himself a licence to fill in the gaps. He awarded her powers she never had, depicting her nurturing the talents of her famous male friends and then dropping them and, after a hiatus in the early 1940s, composing with such ease that ‘music began to pour out of her’. When faced with the memory lapses of Glanville-Hicks’s friend and former lover Paul Bowles—with whom she had corresponded for more than 40 years—the biographer himself supplied the necessary details. Murdoch later wrote:

[B]y filling in these lacunae … I helped him [Bowles] focus on Peggy the composer, Peggy the writer, Peggy the vital personality, where previously he had been content to think of her only as a reflection of himself.

Reading between the lines, though, it was hard to sustain the idealist’s view. By its end, their friendship had become burdensome and Murdoch’s own ambivalence can be sensed when he refers to his subject as ‘an old and lonely lady’.

Aware of the myths and distortions surrounding the composer, my own biographical research drew on sources including published interviews, letters and annual appointment diaries. Even there, however, it was difficult to separate fact from

40 Murdoch, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 272.
41 Murdoch, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 253.
42 Murdoch, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 40.
43 Murdoch, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 40.
44 Murdoch, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 41, 46.
45 Murdoch, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 51.
46 Murdoch, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 253.
fiction, or at least creative embroidery. In an interview with an Australian journalist in London in 1947, for example, Glanville-Hicks referred to her husband and their home when by then they had separated.\textsuperscript{47} She even felt the necessity to boast to her closest friends. In New York in the 1950s, when she was in her forties and at the apex of her career as a composer and music critic, she attempted to puff up her credentials as an opera composer by confiding to the chief music librarian of the New York Public Library that, as a teenager, she had been involved in every aspect of mounting seven productions of modern opera in Melbourne and then another dozen while a student at the Royal College of Music in London.\textsuperscript{48} In the case of the early seven productions, she was referring not to some august opera organisation, but to productions by the students of the boutique Melba Conservatorium under its director British-born composer Fritz Hart. To reach this number of operas, she had to be counting double bills and operas by Mozart and Donizetti; her part was likely to have been menial at best.\textsuperscript{49} Even if these examples show her playfulness with the details of her past, she was also capable of telling blatant lies, once writing to her closest male friend, the dancer and choreographer John Butler, that she had lived for two years with her composition teacher Ralph Vaughan Williams and his wife, Adeline, in their house in Dorking, south of London.\textsuperscript{50} While the story provides evidence of her admiration and reverence for her teacher, her diaries show that her visit in fact lasted only a few days.\textsuperscript{51}

Glanville-Hicks playing with the truth

One of the most shocking of the fictions that Glanville-Hicks contrived relates to the \textit{Sonata for Piano and Percussion} she composed in 1951 as a sign of her identification with major American avant-garde composers (such as George Antheil, Henry Cowell and John Cage—all now known and canonised for their landmark percussion works of the 1920s and 1930s). There is no question that Glanville-Hicks's work was a novel concept; although it may have been encouraged by these men and was a homage to the \textit{Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion} (1937) by the Hungarian composer Béla Bartók, the performance of such a work in Manhattan was so novel that Glanville-Hicks devised the premiere herself,

\begin{itemize}
\item[48] Glanville-Hicks, letter to Carleton Sprague Smith, 3 February [1957?], Box 11, Papers of Glanville-Hicks, MLMSS 6394, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney [hereinafter PGH-SLNSW].
\item[49] The operas she is counting may have begun with Mozart’s \textit{Così fan tutte} in 1928, the double bill of Donizetti’s \textit{The Daughter of the Regiment} and Fritz Hart’s \textit{The Woman Who Laughed at Faery} in 1929, the double bill of Hart’s \textit{Ruth and Naomi} and Mozart’s \textit{Il seraglio} in 1930 and the double bill of Hart’s \textit{Pierrette} and \textit{St George and the Dragon} in 1931. Glanville-Hicks left Melbourne for London in June 1932.
\item[50] Glanville-Hicks to John Butler, 5 September [1958], Box 7, PGH-SLNSW.
\item[51] Diary for 1937, Series 3, Glanville-Hicks Papers, MS 9083, National Library of Australia, Canberra [hereinafter PGH-NLA].
\end{itemize}
planning an extraordinary 12 hours of rehearsals and scouring the island for just the right sort of drums. Held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1952, the concert included a performance of Cowell’s *Ostinato Pianissimo* for rice bowls, drums, gongs and piano (requiring the pianist to play directly on the strings of the piano), and a suite by Elliott Carter played on four timpani. She waged a publicity campaign promoting both percussion and the concert, persuading a colleague at the *New York Herald Tribune* to announce that ‘the percussion ensemble itself is quite able to create a self-sufficient and autonomous organic structure using the various tonal and sonority possibilities of those instruments’.\(^{52}\) In the notes to the recording of her work, Glanville-Hicks argued:

> Percussion is no new phase in American music, for the orchestration of rhythm has been offered in rice bowls and brake drums, road drills, typewriters and aeroplane propellers through the years … My concept, however, of percussion [is] not to escape from pitch and tonality—but to return with music toward these … and my graded tonal percussion unit of normal symphonic instruments appearing in their own right as a chamber ensemble had a marked effect, then and later on, on both composers and audience.\(^{53}\)

Critics who attended the concert were not so convinced. One felt he was imprisoned inside a giant mechanical clock and another declared the ideas in her work were ‘not out of Miss Glanville-Hicks’ top drawer’, belonging too obviously to the ‘Bedouins-in-the-desert and rush-hour-in-Hong-Kong traditions’.\(^{54}\) She must have been pleased, however, when the chairman of the museum’s auditorium committee described the concert as the success of the season.\(^{55}\)

Two months later, Glanville-Hicks arrived in Melbourne to visit her family. To reporters, including one from the Melbourne *Age*, she commented on the sonata, explaining that she had taken themes in the first and last movements from the music of the ‘Watuzzi’ Africans, having heard it on recordings held at the Office of War Information (OWI) (where it was Cowell who amassed the collection). She may have heard recordings in the OWI archives but this was almost certainly not the source of her themes. After discovering that the ‘Watuzzi’ (Watutsi or Watusi) belong to the Tutsi tribe of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, I received a tip-off from a friend that led me to the MGM movie of Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*.\(^{56}\) Released in 1950 (the year before *Sonata for Piano and Percussion* was composed), it contains spectacular footage of African scenery and wildlife—the result of MGM sending its cast and crew on a 23,000-kilometre safari. There is

---

53 Glanville-Hicks, Notes to the recording of *Sonata for Piano and Percussion*, Columbia Records, ML 4990 (1955).
55 Gertrud Mellon, letter to Glanville-Hicks, 8 May 1952, Box 12, PGH-SLNSW.
56 The tip-off was from Joel Crotty, whose advice has been invaluable to my research on Glanville-Hicks.
virtually no Western music in the film, all of the soundtrack being made and sung by tribesmen. Surprisingly, Glanville-Hicks took from this movie not one but three themes, two of them becoming the two principal themes of the first movement of her sonata. This discovery at least provides evidence of the authenticity of her source and of the truthfulness of her claim of its ethnicity. The movement she devises out of these themes is rigidly constructed in repeating four-bar units, as it is in the original. But something that in non-Western music is associated with a repetitive task (trekking across the desert) appears predictable in a Western artwork when it is reduced in complexity to a simple theme on the piano. Should we read the work as evidence of originality or even as a portend of composers’ attempts to synthesise Western and non-Western sources? Unfortunately, in the twenty-first century, conditioned as we are by the scruples of ethnography, the transition from African vocal polyphony to the sound of an instrument whose heyday was in the late nineteenth century seems not just pedestrian but a desecration of the original.

For a composer to withhold information about the sources of her musical ideas is not perhaps so unusual, even less so in the postmodern era when our lives are saturated with sound. But to be deliberately misleading about her sources is another matter, particularly when she was attempting to link her work to ethnomusicological research and, by association, to Cowell’s immense knowledge of ‘primitive’ cultures. What, then, does the lie convey? It tells me how much Glanville-Hicks desperately wanted to be part of both the percussion and the Orientalising movements then in vogue among her New York friends, how much she valued authenticity and how much she wanted to be seen as an innovator like them. It also suggests she had little time to compose and that the formal advance of the work—its mosaic structure—was developed not because the top drawer was empty but because she had no time to even open it. Perhaps most significantly, the ‘secret’ source of this work conveys that she went to the movies often enough to notate the melodies she heard and that her Orientalising tendencies were encouraged if not formed by popular culture. It reminds me that moviegoing was an integral part of her friendships with women, something that would become more obvious once she abandoned composing and needed the company. But can I make excuses for her? Should I treat this as a ‘moment of folly’ and so undermine the significance of her propagandising on behalf of the leading American composers writing for percussion, or overlook it as unrepresentative and unworthy?\(^57\)

\(^57\) Birkett and Wheelwright ("“How Could She?”", 50) refer to the temptation to regard unpalatable facts as ‘moments of folly’.
Glanville-Hicks playing with identity

One other equally disturbing incident in Glanville-Hicks's life defies easy rationalisations. In 1960, after almost 20 years of living and working in Manhattan, she immigrated to Greece. Although in New York she had enjoyed conspicuous success as a composer, music critic, concert organiser and radio commentator, job security was an unachievable dream and she was often in debt. Moreover, the performance of her opera *The Transposed Heads* in 1958 had been poorly reviewed and the schadenfreude of critics and rival composers ineradically poisoned her association with them. In Greece, she settled in Athens and began writing an opera. In the meantime, she explored the islands and bought a derelict dovecot on Mykonos.

Figure 1 Glanville-Hicks in Athens, c. 1960. Portrait by Roloff Beny
Source: Library and Archives Canada/Credit: Roloff Beny/Roloff Beny fonds/E011201139. © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada.
There are a number of reasons why, of the 36 islands she visited, Mykonos was the most attractive. First, her Hicks ancestors had lived for centuries on the Isles of Scilly near Cornwall, which are known for their pristine white sands, subtropical climate and ancient stone relics. Scillonians, like Mykoniots, were legendary sailors and adventurers. A small statue in the square near Mykonos harbour celebrates the feats of the revolutionary heroine Mantó Mavrogénous (1796–1848), a wealthy and beautiful aristocrat and cosmopolitan who led a repulse of Turkish forces in the War of Independence in 1821. Glanville-Hicks’s first and closest friend on the island was Vienóula Kousathana, an English-speaking craftswoman in her fifties who had founded a weaving cooperative that employed islander women in creating fabrics of kaleidoscopic colours and textures that enchanted visitors. Glanville-Hicks herself, writing about the island in American Vogue a few years later, described Kousathana as the black-eyed, white-haired English-speaking, and witty matriarch figure who has played a major role in making Mykonos famous as a weaver’s island, and her subtle use of textures and colors sets her apart from all others. She is a Homeric figure on a Homeric landscape, and on dyeing days, her garden with its potions of shocking pink, moss green, orange, and purple bubbling in copper cauldrons identical with those from the Cretan excavations, might well be a scene from a Knossos fresco.

Glanville-Hicks’s house sat in a rocky niche on the hillside overlooking the hora (the main town) and was a whitewashed box with a turreted roof in front of a rockscape covered in spring with blue and yellow flowers. The purchase was arranged at a ceremony attended by representatives of the five families that had traded the house as part of their daughters’ dowries—fishermen, shepherds, boatmen and the ruling aristocrats among them. At another ceremony, a water diviner cut a forked branch from an olive tree and, after waving the stick over the land, announced where a well should be dug.

Vienóula Kousathana’s nephew Michalis Lykos agreed to oversee the renovations of the dovecot. Having been promised that she would be treated as an ‘island girl’ and so charged ‘island prices’, Glanville-Hicks became an employer and project manager, commissioning new doors and windows, a terrace, a well, toilet tank, kitchen and ‘luxury’ bathroom. For the most part, the workmen used traditional methods. They collected bags of fikia seaweed and mud for insulation and fetched the gravel for the plaster walls from a nearby beach, transporting it back to the house on donkeys. It was Glanville-Hicks’s intention that it should be ‘a handmade house made with material close at hand and with techniques millenniums old’, but as a good modernist she installed electricity for the kitchen and bathroom and an electric pump for the well. Her fantasy of creating something wholly traditional with ancient methods was encouraged by Lykos himself, a humble tradesman and shepherd who was the

---

58 Glanville-Hicks, ‘My Beautiful Greek House—Handmade for $2,000’, Vogue 141 (1 April 1963): 35.
59 Glanville-Hicks, ‘My Beautiful Greek House’, 52.
strongest man on the island, the best dancer, a capable musician and a natural leader. Inevitably, Glanville-Hicks fell in love with him. He was described by a visitor as 'a fine-looking man, with wide, strong hands, a wide, strong, craggy face, and a dome of a head above it'. When the house was finished, the new owner praised Lykos as a fellow artist, proud that his signature was scored into the cement work as though he was a painter signing a masterpiece. No-one is sure whether there was in fact an affair; according to Beckett, Lykos had a reputation as a 'Don Juan', offering companionship to women in need, and yet one of Peggy's friends told me it was unlikely she would have stooped to an affair with a Greek. That comment implies that there were racial and class differences in play, and that Glanville-Hicks was exploiting racial difference for the sake of personal opportunity.

If on the one hand she exhibited a desire to recover lost origins—what Simon Gikandi calls 'self-realization in the spaces of the other'—her very presence is recognisable as 'a project of power and control, of domination and racial exclusiveness that … provided the context in which modern identities were constituted'. In selecting and renovating a house on an island noted for its spectacular scenery and architecture, Glanville-Hicks was performing her modernity, simultaneously searching in a remote and as yet untrampled place for lost origins—in ancient traditions of weaving, building and seafaring, in the island's proximity to Delos, in reliance even in the 1960s on hurricane lamps and donkeys and in enjoying primitive-sounding tsambouna music—while composing an opera in a modern language, writing an article destined for the New York edition of Vogue and corresponding with members of an artistic avant-garde. To several of them, she described her life in a 'blue and white island paradise'. On her advice, Yehudi Menuhin and his wife, Diana, also bought a house on Mykonos. As Menuhin described in his autobiography, he and Diana respected the simplicity of our little peasant house. Built of stone, the roof insulated with straw and seaweed between narrow beams (for wood is precious on the island), with a distinctive little chimney, it is cool, white, clean and totally unspoiled. For a few years it was an idyllic summer holiday hermitage where one wore one's oldest clothes, swam in the empty sea, daily collected steaming loaves of black bread from the baker's brushwood oven, and took evening walks in what Diana called our supermarket—our three terraces and the adjoining vineyard where grapes, figs, pomegranates, prickly pears, tomatoes and quinces grew, these last usually full of worms.

---

60 Christopher Rand, *Grecian Calendar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 121.
63 Quoted in Robinson, *Peggy Glanville-Hicks*, 205.
When Glanville-Hicks’s house was completed, she chose the date of a full moon to move in and at sunrise took a caique to Delos and climbed Mount Kynthos to give thanks to Apollo.

Coincidentally, the opera she was composing was based on Lawrence Durrell’s play about the life of the poet Sappho. By selecting his play, Glanville-Hicks secured a connection to a leading British novelist and, more usefully, to the writer known for his atmospheric memoirs of life on the islands of Corfu, Rhodes and Cyprus. In January 1963, Durrell wrote to Glanville-Hicks to say that the prospect of a Sappho opera was almost too good to be true. She began work on 1 March, ecstatic to have found a foremother whose life experience as a woman and creator resonated deeply with her own. Of his many female characters, Glanville-Hicks wrote to Durrell, Sappho was one of the most intriguing, ‘so exactly the kind of woman it must have been who wrote those ecstatically frugal lines’. In early June, Durrell and his wife, Claude, visited Glanville-Hicks on Mykonos. They discussed the opera but otherwise spent five days in an inebriated haze, carousing at her piano by night and going on picnics and expeditions to Delos by day. She had, in fact, renewed Durrell’s love of Mykonos. He was to write in his book on the Greek Islands of the ‘extraordinary cubist village, with its flittering, dancing shadows, and its flaring nightmare of whiteness’, of the souk brimming with carpets, brocades, blankets and shawls, of the ‘voluptuous shapes of breasts translated into cupolas and apses, into squinches and dovecots’ and above all of the island’s ‘eye-caressing beauty’.

Just as she achieved her personal nirvana, however, Glanville-Hicks’s paradise soured when the reality of her poverty prevented her acquiring more land, and when encroaching tourism threatened to spoil the serenity of her hideaway. Soon after she moved in, she was visited by two men in business suits who wanted to know what she had paid for her property. This worried her for two reasons, because it might be found that she had failed to pay enough tax on her land and because the knowledge of a figure as famous as Yehudi Menuhin buying property would inevitably jack up prices, when she hoped to purchase the land surrounding her house. The chief culprit, in her view, was Jim Price, the American Menuhin had employed as his agent on the island. Price was a friend of Glanville-Hicks—it is possible they had an affair a few years earlier in New York—but she now waged a campaign to have him drummed out.


67 It is unclear in her diary how long Durrell was on Mykonos, but it was most likely five days, from 10 June to 15 June. See diary for 1963, Series 3, PGH-NLA.


69 In describing the overnight visit to Delos, Durrell dated it to 1966 and reported that his wife had recently had an operation. But the operation took place in 1963, shortly before his visit to Glanville-Hicks on Mykonos. See Ian S. Macniven, *Lawrence Durrell: A Biography* (London: Faber, 1998), 533. Claude Durrell died on 1 January 1967.
off the island. Menuhin was horrified, and even more aghast when he received letters from Glanville-Hicks describing Price as a warlock. He was appalled that she could accuse her former friend of ‘mania, insanity, sadism, violence—particularly at full moon, etc’. However it was engineered, Price subsequently left the island and the Menuhins no longer corresponded with Glanville-Hicks as regularly as before.

Two years later, fearful that Mykonos would be ruined by tourism, Glanville-Hicks bought a shell of a house on the nearby island of Tinos and proceeded to employ Tyniots in renovating it. The Mykonos house eventually sold for a handsome sum.

A decade later when Durrell came to write his book about the Greek Islands, he referred to Mykonos as a ‘choice and secret place’ and to its Athenian habitués as a ‘little club of Mykonioits d’élection’. In her anthropological study of this exclusive group as it coalesced in the 1970s and afterwards, Pola Bousiou describes its members as nomads and “mystic” participants in an ideal socialisation who occupy an artificial and yet ideal space. Subject to a romanticised ‘tourist gaze’, the island renowned for its vernacular architecture and craftsmanship became in subsequent decades an object of elite consumption. The perpetual reconstitution of the town’s quintessentially traditional yet modern Greek Island–style architecture ‘faked’ or ‘staged’ its authenticity. Visitors came not just to admire or photograph the landscape but, like Glanville-Hicks, also to literally possess it. Although there are today modern Greek houses planted on the fringes of the town, there are also dovecots renovated as lovingly as Glanville-Hicks’s and the vista the visitor sees from the ferry is still a jumble of whitewashed boxes. Glanville-Hicks unquestionably subscribed to the island’s myth of exclusivity, becoming in her own words an ‘aristocrat’—reserving her house for a privileged group of New York artists she described as ‘family’. In my view, her shameless behaviour when her tranquillity was threatened was less the product of work-related stress or illness, as one of her previous biographers speculates, than a violent reaction to the attack on the performative identity she had created for herself in the wake of years of hardship and bitterness in New York. For the remainder of her life, she was to pursue the chimera of this identity, performed most clearly in the portrait from 1989 showing

---

70 Murdoch, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 192.
71 Yehudi Menuhin, letter to Glanville-Hicks, 5 August 1963, quoted in Robinson, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 211.
72 There is a gap in the extant correspondence between Glanville-Hicks and the Menuhins from 1963 to 1966 and very few letters beyond that date. The correspondence is held in Box 2, PGH-SLNSW, and in the Menuhin archive at the Royal Academy of Music in London.
73 See Glanville-Hicks, letter to Ian Potter, 3 March 1971, Box 4, PGH-SLNSW.
74 Durrell, The Greek Islands, 236.
77 Bousiou, Nomads of Mykonos, 14.
78 See, for example, Beckett, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 196; and Glanville-Hicks’s letter to the Brazilian journalist and musicologist Luiz Heitor Corrêa de Azevedo, dated 17 September 1948, in which she refers to ‘aristocrats’ who uphold truth and enlightenment (Box 14, PGH-SLNSW).
79 Murdoch, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 192.
her in a red cloak holding an owl, a symbol of Athens. Displayed on the wall next to her are two of her own ancient Greek masks, further signifying her association with Greece and its history. The cloak hides her figure, its shapelessness disguising her age and the painting’s date. Rather than appearing as an old lady from Sydney, she inhabits a timeless and mythical space, with a look of hauteur to match.

Heroine or anti-heroine?

Knowing this much, or at least applying twenty-first-century investigative tools to a mid–twentieth-century life, makes it impossible to construct a biographical identity of Glanville-Hicks as a heroine in the tradition of Carlyle’s paragons. To do so would be to overlook aspects of her life and personality for which we have ample documentation. It would also require privileging the public over the private. This would have suited Glanville-Hicks; perhaps she knew that the hundreds of letters she hoarded for posterity would one day be read very closely and only rarely in a letter did she deviate from artistic or professional matters. Although many of her claims cannot be taken for granted, the memories and letters of friends, colleagues and even enemies provide counterpoints that help to place her in historical context. One of the most precious of these countervailing sources, and the one that catches her off guard at moments of her greatest vulnerability, is the diary of the feminist author Anaïs Nin. One day Glanville-Hicks described for Nin the habits of the lapwing bird, which erases its tracks by sweeping the sand with its wings. Nin appreciated the story’s metaphor, knowing that both of them were hiding deeply rooted secrets. Glanville-Hicks destroyed her most intimate correspondence, with her mother, her best friend and with lovers she preferred to forget. But enough remains to be able to sense the very private psychological journey she underwent. To my mind, Glanville-Hicks’s accomplishment does not rest on her career highlights, the firsts she achieved or her friendship with Great Men. It lies in the challenges she set for herself, her capacity to envisage new paths and her ability to respond imaginatively to creative impulses.

This is not to say that I am willing to suspend judgement, but to acknowledge that the value of the life might lie in unexpected places. I am encouraged by Carlyle, who, when writing of Dante, pinpointed the essential quality required to attend to the whole person:

Find a man whose words paint you a likeness, you have found a man worth something; mark his manner of doing it, as very characteristic of him. In the first place, he could not have discerned the object at all, or seen the vital type of it, unless he had, what we may call, sympathized with it—had sympathy in him to bestow on objects.

80 See the portrait at: pghcomposercritic.tumblr.com/.
81 Anaïs Nin, diary entry for 16 February 1956, Anaïs Nin Papers, University of California, Los Angeles.
Sympathy came naturally to Virginia Woolf, who, in *A Room of One’s Own*, found herself imagining the life of an ancient lady she saw crossing the street on the arm of a middle-aged woman. If, she mused,

one asked her what her life has meant to her, she would say that she remembered the streets lit for the battle of Balaclava, or had heard the guns fire in Hyde Park for the birth of King Edward the Seventh … [but that nothing remained of] all the dinners cooked; the plates and cups washed, the children sent to school and gone out into the world.83

And then she thought of the girl behind the counter and declared: ‘I would as soon have her true history as the hundred and fiftieth life of Napoleon or seventieth study of Keats and his use of Miltonic inversion.’84 Woolf appreciates not only the sanctity of small lives, but also her own appetite for life-writing itself. No biographical subject—and certainly no woman—needs to be a saint or a war hero for someone to appreciate them. In Johnson’s words, ‘there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful’.85 Glanville-Hicks might not (yet) be remembered by a blue plaque on the worker’s cottage in St Kilda where she was born, and there is no chair with a label that says it was the one in which she sat while composing, but it is not the biographer’s mission to prove her worthy of such things.

Nor, then, do her biographers need to shy away from reporting her views and actions. Another of the axioms of modern biography is that neither ‘truth’ nor the ‘inner truth’ can be fully known or inferred. According to Liz Stanley, the past ‘is a mythology created out of scraps and traces and partial interpretations—those from the past as well as those of the historian-auto/biographer’.86 What records we have show that Glanville-Hicks could be nasty, spiteful, vindictive, hypocritical and dishonest, but in discovering that, my task as a biographer was to present her complexities, contradictions and multiple selves, and to situate rather than to exonerate her. My version is surely as subjective as any other, but I would rather present the life in all its chromatic intensity than sidestep the flaws like puddles on the street. ‘If we owe regard to the memory of the dead’, Johnson wrote, ‘there is yet more respect to be paid to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth’.87

84 Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 118.
87 Johnson, ‘The Dignity and Usefulness of Biography’. 
This article poses a question that arose out of the process of researching and writing an *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (*ADB*) entry on the veteran Sydney columnist Jim Macdougall. Seeking, in the usual way, merely to identify my subject’s immediate ancestry, I noticed something slightly unusual about it, which was that Macdougall’s father and grandfather were as prominent in public life as he, in different but related fields. (His son, too, was sufficiently prominent to have been awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for services to regional medicine, in 2006.)¹ As it happens, neither of the older Macdougalls appears in the *ADB*, though a case could certainly have been made for both of them, as will become evident. But the question I want to address is not whether they should have been included in the *ADB*, but whether the lives of these three can usefully be considered as a grouped biographical entity signifying something more than the sum of its parts, which is to say more than the three separate lives.

Meaning is routinely adduced from three or more generationally successive lives in various historiographic contexts. In royal dynastic histories of the older type, for example, it would not be unusual to find an individual monarch’s attributes and policies being interpreted as, in part, a continuation, modification or rejection of those of his or her ancestors. Histories of aristocratic families—especially those with self-conscious traditions of prominent public service, such as the Churchills and the Russells in Britain—sometimes adopt a similar perspective, in which the march of generations, usually through the male line, can be used not just as a form of familial aggrandisement, but also as a lens through which to observe and interpret the unfolding of a series of real historical possibilities.

In white-settler colonies such as Australia, upper-class genealogical histories can be tinged with pathos and irony, preoccupied as such narratives sometimes are with the loss of wealth and status and even—following one popular Victorian trope—with the spectre of moral and physical degeneration on the edge of empire. Where the

---

¹ Australian Honours Search Facility website (Canberra: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2006), honours.pmc.gov.au/honours/awards/1133250.
generational trajectory is ascending (or flat), it is often because the family narrative is interwoven with the colonial and postcolonial progress of a particular profession—be it politics, medicine or the law—and can thus be used to explore longitudinal institutional processes such as the reproduction and elaboration of ethical norms and professional expertise, and the development and extension of multigenerational professional networks. Karen Fox's *ADB* essay on the legal 'dynasties' of the Stephens and Street families shines a light on two Australian narratives of this type.²

Modern family biographies generally seek to discover substantive, not merely nominal, continuities and transmissions between the generations. Sometimes—as in the case of the six generations of Thomas Archers who owned and inhabited Woolmers Estate in Tasmania for 170 years—the cultural process by which a 'lineage' can be constructed, retrospectively, out of the mere succession of generations may be the most interesting thing about the dynasty as a whole.³ In other cases, the dynasty may be given historical substance by virtue of its continuing connection with grander narratives. Thus, for example, Stephen Foster's biography of six generations of the Scottish Macpherson family, from the mid eighteenth to the late twentieth century, presents them as a concrete familial instantiation of the whole British imperial project, extending over many parts of the globe—North America, the Caribbean, India and New South Wales—and involving many different activities, enterprises, professions and occupations.⁴

Even shorter series of generations, however, can sometimes claim a significance wider than the single individuals who constitute the series—perhaps more easily than the longer series, since across, say, three generations there is at least the possibility of direct personal interactions. Andrew Motion's *The Lamberts: George, Constant and Kit* is one useful and interesting example, in which the three generations—painter, classical composer and musical impresario—relate to one another in complex and mutually revealing ways.⁵

Three generations might be regarded as the minimum length of such a series, in the same way that Edward Shils defined a tradition as a pattern of behaviour or belief that persists through at least three generations.⁶ Shils made that stipulation on the grounds that at least two distinct acts are needed to establish the relative independence of the pattern’s existence from its originating agent—namely, an act of receiving a transmitted pattern from a preceding generation and a second act of passing it on to, and having it received by, a succeeding generation. The usefulness

Building, celebrating, participating

of the Shils model of tradition for a three-generational biography, however, might be qualified by the need for a stronger recognition of difference, dialogue and complementarity between the generations; Shils's focus on similarities, repetitions and continuities, in other words, could be seen as an oversimplification of the intergenerational relations in a biographical series.

These issues will be taken up again in the conclusion to this paper, when the Macdougalls’ careers have been examined and compared. Accordingly, the next three sections will comprise selective narratives of the working lives of the three men—grandfather, father and son—with some observations of how those lives intersected to form what might have to be termed a ‘mini-dynasty’.

Dugald Graeme Macdougall (1833–1879)

Dugald Macdougall migrated to Victoria in 1852, aged 19, from Greenock, Scotland. The son of a wine and spirit merchant in that town, he had worked in the Harbour Trust Office after leaving school and, on arriving in Australia, first went into produce trading between Melbourne and Launceston. He soon acquired a parcel of land in the Kyneton farming district north of Melbourne from which, for a few years, he supplied farm produce to the growing mining centres of Maryborough and Bendigo (called Sandhurst between 1854 and 1891). In 1855, he seized an opportunity to establish his own produce dealership on the Bendigo goldfields, transporting produce himself by bullock dray from Kyneton to the grocery store on Golden Square, and later moving to Market Square. The business flourished and grew, but in 1859, Macdougall sold up and plunged on to a large claim at Specimen Hill, Long Gully, where he and a partner discovered a promising quartz lode. Understanding what was needed to realise its potential, he raised £10,000 and erected a combined winding, quartz-crushing and pumping plant, extending many stalled claims well below the water table, and was later credited with advancing the industry significantly. The venture failed in the end, but Macdougall stayed on as manager and initiated several more mining-related hydraulic engineering projects in following years, including the completion of the Bendigo Sludge Channel7 and, notably, the still-functioning Crusoe Reservoir.8 This last project was undertaken by the Yorkshire Mining Company—of which Macdougall was chairman of directors—chiefly to provide water for their own nearby crushing works, and only after considerable resistance from rival interests.9 It was completed—with more than a million bricks used in its construction—in the early 1870s.10

7 Anon., ‘Death of Mr. D. Macdougall’, Bendigo Advertiser, Saturday, 16 August 1879, 2.
8 Anon., ‘Testimonial to Mr. Macdougall’, Bendigo Advertiser, Wednesday, 11 October 1876, 2.
In 1861, Macdougall married, with Presbyterian forms, Mary Anne Mills Brocklebank, the 18-year-old daughter of a prominent local identity, the auctioneer Thomas Brocklebank, a Londoner. The couple had two daughters, Marion (b. 1862) and Kate (b. 1865), and on 17 November 1872, a son, who was given the same names as his father.11 Throughout the rest of his short and active life, Dugald Macdougall (the elder) continued to engage in speculative mining enterprises, with unflagging energy but mixed financial success, his most signal misfortune being the sale of a half-share in a claim a few days before gold was discovered there in large amounts.

Returning to Bendigo from a short stay in Heathcote as manager of an antimony mine, he went into business as an insurance agent and official liquidator. His involvement in the broader community was also growing. Beginning, unsurprisingly enough, with membership of the Bendigo Caledonian Society in 1859,12 Dugald senior the following year chaired the Bendigo Hospital’s Board of Management, remaining on the board for many years. He also chaired various community entertainments, such as the White Hills Popular Readings in 1868 (his Presbyterian background perhaps showing in his congratulations to the organising committee ‘on having avoided anything low or vulgar in their readings’). He is also listed as a member of the founding committee of the new Art Union of Victoria in 1871, which was established ‘for the promotion of fine arts in Victoria’.13 By this time, he had been involved in local politics for some time, and had been elected councillor for the municipal ward of Sutton, which he represented for 10 years. From 1871 to 1873, he filled the position of mayor of Bendigo for three consecutive one-year terms, laying the memorial stone for the magnificent new bells and 30-metre belltower of St Paul’s Anglican Church (later cathedral), and celebrating, as he did, the rapid material progress of the district, but also the city’s attention to its ‘higher duties to humanity’, which was evident in the establishment of charitable institutions for the aged, infirm and homeless, several public schools and a church with a peal of eight bells cast by Meyer and Steinbank of London.14

The bells’ memorial stone reads:

How elated, how joyful, would be the feelings of hundreds and thousands of the inhabitants of this district, and of the citizens of Sandhurst, when they heard this peal of bells for the first time. The sweet music would bring back to their recollections the happy days many years ago, and recall scenes in distant lands, where they heard the same merry, happy sounds cheering and stimulating them and ministering to their best feelings.15

---

11 Family information from the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, and ‘Family Notices’ in the Bendigo Advertiser for 1871.
12 ‘The Bendigo Caledonian Society’, Bendigo Advertiser, Tuesday, 15 February 1859, 2.
14 For the history of the bells, which are still in place but are no longer rung, see St Paul’s Cathedral website, www.stpaulsbendigo.org.au/cathedral.
Throughout this period, Macdougall was an active member of the Liberal Association of Victoria, seconding a successful motion after the defeat of the radical liberal George Higinbotham in 1871 expressing the meeting’s ‘surprise and indignation at the rejection of the hon. George Higinbotham by the constituency of Brighton’ and recording ‘its unabated confidence in and gratitude to him for the great services he has rendered to the people of Victoria in Parliament’. Two weeks later, at their anniversary meeting, Macdougall proposed the health of the new ministry in Melbourne and its premier, James McCulloch, expressing gratitude to him for establishing a strong government, free from scandal and corruption, and effecting ‘important social reforms’; these included publicans’ licensing reforms, the attempt (led by the unfortunate Higinbotham, but unsuccessful at this time) to introduce a system of universal secular education, a ‘wise and equitable’ new code of mining regulations and the long-delayed reforms to the graft-ridden matter of civic water supply, which the government had just announced its intention to localise (an opportunity Macdougall translated into the Crusoe Reservoir, which was opened during his mayoralty, in August 1872). Towards the end of his term, Macdougall also envisioned the transformation of ‘a dusty old mining site’ in North Bendigo into a botanical garden and public recreation area—Bendigo’s first—to be laid out around an artificial lake in imitation of Ballarat’s Lake Wendouree. Having reserved the area for this purpose, Macdougall insisted, against some local opposition, on commissioning William Guilfoyle, the director of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, to design what came to be called Lake Weeroona. It opened officially in 1878 and has been maintained continuously as a popular public park and recreation reserve ever since.

Macdougall was also, for most of his time on the council, chief magistrate of the city and, in 1876, he resigned from the council to apply for the position of town clerk, at a salary—controversially high—of £450 per annum. He performed his duties with great ‘ability and integrity’ until his death from a sudden, though not unforeseen, heart attack on 15 August 1879. He was not without enemies, however, because, as some believed:

[A]s a public man he has not escaped the wrath of some towards whom, perhaps, in his judicial capacity, he has had to administer a bolus, which they found very nauseous in swallowing.

---

16 Anon., ‘Bendigo Liberal Association’, Bendigo Advertiser, Friday, 17 March 1871, 2.
18 Anon., ‘The Town Clerkship’, Bendigo Advertiser, Saturday, 22 April 1876, 2.
What this referred to specifically is not clear, but there were other, more public conflicts. For example, in the midst of the town’s domestic and industrial water supply crisis, the *Bendigo Advertiser* had editorialised against ‘Councillor Macdougall’s pet Crusoe scheme’, adding—with more animus than elegance: ‘If ever there was a reservoir badly situated as respects the results of the giving way of a dam, it is this same Robinson Crusoe folly.’

He probably also made an enemy for life of the city valuer, G.W. Knight, by exposing potential corruption in his out-of-court settlements or ‘squaring’ of several appeals against council property assessments. Macdougall’s Presbyterian rigour in that connection seems even to have antagonised then mayor Robert Clark, a man of more relaxed standards, who opined in advance of Macdougall’s successful motion to call Knight to account that ‘in fact too much had been made of the affair’.

Such clashes were freely acknowledged by Macdougall himself later in the same year (1876) at a testimonial in his honour on the occasion of his retirement as councillor and Justice of the Peace to take on the role of town clerk. He had ‘trod on some people’s toes’; he had ‘an impetuous temperament, [which] may have carried him away at times’; but he believed he had ‘done his best for the benefit of his fellow citizens’ and was gratified ‘that his labors in the public behalf as a representative man had been so well recognised’.

What emerges from this frank if not unnecessarily modest self-appraisal, combined with the observations of others on his conduct in public life, is a picture of a somewhat driven man of great energy and ambition, with a streak of moral rigour and an enthusiasm for ‘public service’ in the broadest sense: *practically*, in initiating and completing several major infrastructure projects for the benefit of Bendigo’s citizens; *politically*, in winning elected positions that allowed him to directly influence and direct the city’s economic and cultural development; *judicially*, in overseeing a scrupulously honest and impartial justice system; and *administratively*, in taking on the job of town clerk, which his experiences on the council had shown to be a key position in a rapidly growing town such as Bendigo for ensuring diversified and therefore sustainable prosperity. Perhaps only in a place such as Bendigo in the 1860s would it have been possible for Macdougall to express his talents in so many different capacities and directions while also maintaining a strong vision of the whole community and its aspirations.

---

20 Anon., ‘Appeals Against Assessments’, *Bendigo Advertiser*, Monday, 3 April 1876, 2.
21 Anon., ‘Ordinary Meeting’, *Bendigo Advertiser*, Saturday, 8 April 1876, 4.
22 Anon., ‘Testimonial to Mr. Macdougall’.
Dugald Graeme Macdougall (1872–1947)

D.G. Macdougall, as he seems to have been called in public life, was born in Bendigo (Sandhurst) in 1872, the only son and eldest child of Dugald and Mary Anne. In 1882, three years after the death of his father, he and his mother seem to have left Bendigo to live with his mother’s brother in Dalby, on the Darling Downs in Queensland, where he probably attended the local primary school for two years before moving to Brisbane, perhaps boarding with a family while attending secondary school. After tenth grade, he returned to Dalby to work as a reporter with the Dalby Herald and, by the end of the following year, aged just 16, he became both editor and part-owner of the small weekly paper—an achievement that seems to have resonated through his later life as proof of his energy and precocity, since it features in several later public summations of his career, including obituaries. Five years later, in January 1893, he married a Dalby girl, Mary Ryan, the daughter of the town butcher, and four months later their first child, a son, Carlyle, arrived. Some 18 months later, the family moved 500 kilometres west to Charleville, where Dugald took on the editorship and management of the weekly Charleville Times and played local cricket, and their second son, D’Arcy Graeme, was born. Subsequently, the family moved north to Charters Towers, where Dugald briefly edited the daily Mining Standard before finally moving to Brisbane, in 1898. Here he worked as a subeditor on the Evening Observer and, in 1903, when C.H. Buzacott founded the Brisbane Daily Mail, he became one of its original literary staff. In that same year, the Macdougalls’ third son, James, was born.

The Macdougalls may have had second thoughts about the wisdom of moving their young family to Brisbane when, in April 1900, the first cases of bubonic plague were reported in the suburbs of Woolloongabba and Kangaroo Point. The outbreak lasted for two years, with 56 notified cases and 25 deaths. Macdougall was secretary of the Brisbane Vigilance Committee set up by the city council to organise inspections, drainage, rodent extermination, demolitions and quarantine and to regulate publicity. This was the first of many ventures in strategic organisation—what might now be called ‘event management’—which would soon draw him away from journalism proper. It was also, perhaps, his first serious engagement with the challenges of public health administration, to which, even more than his father before him, he devoted much attention for the rest of his career.

23 Certificate of Marriage, Queensland Register of Births, Deaths, Marriages and Divorces.
24 Certificate of Birth, Queensland Register of Births, Deaths, Marriages and Divorces.
26 ‘Sporting Column’, Charleville Times, Saturday, 29 August 1896, 1.
28 Certificate of Birth, Queensland Register of Births, Deaths, Marriages and Divorces.
The family moved to South Yarra in Melbourne in about 1907, where Dugald worked as editor of the *Prahran Telegraph* for two years, during which time, according to his successor, ‘his sterling abilities were recognised, and the magnetic influence he possesses for making staunch friends had full scope, and he became very popular’.30 His next move was to the original Melbourne *Punch*, a weekly, where for nine years he was chief contributor and leader writer,31 a job that allowed him to indulge a talent for writing humorous and sentimental short stories and satirical pieces, but also to pursue his interest in local civic and community issues—regional firefighting services and water supply, for instance, and community education and entertainment—as well as broader national policy issues such as trade protection and foreign imports.32

Soon after the outbreak of war in 1914, Macdougall was commissioned by the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) to direct fundraising in support of the association’s considerable contributions of personnel and equipment to the Australian army and navy at home and abroad. The fundraising was conducted chiefly through nationwide press publicity. For nearly three years, Macdougall maintained a news service to more than 650 Australian newspapers on behalf of the YMCA, and in that time succeeded in raising some £320,000 for the organisation’s army and navy work.33 In February 1918, he was appointed organising secretary of YMCA Australasia, with responsibility for further fundraising and publicity.34 A less than pleasing obligation that arose a year after this appointment was to defend the YMCA against attacks on its allegedly ‘sectarian character’ made in the *Catholic Advocate*, seemingly provoked by the new ‘Red Triangle’ appeal he had recently initiated. Macdougall deplored the cynicism, malice and ignorance of such accusations, and had a long letter from a Catholic returned soldier reprinted in *The Age* attesting to the ‘Y’s’ even-handed and generous provision of worship venues in the field for all denominations; and indeed there seems no evidence the YMCA ever proselytised in favour of anything narrower than the nondenominational ‘muscular Christianity’ of its founders.35

The experience may have soured Macdougall’s hitherto sanguine view of people’s generosity and cooperativeness, because two years later he left the YMCA behind and moved to a new job as secretary of Melbourne’s 50-year-old Alfred Hospital, a position that involved publicity and fundraising, but also increasing responsibility for financial administration. He brought with him some new ideas about raising funds for public institutions—notably, that of a ‘women’s auxiliary’. Immediately

---

30 ‘A Man of Mark’, 5.
33 ‘A Man of Mark’, 5.
34 ‘Another Appeal Launched’, *Telegraph*, [Brisbane], Tuesday, 26 February 1918, 3.
after raising £51,000 for building extensions, in a one-off appeal, at a cost of only 1.75 per cent of the amount raised (a record for a public financial appeal in Australia), Macdougall outlined his strategy for securing long-term maintenance funding for the Alfred in a letter to *The Argus*. The activity of the auxiliary, he argued, does not involve any call on the public for money, but is designed to save expenditure at the hospital in innumerable ways, accomplished by slight individual, but keenly systematised, service on the part of well-wishers. Thus, supplies of hospital commodities are provided—an equivalent, of course, to money. Well-wishers who plan an entertainment for the hospital are making no appeal to the public, for they give value for money, which is readily sought; yet the result is a monetary gain to the institution.

The idea took off and, within two years, there were 13 affiliated branches of the Alfred auxiliary around the state—a mode of organisation as efficient and admirable, in the view of its acting chairman, Sir Brudenell White, as the British Empire itself—and they had contributed to the hospital £8,500 in cash and kind over that period. Two years later, Macdougall was presented with a gold watch and chain as a tribute to his ‘ability as secretary of the hospital, and to his work in founding the hospital auxiliary movement in Melbourne’. In the interim, he had come up with an idea for an inhouse hospital publication, *The Alfred*, a sizeable magazine mixing updates on new facilities and organisational changes with expert articles on medical issues such as cancer and ‘bright and entertaining’ sketches, cartoons and poems. Macdougall edited the magazine in addition to his main duties for several years.

Another year, another gold watch. In 1927, Macdougall took his leave of the Alfred after five years’ service and was farewelled in the traditional manner. In November, the family—now just Dugald, Mary and daughter, Sheila, the boys having all left home—upped stakes and moved to Sydney so Macdougall could take on a new job as research and publicity officer for the Sydney Chamber of Commerce. He left that job after two and a half years to return to his forte, as organising secretary of the Sydney Hospital, taking responsibility, again, for establishing a women’s auxiliary for fundraising. By the end of 1930, however, after a mere eight months in the role, the Great Depression took its toll, and his position disappeared. A month later, he wrote an account of the humiliating process of ‘going on the dole’, which was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in February 1931, opening as follows:

---

36 ‘A Man of Mark’, 5.
38 ‘Alfred Hospital Auxiliary’, *The Argus*, [Melbourne], Tuesday, 23 September 1924, 22.
41 ‘Personal’, *Herald*, [Melbourne], Tuesday, 8 November 1927, 7.
42 ‘Personal’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Thursday, 10 April 1930, 8.
44 Macdougall is still named as organising secretary in December, and the dismissal must have occurred in January. ‘Crowning Ceremony’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday, 12 December 1930, 4.
Before I became a recipient of the dole last week, I confess that I shared in a common misconception, not only of the general operation of the form of charity and the extent of its relief to individual cases, but of the effect that the grant might possibly have on the morale or character of the recipient. I have not changed my attitude to the dole or its principle because I have been driven by circumstances to accept it, but because, in the light of practical and personal experience, I find that I was entirely uninformed on the matter.45

What then follows is a 2,500-word description of the long and sometimes humiliating procedures for proving need, registering for and finally obtaining the weekly allowance of 11 shillings and threepence-halfpenny (about $52 in 2019 coin)46 in coupons, concluding glumly:

To stand among that army of well-set-up unemployed, to look up into the blue Empyrean of a cloudless Australian summer sky, to gaze across the rippling waters of our matchless harbour, to visualise the great inviting empty spaces of Australia’s fertile hinterlands, and then answer the summons of the dole, makes one wonder whether, though ‘God’s in His heaven, all is right with the world.’47

As one who no doubt felt some embarrassment himself, Dugald signed the article with a pen-name, ‘Telemachus’, which he had first used for humorous anecdotes in Smith’s Weekly in 1929, and had begun to use for letters he wrote to the Sydney Morning Herald on subjects close to his heart, such as the inadequate system of government funding for public hospitals.48 Perhaps the Homeric pen-name was a private gesture of respect to the father who had made his odyssey from Greenock and died in Bendigo precisely half a century earlier? He had also used the pen-name ‘Graeme’ frequently for contributions to Smith’s Weekly since 1920, its first full year of existence;49 these were invariably short pieces: anecdotes with a ‘bush’ or suburban flavour, occasional bits of verse, but also snippets of news about the comings, goings and doings of well-known Melbourne, and later Sydney, identities—not dissimilar, in fact, to the mix of elements with which his son James would later fill his popular columns. But the ‘Telemachus’ pieces, by contrast, were mostly long and serious essays published by the Sydney Morning Herald, presenting closely argued discussions of a range of topics, extending over nine years. Issues included the constitutional powers of the state governor and the prerogatives of the Upper House (published in May 1931, a year before NSW governor Sir Philip Game’s notorious dismissal of NSW premier Jack Lang), employment and the exchange rate (1932), world disarmament (1932), the Polish ‘Corridor’ (1933), the English

48 ’Our Public Hospitals’, Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday, 27 September 1930, 8.
49 The evidence for these identifications is an article about Macdougall in Smith’s Weekly: ‘Man Who Told World About Bridge’, Smith’s Weekly, [Sydney], Saturday, 2 April 1932, 4.
monarchy (1935, 1937), Sydney’s public transport system (1935, 1936), tariff policy, censorship, Italy’s attack on Abyssinia, the League of Nations, empire defence (1936) and—embarrassingly—the extreme improbability of a German conquest of France (August 1939). There were also articles on George Bernard Shaw and Russian theatre.

The authorship of these ‘Telemachus’ articles, however, is something of a puzzle. The evidence for Macdougall’s authorship is in an anonymous feature article about him published in Smith’s Weekly in 1932, which states: ‘Despite other activities, he wields a graceful pen as a contributor, to “Smith’s” and other papers, as “Graeme” and “Telemachus”’ (my emphasis). Against this must be placed Gavin Souter’s unreferenced assertion that the young Warwick Fairfax used ‘Telemachus’ as his pen-name in the 1930s. The academic quality of the 30-odd articles published from May 1931 to August 1939 lends support to Souter’s assertion, given that Fairfax had graduated in philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford six years earlier; nothing in Macdougall’s background suggests he possessed the kind and degree of specialised expertise these articles exhibit. But not only are the ‘Telemachus’ briefs in Smith’s Weekly clearly Macdougall’s work, so too are the two letters to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald and the first of the long articles published in that newspaper, the personal account of the ‘dole experience’ quoted above. Bizarrely, the only ‘solution’ to the puzzle would seem to be that the two men used the same pen-name in the same newspaper, though not at quite the same time; that Fairfax in effect ‘took over’ the pen-name from Macdougall by explicit agreement (their paths are likely to have crossed in Sydney) in 1931, perhaps for no better reason than that he liked the classical name and felt—as I suggested Macdougall may also have done—an urge to honour his father, who had died three years earlier.

Macdougall was certainly the author of another piece, a long, heavily researched and no doubt well-paid article published under his own name in the Home Annual for 1932—a comprehensive overview, with photographs, of the state of Australia’s primary industries.

At the beginning of 1932, however, opportunity came knocking in the form of an invitation to apply his talents as a publicist and fundraiser to the planned celebrations for the opening of the new Sydney Harbour Bridge. Though not the chief organiser of the event, he was tasked with publicising it effectively, and was widely credited with giving it not just a local, but also a national and even international dimension.

---

50 ’Man Who Told World About Bridge’.
The *Smith's Weekly* reporter, writing two weeks after the grand opening, thought Macdougall had the Midas touch when it came to public relations, and added, with a glance at the bush poets:

Lest it be asked who is Macdougall, it may be stated that as an organiser, when the raising of funds is in the air, he is the Macdougall who has topped Australia's score more than once. He was official publicity man for the Bridge, sent all the dope, abroad that was printed in British and foreign papers, and turned quite a lot of news loose on the Sydney and particularly the country Press, which was regularly fed from that source.\(^{54}\)

The success of the event, it was said, owed much to the creation of the Citizens’ Harbour Bridge Celebrations Committee, of which Macdougall was both publicity officer and organising secretary—responsibilities he retained when the committee was continued on an ongoing basis as the Citizens of Sydney Organising Committee under the chairmanship of Sir Samuel Hordern in 1932. It was an inclusive and highly proactive body, claiming to represent ‘every section in New South Wales’ and promoting a wide range of community initiatives; some, like the Oberammagau Passion Play performance in April 1933, it supported indirectly (and defended vigorously); with others, it was directly involved in publicity, fundraising and organisation. These included the Sydney Festival, inaugurated as an annual week-long program of celebrations before the Easter Show in 1933, the City of Sydney Eisteddfod, the Sydney Garden Month and the Sydney Gala Week. The eisteddfod was given a Hollywood twist in its second year (1934) when the ‘syllabus’ included a nationwide ‘screen personality test’, with the winning finalists (adults and juveniles) to receive free tuition from the Cinema Academy and a screen test with Cinesound, ‘with the possibility of a role’.\(^{55}\)

By 1934, in fact, the Sydney Festival Week had grown to a Festival Fortnight, even boasting a royal visitor, Prince George, the second youngest son of King George V. Macdougall wrote an informative and not overly obsequious article for *The Home* with advice on the etiquette of royal encounters.\(^{56}\) (In the event, with just a few weeks’ notice, and for reasons unspecified, Prince George was replaced with his older brother Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester, whose reward was to become Australia’s eleventh Governor-General in 1945.) Macdougall was spoken of in the Sydney press at this time as ‘a big man for a big job’:

He towers above the average citizen in height, and he would make the ordinary weighing scale spring to attention. Yet he is a mild-mannered fellow with a good share of shrewdness and tact.\(^{57}\)

---

\(^{54}\) *Smith's Weekly*, Saturday, 2 April 1932, 4.

\(^{55}\) ‘Sydney Eisteddfod: Screen Test, Country Arrangements’, *Evening News*, [Rockhampton, Qld], Friday, 1 June 1934, 8.


\(^{57}\) ‘His Big Job’, *Daily Telegraph*, [Sydney], Saturday, 20 January 1934, 6.
Such was the respect for Macdougall and the Sydney committee that their Melbourne counterparts sought their advice and cooperation in designing that city’s centenary celebrations for 1934. In the year following, 1935, Macdougall was instrumental in organising and publicising the NSW celebrations of the silver jubilee of King George V, for which, as secretary of the Citizens’ Committee, he received the King’s Medal.

There was still one more major project to come in Macdougall’s remarkably long and active career—probably his biggest organisational challenge yet: the Australian sesquicentennial celebrations of 1938, for which he was, from the start of planning, the general organising secretary. Lobbying and preparations for this ambitious, and by no means uncontroversial, commemoration started in early 1936. National and international publicity was intensive and comprehensive, as Macdougall himself explained in an article published in Brisbane’s Courier-Mail just two weeks after the end of the celebrations, as a guide and stimulus to those planning a 1940 celebration for the centenary of European settlement in Queensland:

Publicity took many forms apart from the Press. Hundreds of window displays were arranged, and more than 2000 broadcasts, featuring the celebrations, were given outside Australia. The interest of shipping offices and travel agencies was stimulated, and literature and posters were issued through them. An organised force of 1400 amateur radio operators gave nightly broadcasts throughout the world on the subject of the celebrations.

It all came together famously (perhaps also notoriously) with the elaborate reenactment, at 8.30 on the morning of Wednesday, 26 January, of Arthur Phillip’s landing 150 years before at Farm Cove, followed by a huge pageant, ‘Australia’s March to Nationhood’, the progress of which through the streets of Sydney was watched by an estimated 750,000 people. Numbers were boosted by Macdougall’s trademark insistence—a ‘synergist’ avant la lettre—that as many other organisations and events as possible should coincide with this event: ‘International, Empire, and inter-State conferences and congresses brought thousands to the State.’

One synergy he may not have foreseen, however, and would probably rather have avoided, was with the Aboriginal Day of Mourning, a national event organised by the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA) and the Australian Aborigines’ League (actively supported by, among others, the Congregational Church, the Australian Communist Party and the Rationalist Association), to coincide with the start of

59  ‘Death of Citizens’ Committee Official’, Daily Telegraph, [Sydney], Thursday, 17 July 1947, 6. This was, however, not a particularly exclusive award; he was one of 1,800 recipients in New South Wales!
60  ‘Commemorative Stamp: 150th Anniversary of New South Wales’, The Age, [Melbourne], Saturday, 28 April 1936, 22.
62  Macdougall, ‘Sesquicentenary Organisation is Model for Queensland’.
the official sesquicentennial program. The protest was covered, briefly but not unsympathetically, by the mainstream Sydney papers; even the *Sydney Morning Herald* was prepared to quote from the speech of Jack Patten, president of the APA:

> We, as aborigines, have no reason to rejoice on Australia’s 150th birthday … This land belonged to our forefathers 150 years ago, but to-day we are being pushed further into the background. Aborigines throughout Australia are literally being starved to death.  

Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* also reported on the coercive recruitment of and poor accommodation provided for the Aboriginal men from the Menindee Mission in the state’s far west who had been brought to Sydney to take part in the potentially humiliating portrayal of retreat and flight from Phillip’s landing party. Some of the provincial papers published even longer and more sympathetic articles, and the *Workers’ Weekly* in Sydney launched a full-scale defence of the protest and its justification, together with a withering critique of past and present treatment of the Aborigines and of the celebratory themes of the sesquicentenary as a whole:

> History is to be completely falsified—not merely by means of the omissions but even in the episodes and items selected to be dealt with. Captains of industry and trade lose all their sordidness and taint of greed when seen through official spectacles, nor are we presented with comparative pictures showing how a vile commercialism has destroyed the beauties of our forests, the foreshores of innumerable bays of our harbors and the souls of our children born and bred in the slums that have replaced the virgin bush that Phillip gazed upon.

The sesquicentenary was ‘one big orgy of profit-making’ in which floats, favours and privileged access were sold: ‘Capitalist initiative and enterprise have full play.’ (To the last charge, at least, Dugald Macdougall would probably have responded: ‘And your point is?’.)

If Macdougall did respond to some of the broader and more trenchant attacks on the ‘sesqui’, he seems not to have done so in the popular press. He did, however, notice and respond to the charge from the other end of the political spectrum that it gave too little attention to Australia’s military achievements—a choice for which he accepted full responsibility, and which he defended tactfully but firmly

---

in the press.\textsuperscript{67} And he continued to advocate for more and bigger memorial celebrations—‘firstly, from a sense of national pride and achievement felt by people with so young a historical background; secondly, the urge to follow other nations and “Tell the World”’.\textsuperscript{68}

It must have seemed, nonetheless, a slightly sour note on which to end a prominent and successful public career. But, as a whole, that career was characterised by the same irrepressible energy, optimism, determination and public spirit that were praised in the testimonials to and obituaries for his father, and on his own death in 1947. In addition to these fairly generic attributes of the successful colonial entrepreneur, there was also an unusually strong sense of identification in both men with the particular town—Bendigo in the one case, Sydney in the other—to which they devoted most of their developmental, communicative and commemorative energies. If similarities there were, they can probably be assigned to nature rather than nurture, since Dugald senior died when his son was seven years old. And yet, despite leaving Bendigo for Dalby just three years later, the son had fond memories of the place—and perhaps also of the man—and regretted being unable to attend the first ‘Back to Bendigo’ week in 1917. In a letter to the secretary of the Easter Fair, duly reported in the \textit{Bendigo Advertiser}, he noted his father’s terms as mayor and town clerk in the 1870s.\textsuperscript{69} Many years later, in the early Depression years, he drew on his father’s pioneering work in the goldmining industry in Bendigo to support a scheme for putting the unemployed to work as gold prospectors.\textsuperscript{70}

In other words, notwithstanding the apparently wide geographical and chronological discontinuities between the lives of father and son, an explicit connection seems to have been made, and remade, by the latter throughout his adult life, such that whatever its psychological or emotional underpinnings—and one can only speculate about these—it came to constitute a publicly acknowledged bridge across the two (male) generations, enabling the reproduction (in effect, the bequeathing) of certain public dispositions and preoccupations from father to son: a driving work ethic, a devotion to public service, a strong attachment to particular human communities, a belief in the virtues of liberal democracy and capitalist free enterprise, a respect for wealth, some sympathy (real but limited) for the plight of the less fortunate and an irrepressible optimism about the future of the Australian colonies and the new nation within the British Empire.

---

\textsuperscript{68} Macdougall, ‘Sesquicentenary Organisation is Model for Queensland’.
\textsuperscript{69} ‘Former Mayor and Town Clerk’, \textit{Bendigo Advertiser}, Wednesday, 11 April 1917, 6.
James Claude Macdougall (1903–1995)\(^71\)

Unlike his father, whose adult career began several years after his own father’s death in 1879, Jim Macdougall enjoyed a 44-year overlap with the younger Dugald, including many years living in the same cities (Melbourne, then Sydney) as adults and working in more or less the same profession of journalism. Jim was not the only member of the family to enter his father’s primary profession (his older brothers, Carlyle and D’Arcy, were also journalists), but he was the best-known of the three, and his father’s influence in the early part of his career was unusually direct and explicit.

After the family moved to Melbourne, Jim attended Wesley College (1917–19)\(^72\) and then spent some happy years jackarooing on a pastoral property in the southern Riverina owned by Sir George Fairbairn, a friend of his father.\(^73\) Here his life took a decisive turn in 1923 when his father showed another prominent acquaintance, (Sir) Keith Murdoch, a poem Jim had composed while droving sheep, on the strength of which—according to Jim—Murdoch hired him as a cadet reporter on the Melbourne *Herald*.\(^74\) Jim started the job in 1924 and, after a year—impressed by his eye for a good story—Murdoch sent him to Fleet Street to ‘learn the trade’ for two years at the *Herald*’s London bureau.\(^75\) Jim returned to Melbourne at the end of 1926 to be met by a ‘request’ from Murdoch that he move in with the poet C.J. Dennis, then a columnist on the *Herald* staff, in an effort to moderate the latter’s heavy drinking. Macdougall ended up sharing ‘Den’s’ Collins Street flat for several months.\(^76\) Later that year, he made Australian radio broadcasting history when, on 25 August 1927, he conducted an interview from Melbourne with a subject in Sydney that was transmitted live in both cities.

In August 1932, after a six-week courtship,\(^77\) he married Olive McKnight, daughter of a prominent surgeon in Albury, NSW.\(^78\) Soon afterwards, he resigned from the *Herald* and the newlyweds sailed for Europe. Basing themselves in Surrey, they visited several European countries and returned to London for the birth of their son Mikael in March 1934, an event Jim proudly proclaimed, by cable and

---


\(^72\) *Wesley College Chronicle*, [Melbourne], August 1917, No. 150, 4; May 1920, No. 158, 16. (Available online from Wesley College Archives.)


\(^74\) ‘Jim Macdougall Interviewed by Stewart Harris’; ‘Obituary’.

\(^75\) ‘Obituary’; Jim Macdougall, ‘In the City of Doreens’, *Quadrant* (November 1976): 60.

\(^76\) Macdougall, ‘In the City of Doreens’.

\(^77\) Verlander, ‘Columnist’s Flights of Fancy Really Took Off’.

letter, to the *Australian Women's Weekly*.\(^79\) Soon afterwards, Jim was cycling across Nazi Germany with Ronald Hughes-Jones,\(^80\) a journalist friend from Melbourne. In Vienna, he interviewed the Austrian chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss, two months before his assassination, met the famous actor Emil Jannings and conversed with the composer Franz Lehár. ‘A wonderful business man’, Jim said of Lehár with characteristic admiration:

He kept a book showing exactly how many times his compositions had been played in the important cities of the world, and was able to tell at a glance whether ‘The Merry Widow’ was more popular in Adelaide than Melbourne or Sydney.\(^81\)

He then travelled alone to the Balkans, where he worked briefly on the South Slav *Herald*\(^82\) (an English-language newspaper published in Belgrade), pursued a story about tsarist treasure in Dubrovnik (which he sent to the *Newcastle Sun*),\(^83\) visited monasteries in Macedonia, met Prince Nicholas of Greece painting landscapes by a roadside in the Julian Alps and languished in prison for two days in Skopje for a passport violation.\(^84\)

Crossing the Mediterranean, he joined the *Remo* at Port Said,\(^85\) having visited some 17 countries,\(^86\) and arrived back in Australia in September to be reunited with Olive and Mikael, who had arrived from England a month earlier\(^87\) with a breeding pair of dalmatians and a cocker spaniel.\(^88\) They were joined a few months later by what was said to be the first Afghan hound ever imported into Australia.\(^89\) Perhaps with assistance from Olive’s father, Jim and Olive established dog studs in Sydney and Melbourne,\(^90\) breeding, exhibiting and selling pedigreed dogs—an enthusiasm they shared for the rest of their lives.\(^91\)

A few months after his homecoming, Jim reunited with his recent travelling companion for a very different sort of adventure. In August 1935, he and Hughes-Jones drove a heavy truck 2,800 kilometres from Melbourne to Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory carrying a 3,900-litre tank of water, to be left there for the use of its mining population of 600 people. Is it fanciful to find a cross-generational interest in the water supply to Australian rural communities?

---

79 ‘Intimate Jottings’.
82 Verlander, ‘Columnist’s Flights of Fancy Really Took Off’.
84 ‘Journalists to Cart Water in Interior’.
85 Passenger Arrival Index, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
86 ‘Journalists to Cart Water in Interior’.
87 Passenger Arrival Index.
88 ‘Items of Interest,’ *The Argus*, [Melbourne], Friday, 24 August 1934, 5.
89 ‘Afghan Hound’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 April 1935, 12.
90 Inference from advertisement in *Table Talk*, [Melbourne], Thursday, 19 September 1935, 46.
Jim’s grandfather had, after all, designed the Crusoe Reservoir in Bendigo, and his father was an enthusiastic advocate for the sinking of artesian bores in the outback (he wrote a long article for The Sydney Mail on the subject the year after his son’s Aquarian expedition).  

Jim’s first job back in Australia was as a subeditor and occasional feature writer for The Star in Melbourne and then, from 1937, as subeditor, then pictorial editor, of Sydney’s Daily Telegraph. In 1941, having been rejected for military service because of a bleeding ulcer, he moved to the Sydney Sun, where, five years later, the defining opportunity of his life arrived. His daily column, ‘Contact’, first appeared on 18 February 1946, a week or so later than David McNicoll’s ‘Town Talk’ in the Daily Telegraph. Together with Sydney Deamer’s ‘Column 8’, which began in the Sydney Morning Herald 11 months later, these were the first American-style front-page columns in Australian newspapers. ‘Contact’ was the perfect expression of Macdougall’s personality, surmounted by his signature and reflecting (as his then rival McNicoll graciously acknowledged) his ‘sunny and gregarious disposition’. Widely plundered for individual items by provincial and interstate columnists, the ‘Contact’ column was typically a series of half a dozen or more paragraphs of society gossip, business and political news, humorous or appealing stories and whimsical one-liners.

It is difficult to exemplify the particular quality of Jim’s columns—benevolent whimsy, guileless quirkiness, mischievous mockery?—by selective quotation. As a humorous columnist, he was no Lennie Lower or Ross Campbell (let alone an Art Buchwald, the legendary Washington Post columnist he sometimes quoted). Indeed, it is probably true to say that, then as now, many of Jim’s jokes, qua jokes, would be more likely to elicit groans than belly laughs, which he sometimes acknowledged:

**DISGUSTING:** ‘You’re the Fifth Columnist I’ve met this week,’ a friend told me.

**TOMORROW:** I am launching my Food for Thought Fund. My shoeshine has already given me a piece of his mind.

---

93 Newspaper News, 1 September 1939, 17.
94 Verlander, ‘Columnist’s Flights of Fancy Really Took Off’.
96 McNicoll, Luck’s a Fortune, 119.
97 ‘Contact’, Daily Telegraph, [Sydney], 10 February 1956.
98 ‘Contact’, The Sun, [Sydney], Wednesday, 20 February 1946, 1.
99 ‘Contact’, The Sun, [Sydney], Thursday, 21 February 1946, 1.
100 ‘Contact’, The Sun, [Sydney], Tuesday, 19 February 1946, 1.
Often he credited the witticisms to others: ‘As Joe, the fellow who sells papers round the mid-town banking area says, you’re not supposed to repeat gossip, but what else can you do with it?’

Sometimes the tone is not so much humorous as wistful:

I met a fellow in the street the other day I used to go to school with. It was a very sad meeting. You see, he’s grown up since then, and I haven’t.

And sometimes—not often—the humour is mildly risqué in a mid-century style that has not travelled well: ‘An amusement park at Manly has penny-in-the-slot machines showing “beautiful Australian girls”—in the nude. I could hardly believe my eyes. I had to have another look.’

Occasionally he draws upon the wisdom of his father, with whom, clearly, he had a warm relationship:

You can’t wander through life without picking up a peg or two to hang your philosophy on. I can remember my father’s massive hand enfolding mine. I was snivelling about life. All he said was, ‘Remember Jimmie, two men once looked through prison bars; one saw mud—the other STARS.’

But more often he defers to his dog—a dynasty of dalmations—which (or whom?) he credits for his lamer witticisms: ‘That big dog of mine says you can only describe a Dachshund as a long-short dog. That dog’s a fool.’

But his staple source and subject was not himself or his family but, as he put it, ‘the brain, the wit and the wisdom of the people of Sydney’, from whom, at the peak of his career, he was receiving nearly a thousand letters and phone calls every week. In return, he often used his column to highlight individual cases of hardship or injustice and to lend his support to deserving charities. Sometimes a charitable impulse could go off half-cocked. In 1947, he discovered that Jack Moses, the bush bard who wrote ‘Nine Miles from Gundagai’, was buried in South Head Cemetery with no inscription on his headstone.

101 ‘Contact’, Daily Telegraph, [Sydney], 31 January 1956, 2.
102 ‘Contact’, The Sun, [Sydney], Friday, 22 February 1946, 1.
103 ‘Contact’, The Sun, [Sydney], Tuesday, 19 February 1946, 1.
104 ‘Contact’, Daily Telegraph, [Sydney], 10 February 1956, 2.
105 ‘Contact’, The Sun, [Sydney], Monday, 11 March 1946, 1.
106 Verlander, ‘Columnist’s Flights of Fancy Really Took Off’.
The Sydney ‘Sun’ columnist Jim Macdougall called attention to this and appealed to Jack’s old mates to contribute the cost of a suitable inscription. Money rolled in from all quarters. But then Macdougall learned that it was Jack’s own wish that the headstone should make no reference to him at all—not even his name; so Macdougall is returning all the money sent in to him.108

Following the acquisition of Associated Newspapers (publishers of the Sun) by the Fairfax Group in 1956, Macdougall resisted pressure from Lindsay Clinch, the new editor of the (now) Sun-Herald, to ‘start kicking people in the guts’ in his column.109 As a consequence, he migrated, with ‘Contact’, to Frank Packer’s Daily Telegraph, a transition signified by the first appearance of his distinctively puckish caricature with big spectacles, long nose, abundant black hair and stylish buttonhole. Resentment at his and others’ recent rough treatment by Fairfax management made him agree to write two paragraphs sharply critical of their corporate behaviour and journalistic standards. He then had to defend his own integrity in the public hostilities that ensued.110 He later reflected ruefully on the experience in his column:

Good morning: Take it from one who has been through the college: resentment is one of the killers of human happiness. It walks with you and sleeps with you. And you get nothing from it.111

For the next five years, he retreated to his column, now located on the back page of the Daily Telegraph. The jokes were as endearingly lame as ever, his relationship with his readers even more relaxed, affectionate and personal, and the anecdotes a little longer. Then, at the height of his popularity, he accepted an offer from the Sydney Daily Mirror, where his column continued to provide ‘the light-hearted lowdown on life’, now seven days a week (Sunday Mirror included),112 with a new title, ‘Town Talk’, and a photographic headshot. A new strain of Sydney nostalgia began to appear: several items begin with ‘Things I like about Sydney’ and proceed to describe an old saloon bar, a laconic bus driver, a Sunday excursion or something else redolent of the city’s more understated charms:

Are you, too, fond of the vanishing old world charm of Sydney? (Speak up, sir; I can’t hear you!) Well, take a stroll some warm and balmy Sunday, like yesterday frinstance, up to the little park that sits between the frowning walls of the Old Gaol and St. Vincent’s Hospital.113

110 McNicoll, Luck’s a Fortune, 254.
111 ‘Contact’, Daily Telegraph, [Sydney], 7 February 1956.
He called ‘Town Talk’, which ran for 14 years, his ‘corner of warmth in the paper’, and his readers agreed. As a ‘Mirrorman’, Macdougall established his reputation as ‘perhaps Australia’s best-known columnist’, with an uncanny knack—still credited to either his ‘crystal ball’ or ‘the spotted dog’—for accurately predicting honours awards, senior political appointments and Archibald Prize winners. The truth was, of course, he had an enormous network of obliging informants all over Sydney, and most of them were happy to leak. As he himself once observed, with his usual self-mockery: ‘Don’t I have a lot of friends?’ He was honoured with an Order of the British Empire in 1969 and a Commander of the Order of the British Empire five years later for services to journalism—and no doubt knew about them well in advance.

Though he officially retired at the end of 1974, Macdougall took a job with Cathay Pacific Airways the following year to write a regular weekly column in The Australian, ‘Jim Macdougall’s Cathay Commercial’, which ran until his ‘real’ retirement in 1991. During these years, he also contributed a weekly column to his local newspaper, the North Shore Times. He died of a heart attack at his home in Lindfield, Sydney, survived by his wife and son, and was cremated at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium.

Conclusions

The quasi-dynastic sequence of the three Macdougalls might be read simply as a three-stage tradition (in the classic Shilsian sense) of journalism-in-the-family. All three men were journalists, the first by repute (I have been unable to verify his authorship of specific articles in the local press, but he is said to have written several), and the second and third Macdougalls were both journalists in a fully professional sense, but also in very different ways and different spheres. There is even, as was noted, a significant similarity between the anecdotal humour and gossip of some of Dugald junior’s pieces for Smith’s Weekly and those of his son’s columns. Nonetheless, this seems at best an incomplete reading of the series formed by their lives and careers.

117 ‘Contact’, The Sun, [Sydney], Friday, 29 March 1946, 1.
119 Oram, ‘Farewell Jim!’.
121 White, ‘The Daddy of Sydney Columnists’.
A second, complementary possibility is to read the Macdougall series as an ideological continuum across the generations. The vigorously pro-capitalist, pro-business, pro-development, free-enterprise attitudes of the first Dugald were tempered by his strong support for, and involvement in, community-building organisations and activities, ethically responsible administration of public institutions and facilities and the implementation of liberal reformist principles and policies in local and colonial government. The second Dugald, though only seven years old when his father died, nonetheless embraced substantially that same mix of values and attitudes (with explicit deference to his father and Bendigo), expressing them in his own administrative work but also, more discursively, by advocacy and dissemination through his work as a newspaper editor and publicist. Since his father’s day, the Australian political landscape had changed a lot, with Federation and the emergence of the Australian Labor Party; and that mix of pro-business attitudes, nationalism, monarchism and ‘small-l’ liberal values tended to align him consistently with the non-Labor side of politics. Jim Macdougall similarly, though perhaps more reticent than either of his predecessors about his political allegiances, says enough to indicate a leaning towards the right of the political spectrum, and he mixed socially, as his father had always done, with the business and bureaucratic elites at the ‘top end of town’, articulating many of their values and assumptions in his columns. But he was also adept—as his particular kind of journalism demanded—at sharing and giving voice to the pleasures, anxieties and irritations of ordinary Sydneysiders of every class and occupation, who liked him and whose company he clearly enjoyed.

It is also necessary to acknowledge, with regret, that all three Macdougalls evinced, at times, a less than sympathetic understanding of the experience of Aboriginal Australians: the elder Dugald in an unfortunate description of the district around Bendigo before his time as ‘an untenanted waste, having only for its denizens the benighted aboriginals and the wild beasts’;¹²² the younger in his apparent complicity with the poor treatment of the Aboriginal participants in the sesquicentenary reenactment; and Jim in his one-sided treatment of the Coniston massacre in a feature article for the Melbourne Star in 1936.¹²³ Of this unhappy continuity, I would say only that while history can never fully excuse such attitudes—strongly critical viewpoints were voiced contemporaneously, at least on the last two events—the Macdougalls’ views were in the mainstream for their times.

While the ideological model provides some purchase on substantive continuities within the series, it somehow fails to capture its internal dynamic and indeed its vitality. This is because reducing the three men to their ideas and attitudes tends to exclude their differences from one another, and also their interplay as individuals. More complex and nuanced versions of this model have been applied to collective

¹²² ‘Memorial Stone of the Bendigo Bells’.
¹²³ James Macdougall, ‘They Died Back o’ Beyond’, Glen Innes Examiner, Thursday, 27 February 1936, 3 [reprinted from Melbourne Star].
Building, celebrating, participating

biographies of a very different sort. For example, in the ongoing debate about the kind and degree of unity to be found among the Inklings, that group of Oxford writers and scholars surrounding C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien in the middle of the twentieth century, a conception of ‘world view’ (Weltanschauung) has recently been invoked, in its Freudian version, as

an intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one over-riding hypothesis, which, accordingly, leaves no question unanswered and in which everything that interests us finds its fixed place.\(^{124}\)

Such a concept provides greater scope than ‘ideology’ or ‘tradition’ for accommodating the diversity and mutual interactivity of the Macdougalls’ careers, but fails to give sufficient weight to the fact that they belonged to different generations (and therefore, to some extent, different ‘worlds’) and that they were, self-consciously, members of the same family. Furthermore, while all three were highly intelligent, articulate and well-read, none of them was an ‘intellectual’ (in the usual, restricted sense in which the Inklings clearly were) or would have wanted to be regarded as one. Something different from ‘world view’, then, may be needed to illuminate such qualities as the commercialism, curiosity, sociability, patriotism, humour, civility and decency that seem to inform the social and professional behaviour of all three Macdougalls in varying admixtures, while at the same time highlighting their differences and complementarities as social actors.

Perhaps that purpose may be served by a simple notion of ‘praxis’, here used in one of its most basic meanings, as ‘the act of engaging, applying, exercising, realizing, or practising ideas’ in society.\(^{125}\) It can allow broad but valid differentiations to be made as to the kinds of social action and the specific forms of praxis that characterised the three men’s careers.

The first, that of Dugald senior, we might regard as a praxis of building, inasmuch as he spent his career developing an industry, civic institutions and physical facilities that embodied his ideas about civil society. The second, that of Dugald junior, we might regard as preeminently a praxis of publicity, inasmuch as his career—as journalist, publicist, promoter and organiser—was largely devoted to publicising and celebrating precisely the sorts of industries, institutions and material fabric that his father’s generation had built in Australia, though it also involved, on his part, the construction of administrative systems and communication networks of his own.

\(^{124}\) Quoted by Zachary A. Rhone, *The Great Tower of Elfland: The Mythopoeic Worldview of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton and George MacDonald* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2017), 6–7. Rhone uses the concept to challenge Humphrey Carpenter’s (1978) influential revisionist view that the differences between the various members’ writings and attitudes were greater and more important than their similarities.

The third, that of his son Jim, I want to describe as a praxis of participation. This also involved celebration—in a more personal and less promotional mode than his father’s—as well as a lot of additional social network-building. It involved other activities, too, as components of the larger praxis, but above all Jim’s career as a journalist (and, unlike his father and grandfather, he was never really anything else) was permeated by what might be called an ‘existential’ praxis, that of simply being an ordinary, but mindful and communicative participant in the day-to-day life of the city of Sydney. The trivia, the gossip, the lame jokes, the passing encounters, the fond memories, the sentimental moments, the moments (very rare) of irritation or melancholy, the feelings of sympathy, admiration and support, the recommendations of some worthwhile or pleasurable Sydney experience—all these and more are part of what ‘living in Sydney’ felt like to Jim Macdougall, and he wanted to share it with others, if only for a few minutes a day.

What is noteworthy about this sequence of three careers, as just described—distilling them into three different forms of praxis does serve to highlight this fact about them—is that, within their ideological similarities, they are not only different one from the other, but also progressively enabling. That is, the nature of Dugald junior’s career was at least in part an ongoing work performed upon the career of his long-deceased father, and similarly, the distinctive character and function of Jim’s columns—for all their relaxed naturalness—were an ongoing work performed on the legacy of his father and, less directly, his grandfather. Each of the three careers is thus modified by its relation to the others, and the last two might even be seen as realising some of the unrealised possibilities inherent in the careers of their respective predecessors. For these reasons, there is indeed something about the Macdougalls’ combined historical significance that exceeds the sum of their three careers: together they constitute a ‘Macdougall mini-dynasty’, in effect, which enacted a certain set of liberal ideas and values regarding economic development, social progress, ethical integrity, national and civic pride, community, civility and human happiness across three generations and 120 years of Australia’s history.
‘Splendid opportunities’: Women traders in postwar Hong Kong and Australia, 1946–1949

JACKIE DICKENSON

In late March 1946, University of Melbourne graduate and long-time Hong Kong resident Elma Mary Kelly (1895–1974) gave an interview to Melbourne’s *Argus* newspaper. Released from Stanley prison camp in August 1945, Kelly had recently landed in her hometown after a brief sojourn in London. It was her great desire, Kelly told the reporter, to ‘go back to the East’, where she thought there would be ‘splendid opportunities, especially for Australians’, who she believed flourished there because of their ‘poise’ and ‘liking for the life’. Kelly travelled on to Sydney to meet with old friends before returning to Hong Kong in May 1946. On her return, she embarked on an extraordinary venture. In partnership with her fellow Stanley internee Dorothy Gordon Jenner (the journalist ‘Andrea’ of Sydney’s *Sun* newspaper) and a Sydney friend, Isobel (Belle) Robilliard (1895–1975), Kelly set up the Austral-China Trading Company, an import–export business.

This article examines this unusual trading company, asking what drove the women to launch the business in challenging circumstances, how it operated and why it failed. It is based on a collection of 39 documents, including 23 letters and three telegrams written by Kelly to her friends Belle and Tom Robilliard of Bridge End, Wollstonecraft, in north Sydney, between 8 May 1946 and 7 January 1949. The majority of the letters are addressed to Belle Robilliard—nine sent in 1946, seven in 1947 and three in 1948. Four letters are addressed to Tom Robilliard (1892–1978), Belle’s husband (one in 1947, two in 1948 and one in 1949). The collection includes eight documents from distributors (letters, invoices and receipts), two copies of documents relating to Kelly’s Sydney exhibition in 1946 and three telegrams.

The Robilliards were old friends from Kelly’s girlhood in Melbourne. Belle (née Raisbeck) was born in the same year as Kelly and was raised in Flemington, so it is possible the women knew each other from early childhood. The Robilliards

---

1 My sincere thanks go to Malcolm Robilliard for entrusting his grandparents’ letters to me, and to Stuart Macintyre and Kate Darian-Smith for reading an earlier draft.
3 Belle’s replies have not survived and their contents can only be inferred from Kelly’s letters.
married at St George’s Church of England, Royal Park, in May 1916 before moving to Sydney, where Tom worked as an accountant and later as principal of Stott’s Business College. A daughter, Joan, was born in November 1916. Their first son, Peter (born 1918), was killed in New Guinea in August 1942; their second son, Richard (born 1920, and known as Dick), saw active service with the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). Dick married in 1947 and subsequently managed hotels across New South Wales before working for the Australian Mutual Provident Society (AMP). Their third son, Joseph (born 1922, known as Joe), graduated as a medical doctor, marrying a fellow doctor in 1948.

The Robilliard letters show the ways that two Australian women navigated this transitional period, looking back to their lives before the war, hoping to recapture the security and privileges they had once enjoyed, and at the same time, looking forward to a new postwar order that promised them, and privileged white women like them, more autonomy than they had ever had before.

***

Born in 1895 in Melbourne, Elma Mary Kelly was the youngest child of Catherine (née Kildahl), a feminist activist, and William, an Irish-born barrister and local politician. In 1919, Kelly graduated with a Bachelor of Science from the University of Melbourne. After a successful career as a chemical analyst, she travelled to Shanghai in October 1931, in pursuit of a married lover, a naval officer. Soon after her arrival, she commenced work for Frank Millington, the proprietor of a successful European advertising agency in China. By 1935, she was living in Hong Kong and managing the Hong Kong and Canton branches of Millington’s business. There is no evidence that Kelly was engaged in the import–export business before the invasion of Hong Kong by the Japanese in December 1941, but her advertising work (which included printing and publishing) probably provided her with an extensive business network across southern China.

---

8 ‘Weddings’, *Daily Telegraph*, [Sydney], 14 September 1948, 12.
Kelly was interned in Stanley camp from late January 1942. The Japanese had invaded in mid December 1941 and Hong Kong was surrendered at Christmas. Two weeks later, the citizens of Allied countries were ordered to go to the Murray parade ground from where many were forced to move into Chinese hotels and brothels while the internment camp was prepared. During this interim period, Kelly arranged for her possessions, including her business ledgers, to be stored safely, possibly with local staff from Millington’s agency. Some 3,000 civilians were imprisoned in Stanley from the end of January 1942; most were British, but there were also Americans, Dutch and 102 Australians. Facilities were rudimentary: it was common for ‘five or more’ people to share a room and bathroom facilities (women and men together). Food and other necessities were scarce and a black market soon developed in which the Japanese, their Chinese, Indian and Formosan guards and the majority of the interns participated. It is hard to ascertain the extent to which Kelly was involved in black market activities (it is improbable that she became what Emerson calls an ‘internee-trader’), but she would certainly have witnessed and been affected by their operations. As one former internee recalled:

There were internees who were mixed up in the soulless practice of trading with the Japs on the black markets and the ultimate victims of the high prices were fellow internees.

After her release, Kelly sailed to England on the Empress of Britain, intending to reunite with her lover, but stayed only briefly before returning to Hong Kong in January 1946. In March, she flew to Melbourne before moving on to Sydney,
where she stayed with Dorothy Jenner. The pair organised an exhibition of Kelly’s private collection of Chinese objects d’art, including ‘ivories, bronzes, porcelain’ and ‘lacquers’. These objects were for sale in support of the Food for Britain Relief Fund, but the exhibition was also conceived as a marketing opportunity for the women’s new trading business, which was ‘designed to show the class of embroidered linen, silk underclothing and silks that Austro-China [sic] Trading Co. Ltd., Hongkong [sic] can supply to buyers in the trade in Australia’. The circumstances that brought about the Austral-China business venture are unclear. In Stanley, access to the black market determined in some cases whether an inmate lived or died. Kelly and Jenner (especially) had enjoyed successful careers before the war, but their camp experiences must surely have informed the decision to embark on their trading venture. Jenner’s version appeared in her autobiography 30 years after the events they related and reflect what Nicola Goc described as a gossipy, tabloid approach to relating her experiences. Jenner related that Kelly had been kind to her in Stanley, sharing fat for cooking when she was able. Despite this, her recollections were unkind. A former Hollywood actress and renowned beauty, Jenner found her former colleague crude and unglamorous, referring to her repeatedly as ‘the water buffalo’. Kelly, Jenner explained, was ‘a very shrewd businesswoman of the go-getter variety’, but ‘she was not at all my type of woman’. Kelly was back in Hong Kong by the end of May 1946 and began rebuilding her life there. She moved first to resurrect the prewar advertising, printing and publishing business. Her association with Millington had come to an end and she reported ‘skirmishing’ with his firm’s headquarters in Shanghai over leave money she had been owed ‘when the balloon went up’; they agreed to pay her six months’ salary. After reuniting with two or three loyal staff from before the war, Kelly formed her own advertising business, Cathay Limited, with her Chinese lawyer as co-director. The ledgers she had stored when the Japanese invaded enabled her to collect money owed. ‘I am agent for all advertising on Trams’, she wrote to Belle Robilliard, ‘and

22 ‘Exhibition of “Things Chinese”’. Emerson, Hong Kong Internment, 82.
25 Jenner, Darlings, I’ve Had a Ball, 237.
26 Kelly to Belle, 27 May 1946.
27 Kelly to Belle, 8 September 1946.
28 Kelly was interviewed for Radio Television Hong Kong’s ‘Time to Remember’ program on 30 June 1968, mmis.hkpl.gov.hk/coverpage/-/coverpage/view?p_r_p_-10780556564_c+QF757YvWv58jCjtBMIMiqojLr%2BwkJp773&_coverpage_WAR_mnisportalportlet_log+Y&tbsi+CATALOGUE.
if could get them to paid [sic] would be in clover. But can't get that started yet.  

With continued rationing, limited shipping and disrupted trade, the advertising business grew only slowly; in 1948, Kelly recorded that advertising remained ‘a very long term [prospect] with the sea mails as bad to England as they are, for the carrying of vouchers’. More immediately promising were the opportunities offered by the fissure in prewar trading norms and, in the short term, Kelly chose to trade her way back to financial security. Australia’s sea trade with China resumed in April 1946, while Kelly was in Sydney for her exhibition. Hopes were high in Australia that the country could take advantage of new opportunities in Asia, and there were numerous newspaper reports of the opportunities Hong Kong in particular offered. Given this coverage, it is unsurprising that Kelly, Jenner and Belle Robilliard resolved to embark on their business venture. But the women might also have been aware of the reports from journalists such as Peter Russo (for *The Argus*) that tempered the favourable view of trade with Hong Kong with warnings of the impact of organised crime there, which dominated the black market in the colony and kept the cost of living high. Where organised crime stopped and legitimate trade began was murky; Russo reported the difficulties caused by ‘the alleged willing cooperation of British, as well as Chinese, firms with black marketeers’. The risks of dealing on the black market were high and, if they were caught, firms could have their trade licences revoked, or be heavily fined or imprisoned. The place of the Austral-China Trading Company on the spectrum between legality and illegality is difficult to ascertain but, as we will see below, Kelly would prove more than willing to fudge licences and permits, as well as to make use of the black market, if that meant trade could be facilitated.

Australian factors also affected Austral-China’s trade. Shipping had resumed with Asia, but from Hong Kong, this must have seemed limited and unreliable in the immediate postwar years, not least because of the Australian press’s exaggerated

---

30 Kelly to Belle, 8 September 1946; Kelly interview, 1968.
31 Kelly to Belle, 7 June 1948. These vouchers were most likely ration coupons printed in and issued from Britain.
33 ‘Hong Kong Trade’, *Daily Mercury*, [Mackay, Qld], 20 December 1945, 1; ‘Resumption of Sea Trade with China’, *Daily Telegraph*, [Sydney], 24 March 1946, 4.
coverage of industrial unrest on Australia’s waterfront. Kelly kept a close eye on the movement of shipping between Hong Kong and Australia and knew the masters of a number of ships that sailed between the ports. Indeed, her letters were replete with references to naval officers and their wives; Kelly’s social circle in Hong Kong was most likely based on this group because of her own long-term clandestine relationship with the married naval officer.

Belle Robilliard invested £500 into the Austral-China Trading Company, and Kelly matched that amount to purchase their first batch of goods for sale in Hong Kong. Kelly’s first letter to Robilliard (on 8 May 1946) revealed that this was to be a women’s business venture. Writing from the boat between Sydney and Hong Kong (the letter was posted in Townsville), Kelly lamented that Tom Robilliard had not ‘gone in’ with the women; she had wanted him to travel to Hong Kong with her. She told Belle:

He got faint hearted at being associated with women. More fool he. Never mind you and I will endeavour to get a little going on the side and I will help you with any good line by giving you good agents elsewhere.

Besides working on the family farm, Belle had not previously been in formal employment, so why would she join Kelly in this rather speculative venture? Malcolm Robilliard recalls being told that his grandfather, Tom, ‘made a disastrous investment in a farm outside Sydney around 1940, just as a major drought hit’. Tom left Stott’s Business College around the same time and, by 1946, the Robilliard family was strapped for cash; the couple would never be ‘financially secure again’. The all-in war effort had led many married women to join the workforce for the first time and, though many withdrew to the domestic sphere once the men returned from the war, others remained in the workforce and the stigma attached to a married woman working was reduced. Her grandson believes that Belle, by then aged 50, ‘would have appreciated’ the opportunity to work with Kelly and contribute to the family income. It is also possible that Kelly embarked on this speculative business venture (rather than focus on her advertising business) to help out her old friends.

37 ‘Resumption of Sea Trade with China Next Month’, Daily Telegraph, [Sydney], 24 March 1946, 4; Tom Sheridan, Division of Labour: Industrial Relations in the Chifley Years, 1945–49 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998), 95, 104–05. See, for example, ‘Double Dumped Wool’, Sydney Morning Herald, 10 May 1946, 4; ‘Waterside Workers and Miners Decide to Continue Strike’, Daily Mercury, [Mackay, Qld], 22 June 1946, 1; ‘Sydney Waterside Strike Threatens’, Daily Telegraph, [Sydney], 16 October 1946, 4.
38 ‘Delayed Cargoes Destroy Trade Opportunities’, Queensland Times, [Ipswich, Qld], 9 February 1946, 5; Kelly to Belle, 28 November 1946; Kelly to Margaret Jaye, [copy], 15 March 1947.
39 Kelly to Belle, 27 May 1946.
40 Kelly to Belle, 18 April 1947.
41 Kelly to Belle, 8 May 1946.
42 M. Robilliard, Email message to author, 5 October 2018. The sale of the farm seems to have occurred in mid 1946: Kelly to Belle, 17 August 1946.
The letters reveal the intricacies of the women’s business transactions, including pricing, profit, trade restrictions and shipping details, as well as the networks of women and men in Hong Kong, Australia and beyond that Kelly utilised to facilitate the trade. There are brief mentions of family events, items of gossip and the weather.\textsuperscript{43} Kelly writes in clipped, businesslike sentences; she is often uncomfortably bossy but tries to temper her assertiveness with humour and muted apologies. There is a note of drama in many of the letters. Everything ‘shatters’ Kelly—when the balloons she required could not be procured, when there was a mix up over cable addresses and when some unspecified problem with ‘purchases’ arose.\textsuperscript{44}

Despite the very real drama of her life between January 1942 and August 1945, there was little in these letters about Kelly’s time as a prisoner of the Japanese, beyond references to her ‘camp memory’ and a comment about ‘a spot of mould’ on a cake that Belle sent her, which she dismissed as ‘nothing after camp’.\textsuperscript{45} The dramatic tone of some of the letters might indicate some sort of post-traumatic stress; Kelly received no debriefing on leaving Stanley and had been pushing ahead ever since, with little time for reflection. The social, economic and political situation in Hong Kong and southern China must also have been a cause of concern, but it received little attention in the letters. On her return in late May 1946, Kelly was too focused on starting the business to dwell on the instability in the region in these immediate postwar years, although her first letter from Hong Kong (on 27 May 1946) gave some sense of what it was like for the returning expatriate. ‘There are problems in Hong Kong’, Kelly wrote: ‘It is not safe on streets … [it] is certainly not a nice place at the moment.’ She was struggling to secure accommodation; it seems those who stayed ‘or came back in a month’ had snapped up the best homes.\textsuperscript{46} Analysis by Polish economist Edward Szczepanik supports this. When the occupation ended, he noted in 1958, the previously thriving economy was in ruins; the prewar population had fallen by two-thirds (the population in 1945 was 800,000, 97 per cent of whom were Chinese); trade and industry were at a standstill and many of the homes had been destroyed or were significantly run down.\textsuperscript{47}

Kelly made no further comment on the political situation in the region until the end of January 1948. Meanwhile, the tenuous truce struck between the Chinese nationalists and the communists after the Japanese surrender broke into all-out civil war during 1946. At the end of the Pacific War, nationalist troops and the communists’ guerrilla forces were both within striking distance of Hong Kong,

\textsuperscript{43} Kelly to Belle, 28 January 1948.
\textsuperscript{44} Kelly to Belle, 16 November 1946; 28 November 1946; Telegram, 19 November 1948.
\textsuperscript{45} Kelly to Belle, 17 August 1946.
\textsuperscript{46} Kelly to Belle, 27 May 1946.
but the leaders of the opposing forces had more pressing problems than resolving the ownership of Hong Kong. Britain considered granting Hong Kong its independence (as it had with Singapore) and returning the colony to China but, with the support of the Americans, it eventually settled for reoccupation. The territory resumed its previous incarnation as a port of entry into China and continued to display all the features of a colonial outpost. As the civil war intensified during 1947, the nationalists remained a threat to the security of Hong Kong. At the end of the year, Kelly noted: ‘World, or British Empire still seems a troubled place!!’ Two weeks later, on 16 January 1948, Chinese nationalists rioted on the island of Shameen (now Shamian), 130 kilometres north of Hong Kong in Canton (Guangdong), torching the British consulate there. These events dominated Kelly’s letter to Belle of 27 January 1948:

Wasn’t it [the Canton unrest] infuriating? And I can just hear you saying, that’s what I said [would happen]. Everyone here is furious but not other sentiments. Annoyed that T.V. Soong [the Governor of Guangdong province] didn’t see it couldn’t happen. Only two small bridges lead into Shameen. Two machine guns on each could have fixed it … As far as we are concerned, that means nothing.

Some letters hinted at Kelly’s political views. In her youth, she had been a committed feminist activist, although on the conservative side of the movement. Given her business interests, this conservatism was unsurprising, though she was not blind to the inequalities of life in Hong Kong: ‘It is so hard for anyone who hasn’t been here to visualize it. Extreme wealth and extreme poverty.’ She was able to put any qualms about such inequality to one side, however, and continued to exploit the cheap labour provided by the colonial economy. As Szczepanik notes of the printing and publishing business in Hong Kong in this period, cheap labour and good craftsmanship attracted orders from abroad, and Kelly benefited personally from the skilled work of underpaid Chinese workers.

Kelly’s first letter to Belle Robilliard from Hong Kong reiterated her disappointment that ‘Tom is not in [the business] with us’, but she reassured her that they would average 25 per cent profit on ‘our £1000 that I bought [sic]. Not so dusty is it?’ She encouraged Belle to get started on their enterprise. There was a patronising tone to her instructions; she was clearly going to take the lead in the business: ‘If you

---

50 Louis, ‘Hong Kong’, 1071.
51 Kelly to Belle, 27 January 1948.
52 Kelly to Belle, 12 April 1947.
53 Szczepanik, The Economic Growth of Hong Kong, 125.
never start, you won’t get anywhere will you’, she told Belle, who had found a source of ‘dry fruits’. Kelly encouraged her to send up a ‘small lot’, as they ‘would do very well’ in Hong Kong, where cans of fruit were snapped up quickly:

Why not send 100lbs of each … I will agree to take that amount on your recommendation that it is good quality … add 5% for yourself … Try your hand as a shipping clerk with that amount and if it is alright I’ll send down a decent order with cash. And so you get started.54

She advised that

quick turnovers are the secret of success … If you have enough turnovers in a year you can afford to do it on a small profit. All of which you know.

The Commonwealth Disposals Commission sales were an important source of goods for the women’s business.55 These sales of Australian surplus defence equipment and materials were intended to generate income, and those held in Darwin aimed to further the development of the Northern Territory.56 They began late in 1944 and, in the peak years of 1946 and 1947, represented the largest commercial enterprise in the Commonwealth.57 Dealers with ‘plenty of ready cash’ were ‘making fortunes buying lines in bulk at Disposals Commission auction sales, and retailing them to the public.’58 The sales continued through until 1949, when the commission was closed.59

Belle’s son Dick travelled to Darwin for the disposal sales, accompanied on at least one occasion by his father.60 He bought a truck and a trailer at the sales, as well as women’s clothing and blankets, which would become a recurring subject in the letters. Kelly was interested in buying them from Dick, because, although there were many available in Hong Kong—from ‘all the disposal areas, from Okinawa and China and the Phillipines [sic]’—these were too short for the expatriate market.61 She had ‘sent down’ for a long list of items, mostly clothing, to be bought at the sales and ‘has hardly had a nibble yet for the blankets’.62 Dick had driven to Darwin for

54 Kelly to Belle, 27 May 1946.
55 This letter is undated (the stamp has been torn off) but appears to have been written in early October 1946.
58 ‘Disposal Profits’, Smith’s Weekly, [Sydney], 26 January 1946, 5.
60 Robilliard, Email message to author.
61 Kelly to Belle, 17 August 1946, 1; 6 November 1946.
62 Kelly to Belle, 17 August 1946, 1.
the November 1946 disposal sales and, in mid December, Kelly wrote: ‘Re Blankets ... I cabled you the other day in case Dick has arrived back. If he has and you can ship at 16/- FOB then I take them.’

The blankets did not arrive (perhaps Kelly’s price was too low) because the following April, she informed Belle that she no longer required them: the weather was too hot, and she was sending her own blankets into storage. ‘There are now to be disposal sales up here of all those items’, so she was no longer interested in Darwin sales. But then, in a telegram (9 December 1947), she asked Belle to quote the best price for a ‘hundred thousand good quality grey blankets’. Later in the same month, she wrote:

Re Blankets. Got quotes for 10,000 then another 10,000. Not much when they asked for 100,000–500,000. We think it is for the Chinese armies ... If the Disposal Boards [sic] has orders for ¾ million should think that just washes us out. Shall tell them [the Chinese] that.

The shipment of 20,000 blankets arrived in January 1947 but Kelly was unhappy because ‘they are neither clean nor unstained’. A year later, she wrote ruefully: ‘Blankets. One firm was able to supply 100,000. Not through me unfortunately. At 15/- landed here.’ In typical Kelly fashion, however, she refused to give up. In a telegram on 3 December 1948, she directed: ‘Will take all blankets must ship immediately catch December’s boats.’ The last letter in the collection (January 1949) contains no reference to blankets and we are left to wonder whether Kelly ever received the December shipment.

Dorothy Jenner’s involvement with the Austral-China Trading Company was short-lived. In November 1946, Kelly told Belle she was ‘going to be fairly short of money for a while. I’m buying Mrs Jenner out. She thought us too slow.’ In her autobiography, Jenner claimed the women had intended investing in ‘plastic manufacturing’ in Hong Kong. Though Kelly never mentioned the venture, it makes sense that she would have viewed plastics as an opportunity. As we will see, influential Australian designers were predicting that plastic would be the material of the future, and although the industry had not existed in Hong Kong before the war, by 1960, it was firmly established. Jenner implied that Kelly had inveigled

---

63 Kelly to Belle, 12 December 1946. FOB is the acronym for ‘Free on Board Shipping Point’, which means the buyer takes delivery of goods being shipped to them by a supplier once the goods leave the supplier’s shipping dock.
64 Kelly to Belle, 18 April 1947.
65 Kelly to Belle, Telegram, 9 December 1947.
66 Kelly to Belle, 29 December 1947.
67 Kelly to Belle, 27 January 1948.
68 Kelly to Belle, 27 January 1948.
69 Kelly to Belle, 3 December 1948.
70 Kelly to Belle, 6 November 1946.
71 Jenner, Darlings, I’ve Had a Ball, 237.
72 Szczepanik, The Economic Growth of Hong Kong, 120.
financial support for this venture under false pretences: having convinced Jenner and her family to invest in the business, Kelly then wrote to say ‘she had taken some of our money to buy herself a car’. Jenner’s brother-in-law ‘had [Kelly] stopped’ and ‘got our money out’: ‘Another unsuccessful business venture’, lamented Jenner.73

Kelly’s account of the car purchase was rather different: she had ordered the car in London, before her agreement with Jenner.74 Now she had to pay for it and her advertising business was yet to commence: ‘All means cash is fairly tight and I’m sure I don’t want to buy goods I have not already sold here.’ Jenner was leaving Australia for Europe, and Kelly asked Belle to find out

whether she has any coupons of me [sic] … there has been a great delay in settling with [Jenner] entirely due to her lawyer in Sydney though I am probably blamed.76

The letters were dominated by requests for the precise costs of items, concerns about shipping delays and missing goods and the problems caused by rationing and trade restrictions. Shipping strikes affected the women’s trade; unrest on the Australian waterfront prompted Kelly to write: ‘Australia seems to have gone to the pack from all accounts. Terribly hard to get anything out.’ She anticipated more strikes in 1947.77 Later, she sent two pairs of stockings to Belle, but these were ‘now off the market, partly due to control and partly due to American shipping strikes’.78 She was willing to flout the rules to facilitate the women’s trade:

I had to sign a document that [the wool] was a present to me!! Wool is now rationed. Everyone may have one lb. at a controlled price on their rice ticket.

A friend in Japan was sourcing artificial fishing gut for the Robilliards to sell in Australia, but this was ‘all very complicated. All such deals are strongly Governmental at present. However we are doing best believe me.’ Kelly offered advice on how to subvert restrictions on trade with China:

Your trade is with Hongkong no matter where I buy [the handkerchiefs], not with China, hence all inside sterling block. What asses the Customs men [sic] are to say, ‘Reason for refusal was non sterling origin’. Rubbish but you must say Hongkong not China.79

Goods failed to arrive: material for bed covers Belle had sent over (supplied by her brother) had been ‘pinched’, either in transit or from Kelly’s office.80 The smallest error could disrupt the trade: ‘the Christmas order’ was ‘a nightmare’ because of the mix up over a cable address. In the New Year, Kelly was successful in her efforts

73 Jenner, Darlings, I’ve Had a Ball, 237.
74 Kelly to Belle, 6 November 1946.
75 Kelly to Belle, 6 November 1946.
76 Kelly to Belle, 18 April 1947.
77 Kelly to Belle, 17 August 1946; 12 December 1946.
78 Kelly to Belle, 16 November 1946.
79 Kelly to Belle, 27 November 1946.
80 Kelly to Belle, October 1946[?].
to import the Japanese fishing gut into Australia, with the help of Hong Kong’s Department of Supplies and Industries. Kelly wanted 10 per cent, but told the Robilliards that, even with her cut, this would be a good deal for them. She also requested a range of children’s books to be sent from Australia (‘Add on 5% to everything you send which is for re-sale’).

Friends and family members were drawn into the operations of the Austral-China Trading Company—for example, Kelly turned to her cousin Ned (the barrister E.C.W. Kelly, who had chaired the 1924 Victorian Royal Commission on the High Cost of Living) to chase money she was owed. Her long association with the advertising industry meant her friends included artists and designers, some of whom she marshalled to help with the business. The Australian artist Arthur J. Lindsay was one example. Lindsay worked for Kelly before the war and was interned in Shanghai between 1943 and 1945, before returning to Melbourne. He had trained at the George Bell School (Rupert Bunny was his mentor) and was a member of the Victorian Artists Society. Lindsay left Melbourne in June 1948 to reside in a monastery in southern China and Kelly took advantage of his journey to import some goods. ‘Have just had a cable from Arthur Lindsay … saying he is on [the ship] “Soochow”’, she tells Belle: ‘So I cabled him at great length to go see Miss Jaye.’ ‘Miss Jaye’ was Margaret Jaye, the renowned interior decorator and proprietor of an influential gallery in Rowe Street, Sydney. An English-born entrepreneur, Jaye was the first trader in Sydney to be listed as an interior decorator and was renowned for her ‘modern’ approach to interior design. Indeed, she had predicted in September 1945 that plastic manufacturing would revolutionise furniture design and materials and, as Jaye was ‘a great friend of Mrs Jenner’, she was surely behind Kelly and Jenner’s intention to invest in plastic manufacturing in Hong Kong, where labour was cheaper than in Australia. Jaye ordered round woven trays from Kelly to sell in her gallery shop, but Kelly found her ‘an extremely touchy lady’ and, after a problem over permits to import the trays into Australia, Kelly struggled to secure payment from Jaye. When Lindsay visited Jaye in Sydney, ‘Miss Jaye tried to get off from paying Customs’, Kelly reports: ‘What a dame. Asked Arthur Lindsay to smuggle all he could for her.’

81 Kelly to Belle, 3 February 1947.
82 Kelly to Belle, 3 February 1947.
83 OPC Distributors to Belle, 10 February 1947.
84 ‘Cost of Living Inquiry’, The Argus, [Melbourne], 27 February 1924, 18; Kelly to Belle, 29 December 1947.
90 Kelly to Belle, 14 August 1948.
Belle’s work for the Austral-China Trading Company seems to have been predominantly administrative (as ‘a shipping clerk’). She dealt with suppliers, distributors and stockists in Australia and arranged for parcels to be sent to Kelly’s friends and acquaintances in England, Singapore and Hong Kong, and then chased up these parcels when they failed to arrive. She acted as a kind of ‘personal shopper’ for Kelly, who instructed her on the clothing items (‘Ask her to increase the waistline’) she wanted made for her by Sydney dressmakers. She sent over Sydney papers and Australian magazines—the Sunday Sun, Smith’s Weekly, The Woman and the Australian Women’s Weekly—no doubt so Kelly could keep abreast of business trends in Australia.

The Robilliards were also expected to act as impromptu tour guides for the stream of Kelly’s friends and acquaintances who visited Sydney: ‘Would be grateful if Dick could take Wilfred Edge for an inland tour. He would love it and is quite a good scout’; Jean Ackery, ‘a Naval Officer’s wife’, will be ‘taking the odd stocking soon. Should turn up in about one month from now … pleasant … staying in Manley [sic], only knows one girl’. The visitors were all Europeans and Kelly described their backgrounds, personalities and appearances. This contrasted strikingly with her representation of her Chinese employees, including her sales team and her contacts on the mainland. These were shadowy figures in the letters: ‘the Chinese in his cable’; ‘the Chinese I spoke to’; ‘the Chinese who lent [the book] to me is most upset’; ‘will discuss with the Chinese’; ‘My Chinese artist’s flat’; ‘And the Chinese are out on it now’. With the exception of T.V. Soong, not a single Chinese person was named in these pages.

This silence around Kelly’s Chinese friends, colleagues and employees reflected her desire to maintain the racial hierarchies that had operated in the colony before the war and to reclaim the social position—and the privileges it delivered—she had enjoyed as an expatriate. In the lead-up to her first Christmas back in the colony, her attempts to import items required to mount a jolly Christmas were poignant but telling. The Christmas order she had placed through Edwards Dunlop became ‘a nightmare’. ‘Christmas novelties’ and crepe paper arrived, but there were no balloons to be found in Australia. She could not sell the Christmas trees; the Christmas cards arrived too late. The confetti she had ordered never arrived. Shipping delays, trade restrictions, rationing and high prices kept getting in the way of this reconstruction of the prewar ‘high life’. Despite these obstacles, however, Kelly continued to throw large and frequent cocktail parties, which no doubt doubled as

91 Kelly to Belle, 8 September 1946; [?] October 1946; 28 November 1946; 27 January 1947.
92 Kelly to Belle, 16 November 1946; ‘Counter Points’, Daily Telegraph, [Sydney], 4 August 1949, 17.
93 Kelly to Belle, 5 December 1947; 29 December 1947; 14 August 1948.
94 Kelly to Belle, 17 August 1946; 7 June 1948; 14 August 1948.
95 Kelly to Belle, 27 May 1946; 17 August 1946; 15 March 1947.
96 Kelly to Belle, 18 April 1947.
97 Kelly to Belle, 28 November 1946.
networking opportunities: ‘Last Monday had 42 for drinks and 17 for Irish Stew afterwards’, she wrote to Tom. ‘Liquor is what is dear.’ Her guests drank five bottles of whisky at HK$15 a bottle—‘that is over a pound Australian’.99 In April 1947, she confessed to dissipation, recording day after day of parties, drinks and dinners. ‘This is a peculiar place’, she wrote, ‘still think people from here [by this she meant British and Australian expatriates] would find it difficult to settle down anywhere else.’100

***

Kelly’s advertising business picked up gradually during 1946 and, by mid 1947, her printing press was up and running.101 ‘It’s a good thing the advertising pays’, she wrote in January 1947: ‘It clears up the messes of the Austral-China Trading Co. Ltd.’102 The business was not going well; Kelly admitted to being ‘chaotic’ and warned Belle that the cheque she had sent her might bounce. As the economic life in Hong Kong recovered, there was a discernible shift in tone: ‘Can get anything here now’, Kelly wrote: ‘Must be really one of the luxury places of the world.’103 Trade with Australia started to fall away as the disposal sales wound up and Kelly wrote to Tom offering him a job. ‘Jump on a boat’, she told him:

The view from my balcony tonight with a full moon on the Harbour and fires on the distant hill like circles of light hanging in the sky is of a beauty to be seen to be believed. Come quickly. Cheerio.104

Cathay Limited was doing well (there was no mention of the Austral-China Trading Company), but her ‘good Australian Assistant has got married … her husband does not like her working and wants her to stop’. Kelly could make Tom a partner: ‘[G]ive me an answer soon because if you are not interested I am going to get someone soon. Male. Sick of these either love sick or marrying females.’ Tom must have replied almost immediately, declining her offer. He seems to have expressed concerns about the cost of living in Hong Kong, as well as the political instability that continued in the region. ‘Pity. But there it is’, Kelly writes: ‘Don’t believe all you hear. Actually accommodation is the quay [sic]. If one has that everything is easy. Hong Kong is cheap.’ She now had 25 employees ‘or thereabouts’; the advertising business turned over £214,360 ‘in just 12 months’ and she expected the next six months to be ‘better still’.105

The first letters of 1948 show Kelly moving to wind up her trade with Australia. ‘Trade with Australia from here virtually dead’, she told Tom in a letter dated 16 January but posted later in the month because of the Shameen bridge incident.

99 Kelly to Tom, 16 January 1948.
100 Kelly to Belle, 18 April 1947.
101 Kelly to Belle, 18 April 1947.
102 Kelly to Belle, 27 January 1947.
103 Kelly to Belle, 15 March 1947.
104 Kelly to Tom, 29 December 1947.
105 Kelly to Tom, 16 January 1948.
She was highly critical of Australian workmanship, business acumen and political
nous; her criticisms reeked of cultural cringe. ‘Australian stuff so shoddy’, she wrote
early in January 1948: ‘My refrigerator just about finished and looks so awful. Rust
coming through enamel everywhere.’ Later the same month, she wrote: ‘Trade
seems most difficult. Chiefly because bulk of Australia just lousy in business. And
they are so insular.’ Her evidence for this was the current outrage over the order by
the Australian Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, that Australian women
working with US forces in Tokyo and Manila should return to Australia: ‘Caldwell
[sic] has just made himself a complete laughing stock up here saying these girls must
go home.’ Another example of Australia’s alleged incompetency was its management
of the Australian War Crimes Court in Hong Kong. Since it had taken over from
the English War Crimes Court, Kelly wrote, ‘the Jap defence bureau is in all the
papers’ saying that ‘no provision had been made for them’ and ‘they have had to sell
watches, clothes etc. for food. That’s a nice advertisement.’ ‘Bit fed up myself at the
for a trip.’

Ships seemed ‘very irregular’, Kelly told Belle and asked her to chase up any unsold
goods the pair had with Anthony Hordern’s department store: ‘I really feel I should
clear up all my bits and pieces.’ She remained fed up: ‘I must say I have learnt my
lessons on trade the hard way.’ In June 1948, Kelly told Belle that she had ‘just
completed my second year of business’ and had made a profit ‘about equal’ to what
she put in (£3,000, handwritten) and was thinking of buying a house. In a letter
to Tom (7 January 1949), she objected to his nickname for her (‘the Tycooness’),
than suggested he meet with Mike Kendall, a Manila executive for Philippine
Airlines—one of Kelly’s ‘biggest advertisers’ and ‘a very coming company’—who
would be visiting Sydney and might have openings for Dick and Tom, as a pilot and
accountant, respectively:

When the flights get going they’ll do well and if you are in the doldrums should
think this is fine chance, anyway for Dick. They always rather have people with air
knowledge. Will want accountants also.

This is the final surviving letter between Kelly and the Robilliards, so there is no way
of knowing whether Tom met with Kendall, but we do know that neither Tom nor
Dick would ever work for Philippine Airlines. The Austral-China Trading Company
was deregistered in 1951. Kelly concentrated on her advertising business and, over

106 Kelly to Tom, 16 January 1948.
004292055_019.
108 Kelly to Tom, 27 January 1948.
109 Kelly to Belle, 28 January 1948.
110 Kelly to Belle, 7 June 1948.
111 Kelly to Tom, 7 January 1949.
the next decade, built Asia’s first advertising agency network. When she sold Cathay Limited to the Australian advertising giant George Patterson (acting as proxy for the New York advertising firm Ted Bates), the network had branches in Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Singapore, Bangkok and, of course, Hong Kong.  

Conclusion

What had Kelly meant when she told The Argus that Australians flourished in Hong Kong because of their ‘poise’ and their ‘liking for the life’? By poise, she meant perhaps the calm and pragmatic resilience stereotypically displayed by Anglo-Celtic Australians in the face of (for them, at least) a challenging environment. Their ‘liking for the life’ can only mean that their expatriate status and resources gave them access to the privileges provided by the exploitation at the heart of the colonial economy: the cheap labour that meant the expatriate—Australian or otherwise—could enjoy a standard of living not available to them at home. Interviewed by Hong Kong radio in 1968, Kelly made it clear she could not contemplate returning to live in Australia because she would be expected to manage without ‘a boy and an amah’.

In 1946, it was by no means certain that the life she and her fellow expatriates had so enjoyed before the war could ever be resurrected. Kelly’s pugnacious and engaged letters were written at a time when the global economic order was being remade (and the British Empire was struggling to maintain its trading privileges), when shipping and trading permits were difficult to secure and when the future of East Asia was uncertain to say the least. These letters show the determination of a white, middle-class, educated, expatriate Australian woman to rebuild the social and economic privilege she had enjoyed in the British colony before Japan’s invasion. They show the ways this woman combined with other privileged white women across vast distances to take advantage of the rupture the war had caused in previous business processes and networks. They show the goods these women valued (nylon stockings, handkerchiefs and jewellery) in this time of rationing and austerity.

The letters reveal little, however, about life in Stanley prison camp or the experiences of war more generally, beyond the occasional reference to the difficulties faced by returned servicemen in Australia. This silence is in itself significant, as Kelly was intent on rebuilding for the future rather than wasting time reflecting on the recent past. Another silence is equally significant: present by omission throughout these letters are those Chinese workers whose skilled but grossly undervalued labour facilitated Kelly’s business achievements and made possible the lively social life she enjoyed so much.

112 Dickenson, Australian Women in Advertising, 46.
113 Kelly interview, 1968.
John Augustus Hux (1826–1864): A colonial goldfields reporter

PETER CRABB

Affairs are in such a state at the Flat that it is dangerous for any one to give their opinions with respect to the proceedings that have taken place: but I will state my opinions, without fear or favour, let the result be what it may.

So wrote John Augustus Hux in response to death threats he received as a consequence of his reporting of the anti-Chinese riots at Lambing Flat on 30 June 1861. The statement provides an indication of the character of a man who came to Australia in the early 1850s and then spent most of the rest of his short life on the colonial goldfields in the 1850s and 1860s.

Gold, newspapers and reporters

The discovery of gold in the mid nineteenth century changed the face of colonial society in Australia dramatically and in countless ways, not least through the massive migration and population growth it spurred. Covering the goldrushes and the many changes that occurred were major tasks for contemporary newspapers, as the public's appetite for information about gold was insatiable. The main sources for this information were the newspapers and, for them, gold was 'gold', not least for the capital city dailies, such as the Sydney Morning Herald, The Empire (Sydney) and The Argus (Melbourne). Gold took up a significant proportion of their pages, with just about everything imaginable associated with the precious metal: editorials, specific reports, short reports in the 'Domestic Intelligence' columns, the 'Gold Circulars', reports from other colonies and overseas (for example, California, New Zealand), 'Original Correspondence' (letters to the editor), personal messages and countless advertisements for everything connected with gold and its mining, such as the necessary clothing and equipment, and even 'how-to' books. Much of the

1 Much appreciation is extended to Dr Alexis Antonia, Centre for Literary and Linguistic Computing, University of Newcastle, for textual analysis in helping to confirm the attribution of some of Hux’s articles, and for confirming the presence of another so-far anonymous 'Special Commissioner' reporting for the Sydney Morning Herald from Lambing Flat. Her comments on an earlier version of this article are also appreciated. Thanks are also due to Malcolm Allbrook and Brendan Dalton for numerous discussions, to Clive Hilliker for his cartography and to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

2 Sydney Morning Herald, 22 July 1861, 4.
'gold news' was day-to-day factual reporting from 'local correspondents' and material taken from country newspapers, such as the Braidwood Dispatch, the Temora Herald and the Bathurst Free Press.³

However, as the number of gold finds grew and production increased, the city newspapers recognised the need and responsibility to do more for their readers, to provide not only accurate but also, as far as possible, unbiased information and informed commentary, especially when widely different and conflicting information was circulating among the colonial population. In July 1857, the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald set out how the paper would endeavour to improve the situation:

> It has been our constant effort to furnish our readers with information respecting our Gold-fields; to create no unnatural stimulus to mining pursuits, and yet to give fair play to our mineral resources. It was in keeping with this policy that we despatched a special commissioner to collect, at the different gold-fields, the more important facts, to ascertain the feelings and wishes of the miners, and thus to assist the merchant and the legislator, as well as the labourer. A Commissioner—such was the distinction first claimed by the Times for its agents—has functions different from that of ordinary reporting. His duties are more remote, less liable to oversight, and therefore peculiarly confidential. He is bound to see with his own eyes, to collate and estimate the facts he may gather, and penetrate through the illusions of selfishness, slander, and timidity, in search of the substantial and permanent.⁴

A similar undertaking had been made by the editor of The Argus five years earlier.⁵ The results were extended series of articles in both papers. In both cases, the ‘Special Commissioner’ was Charles de Boos.⁶

While there is little doubt he was the most prolific, Charles de Boos was just one of a number of reporters who worked on the colonial goldfields of New South Wales and Victoria. As with most of the others, his name did not appear on the articles he wrote. It has taken much research to identify his work, and that of Frederick Dalton⁷ and R.J. Howard.⁸ In most cases, reporters were referred to as ‘A Correspondent’, ‘Our Local Correspondent’ or ‘Our Own Correspondent’; a small number were

---
³ For extracts from many of these reports, together with very brief comments, see the Gold Trails website: www.goldtrails.com.au/gold-heritage/.
⁵ The Argus, [Melbourne], 16 March 1852, 2.
⁸ Research continues on Howard, who wrote extensively on the Mount Alexander diggings for The Argus in 1851–52.
given the title ‘Our Special Commissioner’. Some reporters were identified by name, including Daniel Bunce, Angus Mackay, Alfred Clarke and John Hux. Some had worked as gold ‘diggers’; all had significant knowledge of goldmining. Their reports provided reliable information for contemporary readers. Today, they are significant primary documents from a critical period in Australia’s history. Of as much interest as the stories they wrote are the personal stories of these goldfields reporters. Most have yet to be told. This is the story of one of them, John Augustus Hux.

John Hux: Family heritage

John Hux came from what appears to have been an established London family of craftsmen. The oldest known ancestor, his grandfather William Hux (1730–1780), was a ‘pewterer’. Pewter, a tin alloy, was long used to make plates, dishes and drinking vessels. One of the older livery companies in the City of London, the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, dates from 1348—its charter granted in 1474. The industry reached its peak in the late seventeenth century and then declined, largely as a consequence of the new materials and products of the Industrial Revolution. By the late eighteenth century, the company’s numbers were small.9 This may explain why at least one of William’s children turned to another craft; Thomas Hux (1760–1825) became a watchmaker. He married Elizabeth Hudson (1761–1843) in 1782 and they had 11 children, including John, who also became a watchmaker.

John Hux (1792–1876) was born at Finsbury, London, and baptised at St Luke’s, Old Street, on 5 February 1792. He married Jane Rodwell (1798–1835) on 17 November 1819 at Blandford Forum, Dorset.10 They had at least six children, including John Augustus. In 1828, John was recorded as being a watchmaker in Brunswick Place. Jane died about 1835, aged 37, and John married Mary Martha de Boos (1801–1885) at St James Clerkenwell on 26 May 1838.11 Mary was the daughter of Abraham and Marthe de Boos and an aunt of Charles Edward de Boos, who, in 1839, moved to Australia, where he became a journalist and writer.12 John was described on the marriage record as a ‘Watch Manufacturer’ and a ‘Widower’, living at 41 Percival Street. By 1843, he was listed as ‘John Hux & Sons Watch Manufacturers’; eight years later, he employed three men. He had moved to 10 Spencer Street, Goswell Road, where he remained for more than 10 years.13 The

---

10 The marriage record stated that John Hux was of the Parish of Blandford Forum and Jane Rodwell was of the Parish of Hampreston.
11 She was baptised Marie Marthe de Boos.
12 There was also a more direct family relationship with Charles de Boos. See Crabb, "His life history may be told in a few words".
13 Post Office Commercial Directory (London, 1843, 1848, 1851 and 1856).
censuses of 1841 through to 1861 described him as a watchmaker; in 1871, he was listed as a ‘Jeweller’, living at 10 Milton Street. He died in 1876. In the 1881 census, Mary was described as a ‘Boarding Housekeeper’ and ‘Widow’, living with Louisa (1840–1920),\(^\text{14}\) her daughter by Hux, at ‘the abode of a secretary accountant and his family’.\(^\text{15}\) Mary Martha died in October 1885, aged 83.

John Augustus was born on 7 August 1826, and was baptised at St James Clerkenwell on 4 August 1828, on the same occasion as two of his brothers.\(^\text{16}\) At the 1841 census, he was living with his parents and four siblings at Clerkenwell and was described as a watchmaker. But he was soon to leave the family business of watch and clockmaking to his brothers. Two of John Augustus’s younger siblings have a small part in this story. They were twins Mary and Harry Rodwell, born in March 1830 at Hampreston, Dorset, a small village east of Wimborne Minster, where they were baptised on 13 April 1830.\(^\text{17}\) Jane and her husband travelled from their home at Clerkenwell for the baptisms; Jane may well have been at her family home in Hampreston for the births. Harry was living with his parents at Clerkenwell at the 1851 census and working as a watchmaker.

His early years in Australia

John Augustus Hux arrived in Melbourne on 21 January 1853, on the Catherine Mitchell, having sailed from Liverpool.\(^\text{18}\) In August the following year, advertisements appeared in *The Argus* in Melbourne indicating that his sister, Mary, wanted to contact him and their brother Harry:


HUX.—If this should meet the eye of John Augustus or Harry Hux, send a line to your sister Mrs. Connolly, No. 129 Toy Warehouse, Old South Head-road, Sydney.\(^\text{19}\)

Just when Mary and Harry arrived in Australia and where they landed are not known, but the lack of a similar advertisement in any Sydney paper suggests Mary knew both her brothers were somewhere in Victoria. Mary was living in Sydney and married to Matthew Connolly, who had a retail business on South Head Road.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^\text{14}\) The previous year, they had another daughter, Florence (1839–1843), but she lived for only four years.


\(^\text{16}\) Some sources give his name as John Augustus Rodwell Hux. The brothers were Richard Rodwell (1824–1869) and Thomas Hudson (1828–1847).


\(^\text{19}\) *The Argus*, [Melbourne], 10 August 1854, 1; 11 August 1854, 2.

\(^\text{20}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 April 1864, 1. He also ran a ‘Circulation Library’ (*The Empire*, [Sydney], 12 August 1852, 2). Apart from this inquiry, nothing further has been found about Harry in Australia, nor is anything further known about Mary following the death of John Augustus in 1864.
Just over three months after Mary Connolly’s advertisements appeared, on 29 November 1855, a Mr Hux arrived in Sydney from Melbourne, having sailed on the City of Sydney.\textsuperscript{21} And in February 1858, an unusual notice appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald:

I BEG to acknowledge the RECEIPT of Twenty-one pounds ten shillings and sixpence (£21 12s. 6d.) handed me by Mr. HUX and to return him and all parties subscribing to the same my sincere and grateful thanks for their kind assistance, after the fatal accident by which my husband was killed. EMMA LAWRENCE, February 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1858.\textsuperscript{22}

In both cases, we might ask was the ‘Mr Hux’ John or Harry? And who was Emma Lawrence; what was her connection with ‘Mr Hux’; and what caused him to undertake this charitable task? Emma’s husband may have been the Joseph Lawrence whose accidental death while at work at the Western Islands wharf was the subject of a coroner’s inquest about the same time as Emma’s notice appeared.\textsuperscript{23}

**Hux, the digger and writer**

What little is known of Hux’s time in Victoria comes from his later writings. In the winter of 1854, he ‘was working on one of the principal [gold]fields in Victoria’,\textsuperscript{24} and in late 1858, he stated that he ‘had four years’ experience as a gold-digger on the Melbourne side’.\textsuperscript{25} In early 1860, two letters Hux wrote from Back Creek in Victoria\textsuperscript{26} to a friend in Sydney were reproduced in the Sydney Morning Herald. The first was titled ‘The Victoria Gold-Fields’ (it did not present a very positive picture); the second, ‘The Gold Fields of New South Wales Compared with Those of Victoria’.\textsuperscript{27} Also from Back Creek, he wrote a letter to The Age (in Melbourne), entitled ‘The Decrease in the Yield of Gold’.\textsuperscript{28} In a further letter written later in 1860, he stated that he had ‘just returned from the Victoria gold-fields’, suggesting he had more than one extended period there.\textsuperscript{29}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[21] *The Empire*, [Sydney], 30 November 1855, 4.
\item[22] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 February 1858, 1.
\item[23] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 January 1858, 5.
\item[24] J.A.H., ‘Reminiscences of a Gold-Digger’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 April 1861, 2. Given comments he made some years later when writing about the Lachlan diggings, this Victorian goldfield could have been Ballarat: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 November 1861, 4.
\item[25] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 October 1858, 5.
\item[26] Back Creek was near what is now the small town of Talbot, south of Maryborough, in Victoria. See ‘Talbot, Victoria’ (Wikipedia, 2019), en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talbot, Victoria; www.talbottourism.org/home/history.htm [site discontinued].
\item[27] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February 1860, 9; 13 March 1860, 13.
\item[28] *The Age*, [Melbourne], 26 April 1860, 4.
\item[29] *The Sydney Mail*, 1 September 1860, 3.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
In October 1858, two letters on the ‘Fitzroy Diggings’ by John A. Hux, written from the home of his sister in Sydney, were published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.\[^{30}\] Having been resident in the city for several months and fearing the prospect of ‘becoming a respectable or settled man’, he could not resist another dig.\[^{31}\] He wrote that, on his arrival in Rockhampton (in what is now Queensland), the initial reports were positive; upstream on the Fitzroy River, gold had been found at Canoona, and hardly anyone had returned from there to Rockhampton. However, once at Canoona, he quickly realised it was a very different story:

> In the morning I commenced a survey of the diggings. The great rush had not yet taken place for we were only the second vessel that had arrived;—but I saw and heard quite sufficient to convince me that Canoona was no place for me.\[^{32}\]

Along with hundreds of others, Hux and his party found extremely little or no gold at all.

In the two letters and a long article on ‘The Rockhampton Rush’, he wrote in some detail about the Fitzroy and the failure of the Canoona rush, the dreadful conditions, food shortages and the impacts on the many men who had made the fruitless journey north (Figure 1).\[^{33}\] He also wrote of the costs to the shipping companies, which were unable to land their cargoes.\[^{34}\] His letters were reprinted, in whole or in part, in a number of other newspapers.\[^{35}\]

After his trip to the Fitzroy, Hux returned to Sydney, ‘if not richer perhaps a wiser man’, yet he had to acknowledge that ‘[t]he roving disposition once commenced, it is difficult to say when it will stop’. So, when the ‘opportunity’ arose, he was soon visiting the Maitland and Singleton district in the Hunter Valley, although he ‘saw nothing there worthy of notice except the roads’.\[^{36}\] He spent Christmas Day 1858 in Sydney, but on New Year’s Day he was once again on the move, this time sailing to Melbourne.\[^{37}\]

\[^{30}\] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 October 1858, 5; 13 October 1858, 5.
\[^{31}\] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 June 1860, 2.
\[^{32}\] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 June 1860, 2.
\[^{34}\] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 June 1860, 2.
\[^{35}\] *Maitland Mercury*, 14 October 1858, 2; *Goulburn Herald*, 16 October 1858, 2; *Hobart Town Daily Mercury*, 21 October 1858, 3; *Darling Downs Gazette*, [Toowoomba], 28 October 1858, 3; and *Perth Gazette*, 5 November 1858, 3.
\[^{36}\] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 June 1860, 2.
\[^{37}\] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 June 1860, 2.
Later in 1860, when again back at his sister’s Sydney residence, Hux wrote three more letters, mostly about the NSW goldfields. Two were published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*—the first about the goldfields in Victoria, New South Wales and the Fitzroy River. The second, a long letter headed ‘The Gold-Fields of New South Wales’, included comments on the lack of government support for goldmining and on the Reverend W.B. Clarke’s 1851–52 reports to the colonial government on the southern goldfields. The third letter was published in *The Sydney Mail*, headed ‘Gold Digging at the Snowy River’. Early in 1861, he wrote another letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, entitled ‘The Chinese Question’. While concerned about the evils attending so large an increase in the Chinese population, he questioned many of the reasons for the opposition to the Chinese. And though too many may have been arriving, he stated that ‘we are clearly bound to protect those already amongst us so long as they respect and conform to our laws’.

Figure 1 ‘Distress that would astonish the Sydney public’

Source: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 October 1858, 5.
Identified as the author by the use of his initials, ‘J.A.H.’, Hux wrote a number of articles under the general title ‘Reminiscences of a Gold-Digger’. They were published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Sydney Mail* from April 1860 to June 1861. Some were fictional, though he was at pains to point out all were based on fact.42 One was very definitely factual: ‘The Rockhampton Rush’ described some of his experiences on his trip to the Canoona goldfield.43 Some were republished in other newspapers;44 in the case of the Melbourne *Weekly Age*, there was no acknowledgement of the source, much to the disgust of a correspondent only known as ‘M.C.’, who called it ‘piracy’.45 In early 1861, two issues of *The Sydney Mail* contained a column entitled ‘Extracts from My Note-Book’ by ‘J.A.H.’.46 Late in 1860, a serialised story by ‘J.A.H.’ appeared in *The Sydney Mail*, entitled ‘Emma Westan: A Tale of Australia, Founded on Fact’.47 Two sisters with a very unhappy childhood in England are separated and independently move to Victoria, not knowing what has become of the other. The older sister, Emma, has a difficult life, leading to the death of her husband and destitution; the younger, Lucy, has wealth beyond her needs. By chance, they meet in Melbourne, are reunited and, with much happiness, Lucy restores Emma’s wellbeing.

A reporter for the *Sydney Morning Herald*

Hux’s letters and the knowledge of goldmining he had demonstrated may have contributed to him being employed by the *Sydney Morning Herald* and given the title ‘Our Special Commissioner’. It may also have had something to do with the family connection with his stepmother’s nephew, the journalist Charles de Boos, who was at that time also employed by the *Herald*; they could have met in Melbourne, Sydney and/or the Fitzroy diggings, as they were both in these places about the same time.

---

42 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 April 1860, 2.
43 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 June 1860, 2.
45 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 August 1860, 5.
46 *The Sydney Mail*, 9 March 1861, 2 (Parts I and II); 16 March 1861, 2 (Parts III, IV and V). All five parts were published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 March 1861, 2.
47 *The Sydney Mail*, 27 October 1860, 3 (Chapters 1–3); 3 November 1860, 3 (Chapter 4); 10 November 1860, 2 (Chapters 5–7).
Hux’s first destination as the Herald’s ‘Special Commissioner’ was Kiandra, in the NSW Snowy Mountains at an elevation of some 1,400 metres.\(^48\) The cold-climate periglacial landscapes are isolated, exposed, stark and almost treeless (Figure 2). Even in summer, it can be very cold. After European settlement, farmers used the country for summer sheep and cattle grazing. Two graziers, David and James Pollock, discovered gold in payable quantities in November 1859 at Pollock’s Gully.

People came from all over Australia and what had once been isolated grazing country suddenly became a boom town. By March 1860 there were more than 10,000 people on the goldfields.\(^49\)

\(^{48}\) The journey was by coastal steamer from Sydney to Eden and then overland, but Hux does not say how he travelled or exactly how long it took him to get from Eden to Kiandra. Sydney Morning Herald, 28 September 1860, 5; 11 October 1860, 10.

The numbers included many Chinese.50 It was a real ‘rush’ and, at its peak, the town of Kiandra ‘comprised a bank, post office, 25 stores, 13 bakers, 16 butchers, 14 hotels, 4 blacksmiths, a courthouse, gaol, school and local newspaper [The Alpine Pioneer and Kiandra Advertiser].’51

The Kiandra goldrush that began in March–April 1860 was the subject of a number of reports, editorials and letters in the Sydney Morning Herald during the first half of that year, with frequent reports by ‘Our Correspondent’, both before and after Hux arrived there.52 Hux, however, provided commentary as well as factual reporting. His reports appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald from 28 September 1860 to 14 January 1861. There were also two separate reports by ‘J.A.H.’. Over the same period in which Hux’s reports were published, other articles appeared under the general heading ‘Alpine Sketches’ by an unknown writer (two attributed to ‘Our Correspondent’) in the Sydney Morning Herald and The Sydney Mail; these complemented Hux’s writings.53

Hux wrote about the difficulties of getting to Kiandra; the township, which by mid October was already beginning ‘to assume a very respectable appearance’; and the harsh living conditions, especially for those living in tents.54 He also described the mining methods—essentially sluicing the alluvial deposits—and the various locations at which mining was taking place, such as Rocky Plains, Pollock’s Gully, Nine Mile, Four Mile, Surface Hill, New Chum Hill, Tantangara and the Tumut River (Figure 3).55 He wrote at some length about various management issues and the problems the gold commissioners had as a consequence of them, as well as those

52 For example, an editorial on the alpine diggings in Sydney Morning Herald, 17 March 1860, 4; Letter by ‘Stockman’, ‘Winter at the Snowy River’, Sydney Morning Herald, 19 March 1860, 2; Editorial, Sydney Morning Herald, 22 March 1860, 4; ‘The Kiandra Diggings’, Sydney Morning Herald, 5 June 1860, 5. For a short period, from August 1860 to some time in 1861, a local newspaper was published twice a week, The Alpine Pioneer and Kiandra Advertiser. Only a few issues from between 24 August 1860 and 28 December 1860 have survived.
54 Sydney Morning Herald, 11 October 1860, 10.
55 Sydney Morning Herald, 20 October 1860, 4; 27 October 1860, 8; 7 November 1860, 8.
he thought they created for themselves; the fact that the nearest sittings of the District Court were about 90 kilometres away in Cooma; and issues of ‘sly grog’ among the Europeans and opium among the Chinese miners.

The two articles under Hux’s initials presented a somewhat different view of Kiandra. A visit to the cemetery with its unmarked graves was a time for reflection on who might be buried there, as well as recounting the story of one of those buried that was told to him by another visitor to the cemetery. A somewhat tongue-in-cheek account of Kiandra, where Hux was still trudging through snow, slush and mud at the end of November, gave a picture of many buildings in a very poor state, unable to keep out the rain and snow. He concluded the account of his ‘ramble’ with the comment: ‘I think you will agree with a friend of mine, who said that one thing alone was wanted to make Kiandra perfect, and that was an earthquake.’

Figure 3 Kiandra and district

56 Sydney Morning Herald, 22 October 1860, 4.
57 Sydney Morning Herald, 17 October 1860, 5; 22 October 1860, 4; 27 October 1860, 8.
58 ‘Graves at Kiandra’, Sydney Morning Herald, 8 November 1860, 2; The Sydney Mail, 17 November 1860, 6; Launceston Examiner, 10 November 1860, 2; Cornwall Chronicle, [Launceston, Tas.], 15 December 1860, 2.
59 ‘A Summer-Day’s Ramble through Kiandra’, Sydney Morning Herald, 7 December 1860, 2; The Sydney Mail, 8 December 1860, 2.
There was one topic that appeared in almost all of Hux’s reports: the weather. Many people had endured the cold and heavy snowfalls of the 1860 winter, many of them ill-prepared and living in canvas tents. It was a harsh environment in which to live and work; even the daffodils planted by some of the original miners found it difficult (Figure 4). Perhaps the hardest aspect of the weather to cope with was its variability from one day to the next, regardless of the season:

It would seem that this place is never to be favoured with a continuation of fine weather … Last Saturday was quite a summer’s day, and the next morning, to the astonishment of all, the ground was covered with snow … This continued until noon on Monday, when it cleared up, and we were favoured with summer weather again.60

---

60 Sydney Morning Herald, 26 November 1860, 5; 27 November 1860, 3. Lightning strikes on the telegraph wires often caused cuts to the telegraph services.
While it lasted, Kiandra was a very productive goldfield; many miners did well, including the Chinese. For example, in one 10-day period, a group of miners found a single 12-pound (5.4 kg) nugget plus 70 ounces (almost 2 kg) of gold. The largely alluvial workings produced over 67,600 ounces (1,900 kg) in 1860 and 16,500 ounces (468 kg) in 1861. This field’s decline seems to have been rapid, as significant quantities of gold were being sent to Sydney through to late November and a 24–25-pound (about 11 kg) nugget was found in early December. By November, however, Hux wrote that people were leaving for Crackenback (initially called ‘Crack-em-back’), the location of short-lived mining activity, and more particularly, many were heading for Lambing Flat. In mid December, he reported that Kiandra was ‘getting quite deserted’. It had been one of the biggest and shortest goldrushes in Australia. Nonetheless, there were plenty of celebrations for Christmas and New Year, the latter including horseracing (Figure 5).
Hux did not experience the massive snowstorm of late July 1860, which no doubt provided the impetus for an activity that gave Kiandra a world-first. In that winter, skiing, or snowshoeing, was introduced by three Norwegian miners, Elias Gottraas, Soren Tor and Carl Bjerknes. Skis, or snowshoes, were essential to move about. Soon, however, they provided a source of pleasure and, in 1861, Kiandra became the first place in the world to have an alpine ski club and to hold ski races.

On 8 January 1861, Hux joined those leaving Kiandra. Before doing so, he expressed his appreciation to those with whom he had worked, both government officials and miners, and was the recipient of an unusual expression of appreciation, some nuggets of gold. By the time he left, the Kiandra rush was over and, by early March, there were 'not more than 200 diggers left'. Hux's destination was the same as most of the diggers leaving Kiandra—namely, Lambing Flat (now known as Young).

### Lambing Flat

Gold was discovered at Lambing Flat in March 1860 and, over the next few months, numerous other finds were made in the district, extending up to 32 kilometres from the centre of the Lambing Flat field (Figure 6). Large numbers of diggers—European and Chinese—were attracted to the district; by late November, the population was at least 3,000. From very early in the goldfield's history, it seems to have been a lawless place, with antisocial behaviour and robberies (not least of horses) common. In November 1860, the first anti-Chinese actions occurred, with some 500 Chinese driven off their diggings:

John Chinaman was obliged to make himself scarce, and as soon as he was driven off the ground, all the tents were demolished in an instant. We believe that no violence to the person was committed in getting rid of the pests.
Anti-Chinese sentiment and actions continued into 1861, and there were a number of large public meetings. In late January 1861, some 1,500 Chinese were driven off the land they were working, in defiance of the gold commissioner and the police; there were so few police they were unable to do anything.\textsuperscript{75} A petition against the ‘invasion of the Chinese’ and calling for their removal attracted 3,394 signatures.\textsuperscript{76} The Miners’ Protective League made its anti-Chinese position very clear (Figure 7). The \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} also made its position clear—in demanding the fair and lawful treatment of all miners, regardless of race. Even before the worst riots, the paper’s editor, Reverend John West,\textsuperscript{77} a Congregational minister, unreservedly condemned the persecution of the Chinese and the inaction of the government.\textsuperscript{78}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 30 January 1861, 5; 2 February 1861, 4.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 19 February 1861, 6.
\end{flushright}
The long silence of the Government respecting the proceedings at Lambing Flat will be there interpreted one way—assent. The spirit which shrinks from any unpopular duty is one of the characteristic results of democratic ascendency. It is in vain to appeal to the principles of justice—to the rights of humanity—the claims of law—the sanctity of public faith. These are powerless before that cowardly spirit which cringes to the lowest of the people. Could any civilised Government be found that would not vindicate itself by declaring at the outset, and in decided terms, its determination to protect to the utmost of its means defenceless strangers, who have on their side right, humanity, and law.

The history of the Lambing Flat is an illustration of the brutal temper which prevails among the migratory bands of diggers. We gladly distinguish them from a very respectable class, who have given to gold mining the aspect of a settled industry, and whose conduct has been honest and fair. The Lambing Flat was discovered as a gold-field by the Chinese themselves. They were entitled by law to settle there; they obtained and paid for the miner’s right; they were put in possession by the Government. No one pretends they have forfeited that protection which any man who lives under the English flag has the right to expect. The intruders, if any deserve the name where all have a defined and equal right, are the white men, for we will not disgrace our country by calling them Englishmen. The Chinese have been ejected, and robbed of their legal rights—driven off the ground, and exposed to want and starvation. And all this has been done in an ‘orderly manner’ forsooth! We are told there is no violence—no one has been attacked—they have only been driven off?79

Figure 7 Excerpt from the Miners’ Protective League prospectus.
The full prospectus was published in The Miner and General Advertiser, [Lambing Flat, NSW], 6 March 1861, 1
Source: Sydney Morning Herald, 6 March 1861, 4.

A visit by NSW premier Charles Cowper to Lambing Flat in early 1861 did not help. He made statements supporting the miners and the Chinese, including in an address to a large public meeting, but when he returned to Sydney, his statements in the legislative assembly were totally different. Not surprisingly, ‘Slippery Charlie’ was attacked by locals and by Hux for his ‘misrepresentation’. 80

---

79 Sydney Morning Herald, 11 February 1861, 4; ‘Notes of the Week’, Sydney Morning Herald, 9 February 1861, 7.
80 Sydney Morning Herald, 8 March 1861, 5; 2 April 1861, 6; 9 April 1861, 3.
Petitions by the Chinese for compensation for losses from the riots provided them with little satisfaction. James McCulloch Henley, a Chinese-language interpreter, arrived at Lambing Flat from Victoria in late March 1861 at the request of the Chinese miners, who sought his help in their negotiations with the government and its officials. A government inquiry conducted by William Campbell (from nearby Burrowa; now Boorowa) into the claims could be described as a whitewash; he found that

the destruction of property on the occasion of the removal of the Chinese from Lambing Flat on 27th January and 17th February 1861, was very trifling, and that the claims hereinbefore referred to are altogether fraudulent.

Further, Henley’s support of one claim was dismissed, with Campbell stating that Henley ‘must have been labouring under an excited imagination’.

Due to ‘circumstances’ he did not explain, two months elapsed between Hux leaving Kiandra and arriving at Lambing Flat. Over that period, from the beginning of February to the beginning of April 1861, another ‘Special Commissioner’ reported from Lambing Flat for the Sydney Morning Herald. With the exception of reports in late February and again in late March and the beginning of April, they were short, factual and provided little comment, but they offered an eyewitness account of the events that took place during the conflicts between the European and Chinese miners, in contrast to much misreporting, even from government officials. Thus far, the identity of the reporter has not been determined.

---

81 Sydney Morning Herald, 22 April 1861, 8. The Chinese petition with respect to the riots on 19 February 1861 was rejected by the NSW Legislative Assembly ‘because its prayer was for pecuniary compensation’.
82 Carol Holsworth, James McCulloch Henley: Anglo Chinese Linguist and Advocate in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland (Bendigo, Vic.: Carol Holsworth, 2012).
83 Sydney Morning Herald, 29 March 1861, 4.
85 Sydney Morning Herald, 9 April 1861, 3.
86 Textual analysis confirms that the reports were not the work of Hux. See Peter Crabb, Alexis Antonia and Hugh Craig, ‘Who Wrote “A Visit to the Western Goldfields”? Using Computers to Analyse Language in Historical Research’, History Australia 11, No. 3 (2014): 177–93, doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2014.11668539.
87 Sydney Morning Herald, 22 February 1861, 8; 26 February 1861, 4.
88 Sydney Morning Herald, 12 March 1861, 4; 23 March 1861, 7; 2 April 1861, 4.
89 Sydney Morning Herald, 22 February 1861, 8; Goulburn Herald, 9 January 1861, 2.
90 It was not James McCulloch Henley, as stated by Souter (Company of Heralds, 58). Further, the passage quoted by Souter was not from a letter written by Henley, but from the report by Hux in the Sydney Morning Herald (9 July 1861, 5), which did include a long letter from Henley to the governor on behalf of the Chinese.
From 9 April 1861 through to March 1862, Hux wrote more than 75 reports from Lambing Flat as the *Sydney Morning Herald*’s ‘Special Commissioner’. Following on from his predecessor, he reported on the goldmining activities and the protest meetings, riots and acts of violence against the Chinese—some large, some small. In one report, he wrote:

> I noticed in town yesterday more Chinese than I had seen for a long time. I also noticed one crowd of *intelligent* men amusing themselves by throwing rubbish at them.\(^{91}\)

In another report, he wrote:

> One day last week a few Chinese made their appearance at this place, and were shamefully ill-treated—not by diggers, but by a mob of stockmen and shepherds who, to amuse themselves, gave poor John an unmerciful thrashing, one poor fellow having his face cut to all pieces.\(^{92}\)

Far more serious trouble erupted on Sunday, 30 June 1861, involving thousands of people; among other events, the Court House and commissioner’s camp were burned down.\(^{93}\) These riots were particularly bad for the Chinese, and no doubt would have been worse but for the interventions of James Henley. One example of the brutality reported by Hux was

> of a woman, the wife of a Chinaman, she had a poor little baby in a cradle; they burnt the tent and even set fire to the cradle in which the poor little thing was asleep, and if it had not been for the Chinese interpreter (a Mr. Henley), they would have even committed the same atrocities on her.\(^{94}\)

The petition to the government signed by 51 Chinese residents seeking an inquiry into the riot and a request for compensation for their losses almost certainly had the assistance of Henley (Figure 8).\(^{95}\)

---

91 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 May 1861, 5.
92 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 1861, 3.
93 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 July 1861, 4; 18 July 1861, 4.
94 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 July 1861, 5.
Figure 8 Petition to the colonial government regarding ‘Alleged Aggression on the Chinese at Back Creek and Lambing Flat’ on 30 June 1861

Note: On pages 1–7, there were four other petitions regarding ‘Alleged Aggression upon Chinese at Lambing Flat’ from individual Chinese residents of Lambing Flat.


Figure 9 ‘Let them send commissioners enough to attend to these disputes’

Source: Sydney Morning Herald, 20 July 1861, 4.

Hux was forced to move to Yass for a short time because of death threats from people who, not for the first time, did not like what he wrote, but, as noted in the epigraph, he was fearless in his reporting and in his desire to do so accurately. With far too few police and government officials to maintain law and order, many disturbances could not be dealt with. The same observation applied to problems of management, though these were often the fault of the government and its regulations, rather than the local officials (Figure 9).
The riots on 30 June were the last major disturbances in Lambing Flat. Although tensions continued, over the following months, the situation gradually improved, due in no small measure to some diligent officials who worked in the district, such as the highly regarded Captain J.L. Wilkie of the 12th Regiment. When he died suddenly, the town closed for his funeral, during which more than 3,000 diggers marched and large numbers lined the streets. The improving situation in Lambing Flat may also have been helped by some miners moving to the newly opened Lachlan diggings (some 145 kilometres away) and to New Zealand, along with a greater number of miners from Victoria, ‘who, as a rule, look upon Commissioners’ decisions as final’. And, it must be remembered, not all of the residents of Lambing Flat shared the views of what may or may not have been the anti-Chinese majority.

Among Hux’s accounts of continuing troubles, there was information on the goldmining areas and gold production, but European–Chinese relations and the persecution of the Chinese dominated his reports from Lambing Flat. He deplored the lawless treatment of the Chinese, and in this he was supported by the editorial position of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. It was not that the anti-Chinese activities were unique to the Lambing Flat goldfields, but, culminating in the 30 June riots, they were perhaps the worst experienced in Australia.

The reports of Hux and the other ‘Special Commissioner’ provide valuable eyewitness accounts of one of the darkest chapters in Australia’s history—a chapter that has had a lasting impact. But their views were not shared by other eyewitnesses—namely, the editor of and others who worked for *The Miner and General Advertiser*, which was published in Lambing Flat from 2 February to 13 November 1861, and then in Forbes from 4 December 1861. In his book *Country Conscience: A History of the New South Wales Provincial Press, 1841–1995*, Kirkpatrick provides a summary of the events, headed ‘The Black Mark of Disgrace: The Press and the Lambing

---

99 For example: ‘Sticking Up Appears to be Still Carried On with Impunity, on the Various Roads Leading to this Place’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 September 1861, 5.
100 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 February 1862, 5.
101 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 February 1862, 3.
103 For example: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 July 1861, 4.
105 There is an incomplete run of issues from 2 February 1861 to 25 December 1861.
Flat Riots’. Yet in this account, ‘the press’ is almost entirely limited to The Miner. Apart from denials by The Miner of statements in the Sydney Morning Herald, there are no references to any of Hux’s reports. The summary by Kirkpatrick and the reports in The Miner present a different ‘eyewitness’ picture from the one provided by Hux. The Miner and its editor openly supported the European miners and the Miners’ Protective League and were anti-Chinese and even more strongly opposed to continuing Chinese migration. They were extremely critical of the colonial government, the Fairfax company and the Herald’s ‘Special Commissioner’. The Herald was accused of inaccurate and misleading reporting. The Miner’s reports of the ‘monster meetings’ that took place are certainly different to those published in the Sydney Morning Herald. For a fuller story of Lambing Flat in 1860–61, the accounts in both papers should perhaps be read. But which are the more reliable?

The Lachlan diggings

From November 1861 to May 1862, before his work in Lambing Flat had finished, Hux was also reporting on the new goldmining locations in the Lachlan Valley—usually referred to as the ‘Lachlan diggings’ or ‘the Lachlan’. He wrote 21 articles about them. The first gold find was in June 1861, but the rush was over just two years later. The diggings were centred on Forbes, almost 130 kilometres from Lambing Flat. The distance and journey by way of Cowra did not give rise to any comment from Hux. On his first visit, he reported the population as ‘quiet and orderly’—a marked contrast with Lambing Flat. Hux was nonetheless concerned about the limited number of police in Forbes and the Lachlan diggings—which had a population of some 10,000—as he was sure management problems were going to cause ‘great trouble’, especially the frontage system of claims, which was quickly abandoned. There were ‘almost universal complaints’ over the mismanagement of the fields, as the regulations in the Gold Fields Act were not being applied. When one miner mentioned a regulation in that Act, the worthy official to whom he appealed laughed at the idea, and replied in a most grandiloquent way, tapping himself on the breast at the same time: ‘I am the law.’

107 “The Unblushing ‘Herald’”, The Miner and General Advertiser, [Lambing Flat, NSW], 9 February 1861, 3.
108 For example, The Miner and General Advertiser, [Lambing Flat, NSW], 3 March 1861, 3; 3 April 1861, 3; 6 July 1861, 3.
109 Sydney Morning Herald, 11 November 1861, 2.
110 Sydney Morning Herald, 16 November 1861, 6; 6 December 1861, 8; 14 December 1861, 6.
111 Sydney Morning Herald, 24 April 1862, 5.
But in the absence of the kind of problems that had affected Lambing Flat (there are no references to Chinese miners in his reports), Hux was able to concentrate on the goldmining and production. From late 1861 until early 1862, the Lachlan was ‘an established and permanent gold-field’, but just how productive it proved was open to question. Hux reported that there were robberies, and the highway robbers Frank Gardner and Ben Hall were active in the area. A brief visit from NSW premier Charles Cowper left Hux and most local people wondering why he had come. Still, there was much mining activity, some large gold finds had been made and the town of Forbes was booming. And, being the reporter he was, it is not surprising that ‘Mr. Hux of the Herald’ received a very complimentary mention in a letter by ‘Cosmopolite’ to The Empire on the Lachlan diggings.

A resident of Lambing Flat

Hux’s reporting for the Sydney Morning Herald came to an end in May 1862. A column in the Herald in late June referred to:

Mr. John A. Hux, for many months our Special Commissioner on the Gold Fields, a gentleman who has been residing on the Lachlan or Lambing Flat Gold Fields as Correspondent for this journal ever since the latter was opened.

After this, Hux wrote two ‘Letters to the editor’ of the Sydney Morning Herald, which, though on specific topics, also provide some details of his work as a reporter. Both were written from Lambing Flat, indicating he had returned to the town.

In late 1862, he had a change of career, taking over ‘The Albion Commercial and Family Hotel’ in Lambing Flat. More than 30 advertisements for his business appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald and The Sydney Mail between October 1862 and May 1863 (Figure 10). An advertisement for the 1863 ‘Burrangong Annual Races’ included ‘Mr. J.A. Hux’ in the list of stewards. How long he stayed at Lambing Flat is not clear, but a letter by Hux headed ‘Sir Frederick Pottinger’ appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald in July 1863.

112 Sydney Morning Herald, 10 February 1862, 5.
113 Sydney Morning Herald, 16 May 1862, 5.
114 Sydney Morning Herald, 14 April 1862, 5.
115 The Empire, [Sydney], 4 December 1861, 8.
116 Sydney Morning Herald, 21 June 1862, 7.
118 Sydney Morning Herald, 11 October 1862, 3; The Sydney Mail, 16 May 1863, 1.
119 Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Chronicle, [Sydney], 25 April 1863, 3.
120 Sydney Morning Herald, 25 July 1863, 7; The Sydney Mail, 1 August 1863, 10; Armidale Express, 1 August 1863, 4. Hux wrote in support of Pottinger, a senior police officer, who had been the subject of statements in the legislative council that were incorrect and without foundation; they related to events that had taken place in the Lachlan district, of which Hux had personal knowledge and experience.
Prior to settling at Lambing Flat, Hux—like so many of his time and especially those associated with goldmining—was almost constantly on the move, travelling widely in eastern Australia, from Melbourne in the south to the Fitzroy River in the north. Yet even his ‘settled’ time at Lambing Flat was not long, as at some time in the later part of 1863, he moved to Surry Hills in Sydney. What he did on moving to Sydney is not known, but it is unlikely to have been a move he would have wanted, and as it happened, it was his last move. After a ‘long and severe illness’ that lasted about 12 months, he died of heart disease on 21 April 1864, aged 38, at the home of his sister Mary on South Head Road. He was buried on 23 April in the Randwick Cemetery. His death certificate stated his occupation was ‘Publican’.

**Conclusion**

This account of the life and work of John Augustus Hux came about as a consequence of research for a biography of Charles Edward de Boos, and was triggered by the family connections between de Boos and Hux. Until the research was undertaken, the contribution of John Augustus Hux to writings on the Australian goldfields of the mid nineteenth century were unknown. Despite their wealth of information, little or no use has been made of Hux’s writings as a primary source of historical material. This is true even for local studies of Kiandra and Young (Lambing Flat).

Like Charles de Boos, Frederick Dalton and other reporters mentioned in the introduction, Hux travelled widely within Australia. Some, like Hux and Dalton, had worked as ‘diggers’. All had significant knowledge of goldmining. As the prime contemporary source of information, the newspapers could not claim to be always

---

121 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 April 1864, 1; 21 May 1864, 7; Death Certificate, Registration No. 1864/000508. See also records of ‘Burials in the Parish of Randwick in the County of Cumberland, New South Wales, in the Year 1864’, for the Church of St Jude, Randwick.
accurate, but the reports of this group of reporters were recognised by their editors and contemporary readers as providing reliable information and comment. And the extended nature of their work provided a consistency not present in one-off reports.

Today, these writings are significant primary documents from a critical period in Australia’s history. While not as prolific a contributor as de Boos or even Dalton, Hux’s writings are of equal value. Like them, he was a keen observer and an accurate and fearless reporter. From Kiandra, he provided firsthand accounts of living and mining in such an isolated location, with its frequent hazardous weather. His reports from Lambing Flat (along with those of the unknown ‘Special Commissioner’ who preceded him) are of particular value as a firsthand record of the disturbances and anti-Chinese riots that made such a mark on race relations in colonial Australia and the country’s subsequent history.
‘I am proud of them all & we all have suffered’: World War I, the Australian War Memorial and a family in war and peace

ALEXANDRA MCKINNON

Five members of the Corney family served in World War I. Four returned. The impact of this loss—and the losses suffered by thousands of Australian families during the war—lingers in archival records. This article focuses on Rebecca Corney (1862–1943) and her evolving relationship with the Australian War Memorial (AWM). Corney saw three sons, a daughter and a son-in-law serve. Her middle son, Lieutenant Hubert Hume Corney, known generally as ‘Hume’, was killed in action at Broodseinde Ridge in 1917. Extending from 1927 to 1942, Rebecca Corney’s correspondence with the AWM provokes a reconsideration of several objects displayed in its galleries. Her correspondence reflects a family profoundly affected by World War I, and experiences of grief and loss that extended beyond the confines of the conflict. This article presents a biographical profile of one family and a tentative exploration of the broader impact of individual grief on the development of archival records relating to World War I. Focusing on engagement between Australian families and the AWM, it explores how families engaged with memory-making and with the state in the aftermath of the war. It includes a biography of the Corney family prior to and during World War I, an examination of the collecting processes of the AWM and a consideration of the impact of these donations. Some of these donations remain on display today but are presented in a different context to that in which they were donated.

A family history

The basic details of the Corney family are found in official records and newspaper articles. Rebecca Louisa (née Robertson) was born in Kyneton, Victoria, to Frank and Rebecca Louisa (née Kennan) Robertson. Her father was an early settler in the region, emigrating from Scotland before 1858.¹ In 1885, she married Walter Thomas

Their first child, Walter Robertson, was born soon after, at Wilcannia, NSW. Two of their other children were also born there: Charles (Charlie) Frederick (b. 1891) and Hubert Hume (b. 1892). Another two children, Kathleen Rebecca (b. 1889) and Frank Robertson (b. 1891), were born in Melbourne. In 1894, a partnership between Walter Thomas Corney and two other men trading as storekeepers at Wilcannia was dissolved; some time after that, the family moved to Kyneton. Walter travelled to Western Australia and, according to his obituary, became a ‘well-known identity of Coolgardie in the boom days’, but the rest of the family remained in Kyneton. In about 1910, Rebecca became the first secretary of the local branch of the Australian Women’s National League (AWNL), a conservative, antisocialist women’s organisation.

At Kyneton, the Corney family was actively involved in the local community, as newspaper articles and announcements in the *Kyneton Guardian* reflect. The children attended Kyneton state school and regularly appeared in the lists of attendees for local dances and activities. Hume became secretary and librarian of the local Sunday school. Frank, the youngest son, went on to attend the Royal Military College, Duntroon, while Kathleen trained as a nurse. She married John Robertson (Jim) Duigan, a pioneer aviator responsible for the first Australian-made aircraft, at St Paul’s Anglican Church, Caulfield, in 1913. In their father’s absence, she was given away by Hume, with whom she had a particularly close relationship. Hume joined the local branch of the National Bank upon graduation from school. In an obituary published in the *Kyneton Guardian* on 26 February 1918, friends described him as ‘kindly and cheery’, but also ‘quiet and retiring’.

---

2 Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages [hereinafter Victorian BD&M], Registration no. 4073/1885.
3 New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages [hereinafter NSW BD&M], Registration no. 35195/1886.
4 NSW BD&M, Registration no. 38018/1891.
5 NSW BD&M, Registration no. 38571/1892.
6 Victorian BD&M, Registration no. 1906/1889.
7 Victorian BD&M, Registration no. 7064/1895.
World War I interrupted these daily routines. As the war progressed, many members of the Kyneton community enlisted for service overseas, including the four Corney siblings. Hume joined the Australian Imperial Force as a private in May 1915 and left Australia in July 1915 aboard the transport ship *Demosthenes*. Rebecca later wrote of her grief as she waved goodbye from the shore; in total, she would watch five of these transports leave Australia, as three sons, one daughter and a son-in-law embarked for service overseas. Hume served with the 24th Battalion at Gallipoli, where he was badly wounded in the leg shortly before the evacuation. After recovering in hospital in Alexandria, he proceeded to France. As a graduate of Duntroon, Frank was commissioned as an officer in July 1915 and embarked for service overseas in November that year. He was one of three Duntroon graduates from Kyneton to enlist and the Melbourne *Herald* reported that the ‘three Kyneton boys’ had ‘made good’. Frank served with the 25th Battalion at Gallipoli and on the Western Front, before being transferred to the 26th Battalion in October 1918. Charlie joined his brothers in April 1916 and served with the 101st Howitzer Battery. Kathleen volunteered in hospitals in London, on the condition that if her husband or brothers were wounded, she would be allowed to go off duty. Duigan enlisted with the Australian Flying Corps in March 1916 as a lieutenant. The eldest brother, Walter, remained at home.

The home front and the battlefield were closely connected. As the war continued, a group of young Kyneton women formed the Coo-ee Club, which raised funds to assist soldiers from the local district. Musical programs and charity auctions helped the club collect cigarettes and socks for soldiers serving abroad. The *Kyneton Guardian* reported that Hume and another soldier had received their Christmas presents from the Coo-ee Club; from the trenches, the men thanked the people of Kyneton for the reminder of home. The newspaper provided frequent updates on local soldiers and published accounts from men serving overseas. Hume described trench raids, artillery fire and the aerial battles overhead, alongside lighter stories and

---

16 Corney, Hubert Hume, HMAT *Demosthenes*, 16 July 1915, AWM Embarkation Roll.
17 Letter from Rebecca Corney, 26 November 1936, AWM93 12/11/548.
18 Carney [Corney], Frank Robertson, HMAT *Wandilla*, 9 November 1915, AWM Embarkation Roll.
20 Carney [Corney], Frank Robertson, NAA: B2455.
21 Corney, Charles Frederick, NAA: B2455.
22 Letter from Rebecca Corney, 26 November 1936, AWM93 12/11/548. This was also referenced in various newspaper accounts.
23 Corney, Duigan, NAA: B2455.
descriptions of ‘sausage-shaped’ observation balloons.\textsuperscript{27} This writing was published alongside other local news from the town, serving to emphasise a connection between the inhabitants of Kyneton and the men serving overseas. Accounts published in the newspaper were conscious of their intended audience, which included both families anxiously waiting for news of the front and soldiers searching for reminders of home, reading excerpts forwarded from family members. In December of that year, Hume wrote that he had received a parcel from the Red Cross only to discover that the pair of socks he received had, by chance, been made by the Women’s Patriotic Committee in Kyneton.\textsuperscript{28} The home front echoed throughout these written reflections.

By 1915, Rebecca Corney was president of the St Kilda girls’ branch of the AWNL but retained close connections to her former home. Kyneton-born women held a reunion at the AWNL conference in Melbourne in September 1915 and ‘gravitated together very naturally during recess, and social reunion hours and reminiscences of the old days at school in Kyneton were freely indulged in’.\textsuperscript{29} In 1917, the Kyneton branch of the AWNL and local Red Cross workers organised a meeting at the Mechanics’ Institute.\textsuperscript{30} The meeting emphasised the impact of the conflict on local families and offered a vote of congratulations to the families of local men who had received decorations for bravery, including Frank and Hume. There was specific recognition of Corporal Alexander Stewart Burton, VC, born in Kyneton, and Lieutenant Rupert Vance Moon, VC, who had been educated at Kyneton Grammar School. Neither had family remaining in the town, but they were understood as local men, nonetheless. Attendees were identified by their relationship to men on active service, furthering their link to those serving overseas.

On the Western Front, Hume and Frank earned the Military Medal and Military Cross, respectively, on the same day as their paths briefly crossed at Pozières. After his unit came under heavy fire, Hume volunteered as a stretcher-bearer, helping bring wounded men off the battlefield. He carried men across open ground to the dressing station, passing through heavy shellfire.\textsuperscript{31} As he prepared to lead the search for wounded men, he encountered a group from the 25th Battalion. Hume recognised their commanding officer as Frank, who had been badly wounded in the hand, but had remained with his men in the line for 12 hours. The brothers wrote to their mother about this chance meeting\textsuperscript{32} and Hume sent her his stretcher-

\textsuperscript{31} Corney, Hubert Hume, NAA: B2455.
\textsuperscript{32} Letter from Hubert Hume Corney to his mother, 7 April 1917, AWM 2DRL/0947.
bearer armband for safekeeping. When this news was announced back home at the opening of a Christmas fundraiser to support the war effort, students at Kyneton state school gave the brothers a round of applause.

Hume was subsequently commissioned lieutenant. In correspondence with Base Records, his commanding officer wrote that he was known to all ‘as an Officer of exceptional ability’, with ‘indomitable courage and energy’. He was transferred to the 21st Battalion shortly before British command shifted its focus north towards the relatively higher ground of Flanders and what would become known as the Third Battle of Ypres, or Passchendaele. On 9 October 1917, Hume led his men forward during an attack on Broodseinde Ridge. The unit came under heavy fire and he was subsequently reported missing. Another Kyneton man serving with the same battalion, Sergeant James Hutcheson Sandford, was also reported missing during the attack, and the *Kyneton Guardian* reported the double blow for the town. Rebecca received the news of Hume’s loss from her local clergyman. In a letter forwarded to her, his commanding officer wrote that Hume was last seen ‘gallantly leading his men during the attack’—a phrase repeated in later obituaries. In an official report, Hume’s commanding officer added: ‘He knew how to live, and, I feel sure, he knew how to die.’

After the war, the surviving members of the Corney family returned to Australia. Their father had died in Perth of an unspecified illness a few months after Hume’s death. Frank and Duigan had each been wounded in action several times, and Duigan had earned the Military Cross for action in an aerial battle over Villers-Bretonneux in May 1918. Frank remained with the Australian forces after the war and married a British nursing sister, Lucy Keziah Gooch, in 1919. For Rebecca, the loss of her son was devastating. Her early correspondence with Australian military authorities offers an insight into the broader impact of this conflict and is continued in her later contact with the AWM. She wrote repeatedly to General

---

33 Letter from Hubert Hume Corney to his mother, 4 December 1916, AWM 2DRL/0947.
35 Corney, Hubert Hume, NAA: B2455.
36 Corney, Hubert Hume, AWM Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Files.
38 Corney, Hubert Hume, Letter from Rebecca Corney, 22 February 1918, NAA: B2455.
39 Letter from Major Henry A. Crowther, 21st Battalion, to General Sir William Birdwood, 15 January 1918, AWM 2DRL/0947. This was republished in the *Kyneton Guardian* (‘Lieut. Hume Corney, M.M.’).
40 Corney, Hubert Hume, Letter from Major Henry A. Crowther, 21st Battalion, to General Sir William Birdwood, 6 May 1918, NAA: B2455.
41 Western Australia Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Registration no. 757/1918.
42 Duigan, John Robertson, NAA: B2455.
43 Corney, Frank Robertson, NAA: B2455.
William Birdwood and the Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Bureau for information and had her local member of the House of Representatives, Sydney Sampson, contact Base Records on her behalf. In February 1918, she stated simply:

If you can tell me any particulars or that I shall know more in course of time, I will be very much obliged—for I cannot believe that he is dead.44

Corney also wrote to the French general Paul Pau, who visited Australia in September 1918. Describing her three sons, she begged for any information about Hume’s burial and emphasised the shared losses of French and Australian families:

The third is the one I want you to help me with for I fear he will never come back; reported ‘missing’ afterwards ‘officially killed in action’ … I give his bright young life willingly to die for France and am proud to be his mother, but it would so comfort me to know he has a grave and that it is well cared for … I enclose the photo of my ‘missing’ boy with all particulars which may help you to find his grave or perhaps even to find if he is alive.45

Later Corney wrote that her daughter, Kathleen, had searched the hospitals in England, interviewing men from the 21st Battalion, and had written to the Wounded and Missing Bureau.46 No further information was forthcoming. After the Armistice, Rebecca continued to write to Base Records almost monthly, declaring:

Kindly pardon this lengthy letter but I cannot help it my heart is so full of my poor son … I will always search for him, as long as I am alive.47

In 1920, Hume’s body was recovered from the former battlefield, identified by his paybook in the pocket of his tunic. He was subsequently buried at Passchendaele New British Cemetery.48 After an unsuccessful request for the paybook to be returned, Corney’s correspondence with Australian military authorities abruptly ended.

Collecting records

Amid the devastation of World War I, the AWM began the process of writing the official histories of Australia during the conflict. The Australian War Records Section was established on 16 May 1917. Archives remain a central element of the AWM, alongside its function as both memorial and museum. With Lieutenant John Linton Treloar appointed as officer-in-charge, the section was formed ‘in the interests of the national history of Australia and in order that Australia may have

---

44 Corney, Hubert Hume, Letter from Rebecca Corney, 22 February 1918, NAA: B2455.
45 Corney, Hubert Hume, Letter from Rebecca Corney, 1 January 1919, NAA: B2455. A short translation in French was added by Base Records, stating, in effect, ‘she wants to find the grave of her son’.
46 Corney, Hubert Hume, AWM Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Files.
47 Corney, Hubert Hume, Letter from Rebecca Corney, 9 December 1919, NAA: B2455.
48 Corney, Hubert Hume, Grave concentration record, 22 April 1920, Commonwealth War Graves Commission.
control of her own historical records’. Soon after the war had started, Charles Bean informed the Department of Defence that he intended to ‘undertake to write from [his notes and] letters the story of the part Australians [would] play in the war’. This history could not, however, be written solely in his own words, but would instead be drawn from the experiences of those who served on the battlefields of World War I. Within the global catastrophe of the war, Bean saw the opportunity for a distinctively Australian story. Writing this history would require records from the veterans who had returned home, but also from those who had not.

As the process of writing the official histories began, the AWM set out to contact family members of the dead who might hold records of value to this work. The task began with a three-month trial in 1927 and continued until the mid 1930s. While most of those contacted had not been involved directly in the conflict, they remained profoundly affected by its consequences. Their responses were filed as ‘AWM93 12/11—Bazley’s circularisation of next-of-kin’, and this archive remains an unusual record. Arthur Bazley was Charles Bean’s assistant and a central figure in the establishment of the AWM. He had been given the task of the roll of honour circulars, which had been sent by the Department of Defence to next of kin, requesting biographical details of the dead that would assist in compiling the roll of honour and the official histories. Some respondents replied that they possessed letters, diaries, documents or other ephemera of lives abruptly ended on foreign soil. For these relatives, Tanja Luckins has suggested that the artefacts served as substitutes for the absent bodies of the dead, who were scattered on battlefields a world away from Australia. For the AWM, however, the mementos of lost loved ones were also a valuable historical resource, and Bazley sought to negotiate with these families for access to their records. The fact that it was the AWM that initiated contact, together with the breadth of wartime experiences the file series represents, distinguishes it from the broader collecting processes of the organisation.

Within the archives of the AWM, the file series has been little considered as an archive in its own right. Anne-Marie Condé has discussed the process of acquisition evident in the files and the emergence of the collections of both the AWM and the Mitchell Library in Sydney. In a study of 367 files, she explored records donated both by families and by returned soldiers, including some of the most

50 Charles Bean, letter to Commander Pethebridge, Department of Defence, 16 October 1914, AWM38 3DRL 6673.78. Cited in McKernan, *Here Is Their Spirit*, 34.
51 McKernan, *Here Is Their Spirit*, 140.
extensive files in the collection. She concluded that archival records held at the AWM record ‘little of the complex and anxious processes by which the records came into the collection’. In *Here Is Their Spirit*, a history of the AWM, Michael McKernan referenced the series as part of the broader process of collection in the development of the institution. He profiled the first and last files in the series, using them as evidence of the ‘strenuous efforts’ made by Treloar ‘to augment the official records by collecting personal records of men and women who had served in the war’. However, like Condé, he found that the impact of this file series on the broader collections of the AWM had been little considered. Beyond this process of acquisition, the records reflect not only the wartime experiences of their original owners, but also the subsequent experiences of their next of kin. They are thus significant as a reflection both of individual loss and of a broader national grief, with a lingering presence in the modern archive.

Rebecca Corney was among those who received an inquiry from the AWM, more than a decade after Hume had been killed in action. The subsequent correspondence extended from 1927 to 1942 and illustrates the shifting concerns and aspirations of potential donors. Corney appears to have been identified as a participant from her response to the roll of honour circular, which included a summary of Hume’s service. The first letter to Corney was dispatched on 25 October 1927. Her responses give not only a sense of how her life had progressed in the postwar period, but also some of the reasons many families failed to respond to the AWM’s initial requests. She initially responded on 11 December 1927, apologising for the delay and detailing her other obligations, which perpetuated the wartime voluntary work and emotional labour described by Bruce Scates in his article on ‘The Unknown Sock Knitter’. Corney continued to play an active role with the AWNL:

[I] beg to state that I am a very busy woman, being the Hon. Sec. of the South Yarra Branch A.W.N.L. with over 500 members & have not had any time to go through my late son’s letters & belongings—you can understand that I cannot send you anything in a hurry.

She was also a council member of the Friendly Union of Soldiers’ Wives and Mothers, which had been established as a support organisation during the war. This emphasis on work suggests that, while Corney’s letters lingered on the past, her daily life could not; time moved inexorably forwards. In addition, Corney wrote that, while the AWM letter had been addressed to her, she needed to consider the attitudes of the broader family. She had written to Frank regarding his own letters, but they both believed that the private records she held would probably be of little

---

54 Condé, ‘Capturing the Records of War’.
55 McKernan, *Here Is Their Spirit*, 140.
57 Letter from Rebecca Corney, 28 July 1928, AWM93 12/11/548.
use to historians or of interest to the general public. The same was true for Hume’s records. Responding to further prompts from the AWM, she reaffirmed her position on 1 April 1928:

I have been looking through them, but do not think they are of sufficient importance: when he was a non-commissioned officer, all his letters were censored & then he was killed so soon after he gained his commission so you will understand that he was not able to write details or records of the war.

The AWM also contacted Frank directly. On secondment to the Staff College, Camberley, he redirected communications to his mother, who had retained his war records. In the file series, Corney lists the records she held in her collection, vacillating between a desire to enshrine them in the AWM and a reluctance to part with letters and objects that were clearly of personal value. On several occasions, she sent an item from her collection, but each time asked for it to be returned to her.

The responses contained in the series suggest the complicated emotions associated with the donation of records, balancing the obligations and emotions of daily life with concern for what form remembrance would take after living memory of the war had faded. For Corney, her family’s wartime service was a source of both pride and loss, with remembrance linked to her family’s individual experiences. She viewed Frank as her successor as holder of the family’s records, and intended to leave ‘all my papers letters, medals &c to him’, although she also stated that she would like the AWM ‘to have some of them too’. In 1929, however, she stopped writing to the AWM, which concluded that she was among the many who were either unable or unwilling to respond, and the file was subsequently closed.

In 1936, however, Corney reopened the correspondence. Her personal circumstances had changed and she was increasingly concerned about what would become of her family’s records after her death. Frank had suffered a nervous breakdown, which prompted his early retirement, while Charlie had stopped speaking to other family members, which she attributed to a lingering effect of the war. Although she did not mention it, her oldest son, Walter, had also suffered a reverse in his fortunes, having been imprisoned for fraud in his employment as a bank manager. Corney emphasised the continuing impact of the war on each of her children who had served:

58 Letter from Rebecca Corney, 1 April 1928, AWM93 12/11/548.
59 Letter from Frank Corney, 11 May 1928, AWM93 12/11/548.
60 Letter from Rebecca Corney, 8 July 1929, AWM93 12/11/548.
61 Letter from Rebecca Corney, 1 April 1928, AWM93 12/11/548.
Charlie who was not wounded at all, nor did he receive any decoration, but he did his duty & gave up the management of a large station in Queensland … to go to the war & is never the same since—as he cannot settle down & is always wandering around the back country.\(^{63}\)

Both the AWM and the respondents understood that the donations were not only for the present, but also constituted a perpetual memorial. As with many correspondents, Corney emphasised that the records would not hold the same significance for future generations who lacked a direct experience of these losses; the dead would become an abstracted absence, rather than the individuals they had been in life. She sought advice from the memorial:

I now wish to send [the records] to you, whilst I am alive & able to sort them out & only send what is really suitable, as when I am gone, very likely everything will be destroyed, as unfortunately there are no grandchildren who would care for them.\(^{64}\)

Her family’s losses affected not only the dead, but also the living; the consequences of war were sustained not only by those who were sent to foreign battlefields, but also by those who remained at home and lived with the legacy of war. Through the loss of her son, and the service of her other children, Corney came to see a space for her entire family in the archives of the AWM.

Yet Corney remained reluctant to part with the records for the same reason as other respondents had agreed to donate records to the memorial: they were the last remnants of the dead. In 1928 she had explained that

they are too precious & as long as I am alive I like to have them with me—when I am gone, there is no place that I would like them to be.\(^{65}\)

She had visited Hume’s grave in Belgium in 1925, but remained preoccupied by his moment of death, continually revisiting the anxious months when she had hoped he had been taken prisoner, and the reality that ‘he really was shot down & buried in the mud & his body not found till 2 years afterwards’.\(^{66}\) Corney agreed to donate letters from her three sons to the AWM in 1936, and offered Hume’s war medals in 1942. She also enclosed the commemorative medallion sent to her after his death and the ‘little brass box that Queen Mary sent to all Anzacs in Christmas 1914 with her picture head on the lid & M.M. on each side’,\(^{67}\) in which the medals had been kept. Along with Hume’s medals, Corney included the bullet that had passed through his leg when he was wounded at Gallipoli, which he had kept as

---

\(^{63}\) Letter from Rebecca Corney, 26 November 1936, AWM93 12/11/548.

\(^{64}\) Letter from Rebecca Corney, 15 November 1936, AWM93 12/11/548.

\(^{65}\) Letter from Rebecca Corney, 28 July 1928, AWM93 12/11/548.

\(^{66}\) Letter from Rebecca Corney, 1 April 1928, AWM93 12/11/548.

\(^{67}\) This was presumably a tin from Princess Mary’s Christmas gift, which was originally intended for all Commonwealth forces serving on Christmas Day 1914.
‘I am proud of them all & we all have suffered’

a memento. Her desire to donate these objects seemed to have been compounded by the ‘awful War’ that had begun in the interim, and she died less than a year after her final communication with the AWM.

Aftermath

These records do not fundamentally change the histories of Australian service during World War I, but they contribute to a better understanding of the broader impact of the conflict. Letters home were being written not merely by a subject, but also to another. Records associated with the Corney family tell a broader story of loss; their brief responses hint at the continuing costs of war and the intricate networks that intertwined the home front and the battlefield. Corney ultimately donated a selection of letters from her three sons and objects from Hume. This included a ‘gun metal band with Fleurbaix on it—1914–1916’, ‘some Turkish coins’, ‘little ornaments’ and other items from ‘a little tin box of souvenirs [Hume] had collected & sent home to [Rebecca] in his kit-bag’.

The collection of files in the AWM archives relating to the Corney family incorporates three small folders of personal records, numbered sequentially. Hume’s is by far the most detailed and includes a small wallet containing leave passes and a prayer book inscribed: ‘Hume dear with love & best wishes from Mother.’ The personal records are as much about who Hume was in death as who he was in life and can be divided into two sections: his letters to Corney and Corney’s search for information about her son’s death. There are newspaper cuttings from the *Kyneton Guardian* relating to the awarding of his Military Medal and Frank’s Military Cross, an announcement of Hume’s death and descriptions of the memorial services at the local school and church. There is also a collection of letters from General Birdwood and Hume’s commanding officer after Corney’s inquiries about an erroneous report that Hume had been taken prisoner. They reflect a story repeated in thousands of households across Australia, as families attempted to reconcile themselves with the term ‘missing’.

Letters from the three Kyneton men focus on the home front. They received packages from the Coo-ee Club and various people in the town and Hume sent his mother news on local men serving abroad. For example, he wrote that Willie Hall

---

68 Letter from Rebecca Corney, 25 February 1942, AWM93 12/11/548.
69 Victorian BD&M, Registration no. 1247/1943.
70 Letter from Rebecca Corney, 8 July 1929, AWM93 12/11/548.
71 AWM 2DRL/0947, 2DRL/0948 and 2DRL/0949.
72 3323 Private William Wykes Hall, 21st Australian Depot Unit of Supply. Enlisted, 23 July 1915; returned to Australia, 18 January 1919.
was ‘looking very well & is in the A.S.C.’; Vernon Rogerson came over with the 4th Reinforcements & is looking very well; Walker Thomson ‘took my Photo & said he would send it to [illegible]. He was very nice to me.’ He thanked other writers for all the Kyneton news they enclosed and he visited the graves of the dead. Within the confines of what Hume was allowed by military authorities to write, there are hints of discontent with the war, particularly after he learned his brother had given up his position as the manager of a station in Queensland to enlist:

I am very sorry to hear that Charlie has enlisted. It is a great pity that he has to give up his position just when he was going to settle down. He is giving up a great deal & it is hard luck.

Yet he downplays the impact of the war itself in these letters home. Hume described a bullet lodged in his leg as ‘a slight wound in the leg, just above the ankle’, and Frank pronounced his injured arm a ‘very lucky’ injury, although he reported: ‘I cannot close my fist yet & cannot use two fingers very well, but that will all come in time.’

The records are as much a record of Corney herself as of her children’s service, documenting her reimagining of the war in its aftermath and her search for understanding after Hume’s death in action. There is no mention of the horrors of war such as shell shock or venereal disease. In the file folder of Charlie’s personal records, several items have no connection to his own service, including a field postcard addressed to his mother from Charles Hladky, thanking her for the cigarettes sent as part of the Southern Cross Tobacco Fund, which had collected funds across Australia to supply tobacco, cigarettes and matches to soldiers serving overseas. Otherwise, Hladky had no connection to the other letters in the file, beyond his brief interaction with Corney.

73 Letter from Hubert Hume Corney to his mother, 4 September 1915, AWM 2DRL/0947.
75 Letter from Hubert Hume Corney to his mother, 12 March 1916, AWM 2DRL/0947.
76 Captain Walker Henderson Thomson, 29th Australian Infantry Battalion. Enlisted, 16 September 1915; returned to Australia, 15 February 1918.
77 Letter from Hubert Hume Corney to his mother, 17 April 1916, AWM 2DRL/0947.
78 Letter from Hubert Hume Corney to his mother, 12 March 1916, AWM 2DRL/0947.
79 Letter from Hubert Hume Corney to his mother, 25 December 1915, AWM 2DRL/0947.
80 Letter from Frank Robertson Corney to his mother, 31 October 1916, AWM 2DRL/0948.
81 Each of the three Corney brothers who enlisted was hospitalised with venereal disease while on active service. This is not mentioned in correspondence with their mother.
Among the donations was an improvised stretcher-bearer armband Hume had created on the battlefield at Pozières, during the action for which he was awarded the Military Medal. It is now on display as part of an exhibition on the role of stretcher-bearers at Pozières. Hume himself was never officially a stretcher-bearer and he forwarded the armband as part of a Christmas letter to his mother in 1916:

I am enclosing a little souvenir. It is not much, & as you see was made by myself, but it was used by me doing my little bit in the Great Push.

Corney explained her donation with a handwritten note, which is not included as part of the display:

Armlet for Stretcher Bearer made and sent by my son then Corporal H Hume Corney at battle of Pozieres 1916 when he was awarded the Military Medal and his brother Capt. F. R. Corney for work done at same battle the night before—the two brothers met for a few minutes as one was going out of the trenches and the other going on to the battlefield to gather up the wounded. R.L. Corney (Mother).

The medals are no longer packed in the ‘little brass box’ alongside the bullet removed from Hume’s leg; they have been removed from their original context. These artefacts remain as a record of the man to whom they were issued, but they no longer reflect the aspirations and experiences of a broader community.

Exploring how the archives of the AWM were developed is a means of understanding how commemoration has evolved. This file series occupies an unusual space within the historical record, testifying to a deliberate construction of the archive. It represents a process of exchange between the AWM and families, shaping an emerging collection and, accordingly, the national narratives we have come to associate with Australia during the Great War. The files do not spontaneously appear in the archive, but are, rather, transmuted by those to whom these records passed—censored, edited and transformed as the narrative required. For Rebecca Corney, the records she donated were testament not only to the loss of Hume, but also to the enduring impact of the war on her family, and a legacy of service that extended well beyond the Armistice. In detailing her family’s service, she concluded:

So you see I had five of my family at the War, & was left here alone—after seeing the five transports depart. But I am proud of them all & we all have suffered—I think the one who was killed in action is best off after all—the others are never the same … if [the records] really are of value to the Museum—then when the time comes—I shall die happy.

---

83 Improvised stretcher-bearer’s armband, AWM RELAWM12579.001.
84 Letter from Hubert Hume Corney to his mother, 4 December 1916, AWM 2DRL/0947.
85 Note regarding improvised stretcher-bearer’s armband, AWM RELAWM12579.002.
86 Letter from Rebecca Corney, 26 November 1936, AWM93 12/11/548.
By their words and their deeds, you shall know them: Writing live biographical subjects—A memoir

NICHOLA GARVEY

In 1791 James Boswell published *The Life of Samuel Johnson* {LLD}, a biography unlike anything that had come before it; indeed, few have matched it since.¹ Written some 230 years ago, it was published to wide acclaim for its unconventional style in detailing the private life of its subject. Boswell’s subject, Samuel Johnson, was both his muse and his mentor. At the time, Johnson was the most celebrated biographer of his day. His approach was innovative and a stark departure from the usual style of the time, which focused on successes in public life and on pedigree and steered away from anything to do with the private life. Johnson, however, believed readers could learn as much from a person’s mistakes and foibles as from their successes, and that there was no better ‘instructive’ medium than biography:

No species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition.²

In Johnson, Boswell had the perfect biographical subject. Johnson not only aided the career of his young protégé with both access and freedom from censorship, but also was able to counsel the younger man in the ways of his own groundbreaking approach to biography. All told, Boswell spent 270 days with Johnson over the course of 21 years, capturing the subject’s ‘authentic talk’ and nuances, habits and patterns of behaviour. Boswell would, at the end of a long day with Johnson, write by candlelight throughout the night to capture the experience so that ‘none of the freshness and glow might fade’.³ Ultimately, Boswell went far deeper into character, nuance and private life than his mentor ever did so that, in time, Boswell became a more celebrated biographer than his subject.

The biographical theorist Park Honan has described *The Life of Johnson* as the first biography to utilise ‘expressivist anthropology’—a methodology that focuses not on the grand public gestures but on the smaller deeds and actions that often are more

---


revealing about a person’s true character and intent.\textsuperscript{4} In asserting this, he was agreeing with Plutarch’s contention that ‘the most brilliant exploits often tell us nothing of the virtues and vices of the men who performed them’.\textsuperscript{5}

This article explores the theme of expressivist anthropology in biography through my personal experience of writing the authorised biography of the Australian businessman and mining mogul Andrew Forrest. While it did not quite match Boswell’s two decades and 270 days with Johnson, my interaction with the subject spanned approximately 10 years and 100 days. This close and lengthy chronicling gave me insights into Forrest’s persona that no amount of research from afar could have achieved. Anthropologists call this close chronicling of life ‘field research’ and, according to anthropologist Joseph Casagrande, it is a challenging scientific undertaking because of the tricky balance between being a ‘participant’ and an ‘observer’. To observe properly means to participate, but to participate the biographer must be careful not to identify too closely with the subject: ‘If he is an objective scientist, he cannot go native, neither can he hold himself aloof and observe human behaviour as a naturalist might watch a colony of ants.’\textsuperscript{6}

While there can be no better place to understand the interior motive than by being with subjects as they go about their day, biographical portraiture undertaken in this way is inherently risky. The challenge for biographers pursuing an expressivist anthropological approach is maintaining the distance required for objective analysis. Although elements of Boswell’s biography of Johnson might be seen as panegyrical or overly fawning, this is offset by what the reader gains in the detail of Johnson’s day-to-day life.

\textbf{Who is Andrew Forrest?}

Andrew Forrest is one of Australia’s most successful businessmen, a self-made billionaire who bulldozed his way into the global iron ore industry by founding in 2003 a new mining company called Fortescue Metals Group (FMG). Iron is of course the key ingredient that goes into making steel—one of the most ubiquitous and important products of the modern world. What is remarkable about his story is that Forrest was able to achieve what some of the largest mining companies in the world have never been able to. Numerous global mining conglomerates have tried to break into the iron ore industry without success. The sheer size of investment


required to build an iron ore company presents an almost insurmountable barrier to entry, perhaps more than any other industry. Yet Forrest did it, and he did it without the backing of big business and without any personal capital. He was practically bankrupt, having even sold his family home, when he decided to break into iron ore, after a previous nickel-mining venture called Anaconda Nickel left him in a precarious financial position and his business reputation in tatters.

Iron ore is a lucrative industry. Fifty years before the birth of FMG, in 1952, Lang Hancock made his fortune after he discovered the largest iron ore deposit in the world while flying his light plane back to his station in the Pilbara. Hancock then sold the rights to mine the deposit to the mining company Rio Tinto. From the royalties alone, Hancock became the richest man in Australia without having to build any of the infrastructure required to mine the iron ore. By the time Forrest decided to enter the industry, it was thought all the large deposits had been found. He not only had to discover deposits that no-one believed were there, but also had to then build an entire mining operation, including 260 kilometres of railway line, road infrastructure, a deep-water port to handle bulk carriers carrying loads of up to 400,000 tonnes, not to mention facilities to accommodate up to 10,000 workers. Big mining is largely about big finance and Forrest raised more than A$2.9 billion in first-round finance despite his venture being a stand-alone start-up.

A number of things had to occur simultaneously for Forrest to pull off this seemingly impossible business feat, but perhaps the most important was the rise of China, which doubled the global demand for iron ore from 500 million tonnes to 1 billion tonnes in five years. For the previous two decades there had been barely any movement in demand, upwards or downwards. Forrest predicted the rise of China, raised billions of dollars on the back of that prediction and built the infrastructure required within 18 months. Pulling it off will go down as one of the most impressive business feats in Australian, and perhaps global, corporate history.

In the midst of building FMG, Forrest devoted whatever spare capacity he had to philanthropic endeavours. His initiatives in this area have been equally ambitious and include pledges to end Indigenous poverty, find a cure for cancer and eliminate global slavery. Yet, despite Forrest’s business success and his commitment to philanthropy, there remained a distinct whiff of scepticism in people’s opinions about him. While it was true he had an army of followers—people who loved, respected and admired him—there were many who despised him. A large part of this negative commentary was due to the fiasco of Anaconda Nickel. Many of the company’s backers, including ordinary ‘mum and dad’ investors, lost their money, and Forrest was the public face of Anaconda Nickel. There was an overarching cynicism, primarily in business circles, and a view that Forrest was a man not to be trusted. The issue of his trustworthiness was something I knew I needed to interrogate if I were to unlock his biography.
Things stick out when I am interviewing people. Sometimes I don’t know why I am struck by a particular statement, quote or opinion, but I find myself returning to it time and again, going over it in my mind, bothered by it because I feel it is important somehow but I don’t quite yet know where it fits. It usually resolves itself—in time. When I started on the Andrew Forrest biography, I was at the tail end of writing FMG’s 10-year anniversary book. During the course of my research, I was in a helicopter with geologist Eamon Hannon, Fortescue’s head of exploration. We were in the Pilbara—a remote part of Australia—desert-like, sparsely vegetated, hot and virtually uninhabited. He had taken me out to see what an iron ore outcrop might look like, how they explored for it and how they drilled for it. In the course of that excursion, I told Hannon about my newly appointed position as Forrest’s biographer and joked that I was not the first person on Forrest’s list to write his biography, or the second—in fact, I was nowhere on the list.

‘It’s doesn’t matter,’ Hannon said. ‘You got the job.’

As it would turn out, getting a job with Forrest was something of an adventure and Hannon was one who would know. Early in the FMG story, he was sent to the Pilbara exploration camp as the new head of exploration. Forrest had not let the incumbent, Barry Knight, know about his new hire or that he had been replaced. Things had not been going well and no reserves of iron ore had yet been found. Knight, who, compared with the others in the camp, had first-class accommodation—a second-hand caravan—flung open the door to find Hannon.

‘G’day, mate,’ said Hannon. ‘I’m the new head of exploration.’

‘Well that’s news to me, junior,’ said Knight and slammed the door.

Hannon knocked again, a little louder.

‘How about you and me walk over to that hill out yonder? The first one back gets to keep the job,’ Hannon said.

Knight studied him for a moment. He would not be surprised if Forrest had given the job to someone else, the way things were going. He was not interested in ‘walking out yonder’ for a bare-knuckle fight with ‘some long-haired yahoo’; the company probably would not survive the next few months in any case.

‘You can have the job,’ he told Hannon, ‘but you’re not getting the caravan.’

That was fine for Hannon; he preferred sleeping under the stars anyway and, according to Hannon, it did not matter whether I was first pick as biographer—I had the job and that was what mattered.


Interview with Eamon Hannon, Pilbara, Western Australia, 26 July 2012.
By their words and their deeds, you shall know them

Figure 1 The author with Eamon Hannon
Source: Author collection, 26 July 2012.

I tell this story for two reasons: first, to introduce the ruggedness of the Pilbara, where the Andrew Forrest story is based, where there is no mobile phone reception, no running water, where the best accommodation is a used caravan, where things need to be settled there and then and where a large part of Australia’s economic prosperity lies; and second, because this habit of hiring someone for a job without informing the incumbent happened all too often with Forrest. It happened to his head of finance, it happened to his head of human resources and it happened to me. People were rarely sacked; when they were replaced, they just had to move over, find themselves another job in the company or go elsewhere. But, for now, at least, I had the job as biographer.

But what struck me about that conversation with Hannon was that it appeared that, despite my inexperience in biography (having published only one book), there seemed to be an acceptance that I might be the right person for the job. I had done various bits of writing for Forrest on and off over the past five years and was now writing the company book.

‘You know him. You’ve worked with him. You’ve seen what he can be like,’ Hannon remarked with a slight sense of foreboding. ‘Well, good luck. You’re going to bloody need it.’

Those closest to Forrest understood that he was a far more complex character than his public persona conveyed. That comment from Hannon stuck with me: yes indeed, I have seen what he can be like. More than that, over the years of working with him, I have experienced what he can be like. I was both participant and observer. It was an invaluable window into the art of biography, but it was also challenging and taxing, and I am unlikely to ever work with someone as closely on their biography again.

Forrest called me in 2011, three years after we met, to ask me whether I could recommend a biographer to write his story. I had recently completed my first biography on a little-known and intensely private gambling magnate, Alan Tripp, which had just been published by HarperCollins. So, when Forrest’s call came, of course I thought he was asking me whether I was interested.
‘No, no, no. My advisers are telling me I need a well-known writer, someone famous,’ he told me.

Fame and his penchant to be associated with it were among the first quirky things I observed about Forrest. Over the years, I have seen him associate himself time and again with whoever was trending at the time, including Malala Yousafzai, Donald Trump and even Pope Francis. As a young stockbroker fresh out of university, he cold-called some of the biggest names in Australian business, and the benefits he gained far outweighed the multitude of rejections. In 1990, as a young man, he was in the Democratic Republic of Congo travelling around with a friend when they heard of Nelson Mandela’s historic release from prison. The two of them flew to South Africa, joined in with the street celebrations and decided to knock on Mandela’s front door. It was heavily guarded and they were rebuffed, so they instead went to Desmond Tutu’s house, where they were admitted and had tea. Instinctively, Forrest has, from a young age, sought out famous people, whether it be in politics, world athletics, religion or Hollywood.

So, when it came to writing his biography, my lack of fame told against me and I was quickly set straight that he was not calling to establish my interest in the project, but merely for advice on who would be a good biographer. We spoke about some obvious Australian biographers and some less obvious choices and he made some unusual suggestions, such as the US writer/demographer Malcolm Gladwell, the British historian Niall Ferguson and the Australian novelist Tim Winton, but ultimately he settled on no-one. I continued working on Fortescue’s corporate history, while over the next year Forrest occasionally floated the possibility of one biographer or another. But in the end, I was given the job. One could argue that I had reasonable credentials: I knew him, I could write, I wrote biography, but above all (and with the benefit of hindsight), I think I ended up with the job because I was a person Forrest thought he could control.

When I first started working on Forrest’s biography, the issue of control quickly became a central theme. His driving need to control, and his ability to orchestrate events and manipulate people to get what he wanted, was a dominant character trait. Like all dominant character traits, it was both an asset and a liability. It was also the starting point for the polarising effect he has on people. Forrest is a likeable character. Quick to smile, easy to banter, he is a larrikin with impeccable manners. It is as though, growing up on a 100,000-hectare station in the heart of the Pilbara, he had read about the mores and graces of the landed gentry in a century-old book. He kisses the hands of women and calls men ‘sir’, always opens the door for others and walks on the road-side of the footpath. I have no doubt that, if there was a puddle over which a woman must walk, he would throw down his cape. He is unusually tactile. He kisses both cheeks of women and hugs men often. He loves everybody and liberally says so. In fact, familiarity goes hand in hand with his charm.
Within the space of our first meeting—a three-day trip to Fitzroy Crossing in north-west Western Australia—we had become firm friends and, apparently, I was now part of the Forrest family. We were there at the invitation of June Oscar and other Indigenous women elders to help push through an alcohol moratorium. He seemed just as familiar with Aboriginal people as he was with others and invoked long family and country connections to gain trust and legitimacy. He knew how to connect with Aboriginal people and would speak personably and intimately with those he met: ‘I knew your grandmother when I was a little fella’ or ‘I skipped rocks with your dad’ were typical phrases he might use. He was exceptionally acute at finding common bonds with people from all walks of life. He has the ability to make anyone feel they are the most important person in the room. He builds people up, zeroes in on them and makes a person feel they are part of his inner circle. The effect it has on people is both varied and extraordinary. For some, it might be described as intoxicating. On a business trip to Japan in the 1980s, he convinced his business partner Albert Wong that Wong could speak Japanese even though he knew only a few phrases. ‘One thing about Andrew is that he can make people do things they wouldn’t otherwise think possible,’ said Wong:

He has this ability to boost one’s confidence, you felt you were invincible. I remember we were in Japan, and I couldn’t really speak Japanese and Andrew said, ‘Yes, you can’, and for some reason I thought I could speak Japanese for a while, but in fact all I was doing was speaking English with a Japanese accent.

After the trip to Fitzroy Crossing, I, too, drank the ‘Forrest Kool-Aid’, but did I really believe I was part of the Forrest family? No; at least, not yet. At the time, he struck me as someone who lived fully in the moment and who bored easily. His overenthusiasm and abundant compliments came across as a touch disingenuous, but I still liked him, and his showmanship was highly entertaining. He was good fun to be with and seemed not to take himself too seriously; even his mobile ring tone was amusing: the whistled theme tune from the Clint Eastwood film The Good, The Bad and The Ugly.

Other people, however, could not abide him. For some, his swagger and overeffusiveness made him seem too ‘salesy’ and, by extension, untrustworthy. Despite the detractors, Forrest’s charm was without doubt one of his most effective methods of getting what he wanted.

Control was the entire impetus behind his search for a biographer in the first place. There was an unauthorised biography being written about him by journalist Andrew Burrell, commissioned by Melbourne publisher Black Inc. For someone like Forrest, so preoccupied with being in control, it got under his skin that someone was attempting to tell his life story. Burrell worked as a financial journalist for

---

9 Interview with Albert Wong, 17 March 2014.
*The Australian* and had covered the mining boom since 2006 so, on the face of it, he at least had industry understanding. Forrest would constantly grumble about Burrell being a mediocre journalist *at best*, citing this or that example of him ‘getting it wrong’. He had even tried to pay Burrell to drop the project. He told Burrell he would match whatever Black Inc. was paying him if he would just … go away. But Burrell persisted and so Forrest instructed everyone he knew not to talk to him, and mostly he was successful.

If charm did not work, Forrest had other methods to exert control. He could be highly combative and had no compunction about crossing swords with anyone. I discovered that people were wary about speaking candidly of Forrest. Even after he had phoned or written to someone notifying them that they had free rein to tell me anything, I always detected a slight reticence, as though people were carefully choosing their words. Little by little, however, there were patterns of behaviour that kept resurfacing. His combativeness was one such trait, and not just in business circles. He could be equally bellicose in philanthropy as towards journalists attempting to write his unauthorised biography.10 For Forrest, charm and pugnacity were as complementary as salt was to pepper in his pursuit of control.

While most people were cautious about speaking out against Forrest, Simon Lill, an old school friend, seemed to have a longstanding grudge against him, a seething contempt that at first I found hard to comprehend.11 They had attended the same private school, lived together as young adults and had worked together in stockbroking. It was at a time when stockbroking in Western Australia resembled the Wild West—anything went. In the 1980s, the government began cracking down on insider trading, which was rife, and Lill fell foul of the new regulations and ended up spending a year in prison. By the time he got out, Forrest had already set up his first mining company, Anaconda Nickel, and offered Lill a job. One day, Forrest, Lill and a few others were sitting around the board table when Lill said something disagreeable to Forrest—perhaps he was rude or interrupted someone, which was a huge Forrest bugbear stemming from his chronic stutter as a kid. Perhaps Lill said something a bit too familiar. Lill could not perfectly recollect what it was, but three decades later, he remembered the sting of the rebuke. Forrest put him squarely in his place. Until that moment, Lill considered himself a peer, but after that meeting, he was in no doubt about his position in the hierarchy. Forrest was the boss, and Lill had better not forget it.

---

10 Throughout 2014 and 2015, Forrest worked closely with the Vatican on his ‘ending global slavery’ agenda. However, he ended up falling out with the highest echelons of the Papal administration essentially due to the issue of control and Forrest not wanting to cede it to the Vatican. He has fallen out with Indigenous groups, too, when they have challenged his authority or decisions.
11 Interview with Simon Lill, November 2012.
This was not the only example of Forrest coldly putting employees in their place. His butler of 10 years, John—who drives the family around Perth and is valet in various other aspects of life—is with the family day in and day out. He is a genial man, eager to please, unassuming and compliant, and about the same age as Forrest. One year, he was invited to spend Christmas with the family at their farm. He told of the joking playfulness and then suddenly, out of nowhere, Forrest rounded on him. Seemingly, John had become a bit too familiar and he was put swiftly in his place in such a way that he was brought to tears. Christmas was ruined, for John at least. If Forrest used familiarity as part of his charm, it was a one-way street. He alone set the tenor of the ‘friendship’ and he was liable to change it at will.

In the workplace, too, I began noticing a similar pattern in the stories people were telling—the way in which Forrest would court people, flatter them, literally hug them, throw an arm around their shoulders, call them his family, joke and laugh … and then, whammo! I developed a label for this behaviour: the ‘kiss-kiss, kick!’ It was extremely effective. This excerpt from my draft biography illustrates this trait:

[In the early days of Fortescue,] Company Secretary, Malcolm James, was standing in the middle of the office and joked about being an iron ore company with no iron ore. Forrest leapt out of his chair and pulled him into a meeting room.

‘Mate,’ Forrest seethed. ‘If you’ve got serious doubts that we’re going to get there, then express them to me in private—don’t burden other people with your fears.’

Campbell was shocked. The coldness in his [Forrest's] eyes, the tone of his voice … He and Forrest had been friends for a while now, even their wives were friends, but this was something new. There was a side to Forrest’s personality that made people wary of him. He had an ability to make people feel like they were his best mate, that they were part of the inner circle but every now and again he would take a 180 degree turn and cut you down. He did it to almost everybody. Beyond the friendly, chatty persona was a character that could use words to slice a person in two. Yet this, at times, acid tongue, was amazingly effective at keeping people in check. If the Army employed a tactic of kick, kick, kiss to fortify the troops and engender loyalty, Forrest’s way was more kiss, kiss, kick. And when he returned to the smiling, friendly Forrest, as he always did, there was left a small kernel of wariness that kept people forever slightly on the back foot.¹²

I knew it was only a matter of time before my ‘kick’ came, and when it did I, too, was shocked and brought to tears. I was in the midst of writing the company book and had just spent a whirlwind five days in Western Australia, interviewing dozens of people, traipsing around the Pilbara. I landed back in Sydney on a Friday night after a five-hour flight. My husband and two-year-old son had just pulled up at the airport but before I could open the car door the phone rang. It was Forrest.

He wanted to know why the company book was not finished. I explained that I was still interviewing people. I told him your people have set these interviews up; I can't write what I don't know.

These are the words I remember him saying:

Is it acceptable to you that a key part of my marketing and engagement strategy is late? Is it acceptable to you that you are the reason which will hold this great company back?

Then he put me on hold. I got in the car in shock. I had barely had enough time to scratch myself the entire week and I had never spent so long away from my son. Emotionally and physically, I felt I had put in as much as I was able.

‘How was your trip?’ my husband asked.

‘Great,’ I smiled.

Inside I felt deflated, hurt and, yes, that I needed to perform better. I resolved that I would do better. That was my first Forrest kick and it (and my response to it) was a sign that I was going ‘native’. Or was it?

Biography is essentially about uncovering the truth. The truth of character reveals itself in the behavioural patterns of the subject. Honan alluded to these patterns by what he calls ‘feelings’ in biography. According to him, modern biography has two complementing structures: the facts of lives (the chronology) and the feeling of a life. ‘Modern biography,’ he wrote, ‘succeeds or fails through its structure of feelings … This always involves a tactic, a scheme of selection, and a method of handling the relationship between biographer and biographee.’ What he is referring to is the process of portrayal; what to include or exclude to paint a picture. While anomalies in behaviour can be illuminating in their own way, the patterns in behaviour are what reveal the truth about character.

In the end, Burrell’s biography did suffer from the lack of access imposed by Forrest. Burrell covered Forrest’s public life more fully and analytically than could be achieved in short format. Yet, although he achieved a chronology, his treatment of Forrest lacked the complexity of character, motivations and reasoning to lift the work to insightful heights. In Park Honan’s parlance, it lacked feeling. After its publication, Forrest’s feverish pursuit of a commissioned biography dissipated. Whatever he feared about Burrell’s book did not eventuate. He still wanted to continue with the authorised biography—in part, I think because he enjoyed having a biographer around as part of his retinue, but also because he is especially diligent about documenting history.

---


14 I have written one of two Fortescue books, as well as two articles to do with Forrest’s Indigenous philanthropy. He has also commissioned a historian to write the history of the family pastoral lease, Minderoo.
The sales of the Burrell biography were modest and, in response, my publisher was wary of producing another biography that might till similar ground. Having read my first draft, he advised me to go back and dig deeper as it, too, lacked ‘feeling’ and it needed to come at the story from a different vantage point. I had the unenviable task of telling Forrest that the ‘cradle to present-day’ story I had drafted was unlikely to attract interest from publishers. I pitched to him starting anew, but this time it would be all about the business story, an Australian version of *Barbarians at the Gate*, with all of the snakes-and-ladders intrigue that big business entailed. Until that point, which was about a year into the project, Forrest had been an awkward subject. He was almost impossible to book time with. For our first proper sit-down interview, I had flown to Perth from Sydney to conduct a three-hour intensive question-and-answer session, to broadly outline the details of his life. It was to be the first block interview of many, or so I thought. But things did not quite work out that way. Instead of the quiet sit-down, I was ushered into a chauffeur-driven car to attend the opening of a Linfox trucking logistics facility. *No problems*, I was reassured, *we can do the interview as we’re driving there.*

The three-hour slot I had been allocated was taken up with opening speeches, an Aboriginal welcome to country, a meet and greet with the Western Australian premier and a tour of the facility with Lindsay Fox, his two sons, a film crew and a handful of journalists. So, my interview was reduced to just 30 minutes en route to Forrest’s next engagement—a lunchtime speech at the Perth Convention Centre. As we cruised through an avenue of shops, Forrest instructed his chauffeur to pull over and he asked me whether I wanted a coffee.

‘Sure. I’ll have a flat white, thanks.’

‘John, mate. Can you run over and grab two *skinny* flat whites?’

*Interesting*, I thought. I am not a fan of skinny milk nor am I particularly body conscious. I was not offended but I did find it curious that Forrest chose to ignore what I had asked for. Over the subsequent four years, I was to discover that this was not a mere slip, an accident or a localised incident; it was a consistent theme. He was domineering. He took charge. He honestly believed he knew best, about *everything*. It was a trait that governed his personal, business and philanthropic endeavours. As I was to witness, time and time again, this attitude pervaded even the most minor interactions with Forrest, such as ordering a cup of coffee, and was painful to witness and, perhaps more so, to experience.

---

Money and power

When the acclaimed biographer Robert Caro set out to write his biography of Robert Moses, which became the Pulitzer Prize–winning *The Power Broker*, he understood from the outset that the book was really about power.\(^\text{16}\) Caro’s deep curiosity was with how power operated in reality, not how it was enshrined in legislation and legal codes. Moses had refused to cooperate with Caro, but after years of dedicated research, doggedly inching closer to Moses’s inner circle, Caro’s subject relented and granted him a series of interviews. At first, the biographer trod gently, teasing out his subject’s perspective on the many events in which he had been involved, but as soon as Caro broached a sensitive topic, such as the corruption that underlay city planning decisions, Moses shut the door and refused any further communication.\(^\text{17}\) Caro’s book was unauthorised but it allowed him to honestly consider his subject’s pursuit of power. After the initial publisher’s advance had evaporated, Caro and his wife, Ina, experienced many difficult years financially in pursuit of the truth about Moses’s life and career, and in particular the way he had learned to exert power and influence. It took Caro seven years to write the book and the result was an uncompromising portrait, which was widely praised, won awards and established the author as one of the United States’ leading biographers. My book about Forrest, by contrast, was not only authorised, it was also commissioned and, while that approach supposedly would remove obstacles pertaining to access, it also threw up many more issues. According to Hamilton and Renders in *The ABC of Modern Biography*, no biographer should enter into an authorised agreement lightly. Such an agreement will always involve giving up one’s independence.\(^\text{18}\)

After I told Forrest that I had to start anew, that I wanted to write a *Barbarians at the Gate*–style exposé about big mining, something occurred that I had not expected: he softened. He let his guard down, he gave me more time and allowed me to interview him and properly investigate his business story. Looking back, I think it was perhaps because I told him that I did not need more *money* to complete the task, I just needed more time. While much of Forrest’s story is about power, a lot of it is also to do with *money*—how it has motivated Forrest, his acuity in the employment of capital, how he uses it to manipulate people by withholding and promising it and his absolute obsession with it, despite all of his declarations to the contrary.

That decision to start again was both a good and a bad one. It turned out to be a bad decision for my personal finances as I thought it would take perhaps another year to complete a second version of the manuscript, but it ended up taking three. But it turned out to be a good move from the perspective of shifting the balance of power. Until that point, Forrest expected me to jump when he said jump. He would often give me no notice of his demands but expect me to respond without question. He once called unexpectedly and asked me to be at his Sydney office in 15 minutes. It was a Saturday afternoon and I got there in 30 minutes. When I arrived, he asked me why I was late, and then spent
just 15 minutes with me before going to see a movie with his daughters. On another occasion, I received an email from his secretary with a request to join Forrest for lunch. It was about 11 am. I was looking after my young son that day and, with no hope of getting a babysitter at short notice, I declined. Five minutes later, the phone rang, and it was Forrest. He rebuked me for not calling him personally to decline, rather than responding to his secretary’s email, with words to the effect: ‘Do you really want this gig at all if you’re not prepared to go the extra mile?’ I remember standing in the middle of a playground at a loss about what to say to him. Should I have responded to him directly instead of responding via the medium from which it was sent? I don’t think so. And that was what it was like working with Forrest—a constant kiss-kick. Forrest seemed to think people should be grateful for the mere opportunity of working with him, with no corresponding appreciation for their efforts. David Mendelawitz, a plucky young geologist who had started with Fortescue before they had even discovered iron ore, was called a ‘traitor’ by Forrest because he declined the role of mine manager. Mendelawitz had a one-week-old baby at home and did not want to be away from his family for weeks at a stretch. After all the hard work and effort Mendelawitz had devoted to the project, it was a statement he found hard to take. ‘I know where my loyalties lie,’ Mendelawitz said. However, when Forrest stopped paying me, he also stopped expecting me to jump when he said jump. ‘We’re now business partners,’ he said.

A curious thing about Forrest is that he is notoriously parsimonious when it comes to money. In the early days of Fortescue, this was necessary. Like all start-ups, for Fortescue, money was tight. Forrest would instruct his staff to wash their socks and jocks in the hotel sink rather than send it to a laundry. When negotiating with suppliers for the construction of a section of railway or road, his staff drove hard on pricing and Forrest would then ring and ask for a further 5 or 10 per cent off the agreed price, and he would always achieve it. It was a classic one-two approach to negotiation (as I was later to personally experience). He would send his staff in to negotiate hard and then when the supplier thought the deal was done Forrest would come in and negotiate harder still.

Staff were often paid well below market rates. The chief financial officer, Chris Catlow, took a pay cut, earning one-sixth of his market rate to work at Fortescue, and invested his personal money in the business, too. Again, this is not uncommon and is often necessary in start-ups. Yet even after Fortescue’s success and Forrest’s ascension to the spot as Australia’s richest person, his parsimoniousness never went away. He is even proud of it and calls it frugality. But is it frugality when other people are wearing the cost? On a trip in 2014 via the Vatican and then London, eight of us went out to dinner. When the bill arrived, Forrest made no move to pay and, in the end, it was paid by Raza Jafar, a Pakistani philanthropist and billionaire.

---

I thought it was strange that Forrest did not move to pay the bill given that we were all, including Jafar, his guests. I spoke to Jafar about it afterwards, having noticed this trait a few times.

‘Why does he do that?’

‘He’s not used to being a billionaire,’ Jafar surmised.

But it was more than that. If Forrest paid for something, he made sure to point it out.

‘I paid for the banana bread,’ he once said at a café inside Parliament House in Canberra. So what?

His secretary once described Forrest as generous. ‘Okay,’ I said to her: ‘Describe that to me.’ The example she gave was of Forrest donating Christmas lunch to a nursing home at a cost of about $350. I asked her to give me some more examples but that seemed to be the largest of them. It was odd because Forrest makes such grand announcements when donating large sums to charity, but then seems almost hypervigilant about the most minor donations. On another occasion, he was asked to fund 20 wheelchairs for disabled former rugby players. Given Forrest had recently started his own rugby competition, it was thought he might be open to the initiative. He demurred, saying he would donate just one chair.

My replacement as biographer

In 2015, I sent my completed manuscript to Forrest and agreed to meet him in Perth the next day. Dispensing with greetings, his first words to me were: ‘I’ve read the first hundred pages and I’m beginning to think you don’t like me!’

He was half-joking. He was also half-right.

I was starting to feel resentful at how long the project was taking (four years by now) and how he kept encouraging me to do more and give it ‘10 per cent more effort’. I think the words were: ‘You’ve given it your perspiration, now give it another 10 per cent of inspiration’, or some such platitude. The truth was, I was burnt out and flat broke, and relying on my husband to keep the family finances afloat.

The whole ‘we’ll be friends for life’ shtick was beginning to wear thin, too. He would call me ‘family’ but had no idea about my family. We had known each other for a decade and in the previous four years spoke at least weekly, yet he would never ask about my family. Every so often he might offhandedly ask, ‘What does your husband do again?’ I would tell him, knowing it would instantly be forgotten.
Over the next two days, we were meant to read through the entire manuscript but at the end of the second day we had barely reached page 40. It was excruciatingly slow, and I told him so.

‘This is important stuff. If you have to come back 10 times then that’s what we’ll have to do,’ he said.

‘I can’t keep going over the same ground with you. I have to finish so that I can move on to other assignments and earn money,’ I told him. He knew that I had not been paid a cent in three years. That made absolutely no impact on him. He would keep going over the same things, no matter how long it took. The issue was that he did not entirely like my take on certain events. He would keep repeating his version, as if on loop, I guess on the assumption that if he repeated his story often enough, I would change my view. But the more I got to know him, the more the patterns became clear and, as a biographer, it became impossible for me to ignore them.

Part of the problem was Forrest’s understanding of what an authorised biography entailed. Certainly, he should be able to correct his own statements or versions of events, but his influence on the text should not extend to other people’s versions of events. A good biography seeks to find the truest version of events based on all of the assembled versions. Following only the subject’s version of events is an autobiography. I tried, in vain, many times to explain how important it was to allow others’ views to be aired. Early in the project I had given Forrest a copy of Walter Isaacson’s biography of Steve Jobs. The point I was trying to make was that Jobs, a well-known control freak, had allowed Isaacson free rein. Isaacson was a well-known journalist, who had covered Apple Inc. stories over the years and knew Jobs. He had also published a number of biographies including of Henry Kissinger, Albert Einstein and Benjamin Franklin. Jobs chose Isaacson to write his biography because, he told him, ‘I think you’re good at getting people to talk’. Isaacson later discovered that Jobs was dying of cancer and wanted the public to know about his life in its entirety.

The biography of Jobs, I tried to explain, was not only highly regarded because of the light and shade it revealed of Jobs’s character, but because, by laying bare his failings, Jobs’s brilliance shone through more brightly. I might have saved myself $50. Forrest never read the book. His response to me was: ‘If you think a control freak like Jobs had no say on the book, then you’re kidding yourself.’ Was I kidding myself about Jobs’s non-censorship? I don’t believe so. Was I kidding myself thinking I could convince Forrest to lay bare the light and shade in his character? Apparently, yes. Forrest was just 55 years old and was more interested in manufacturing an image of

---

20 For a fuller account of authorised biography and the pitfalls of this approach, see Hamilton and Renders, *The ABC of Modern Biography*, Ch. 1.
himself than the truth of the story for truth’s sake. As biographers and historians, we strive for truth because we know just how invaluable an objective snapshot in time is. Forrest had not yet arrived at that destination. I think he was too young.

Hans Renders, of the University of Groningen, believes the ideal time to write a person’s biography is 10 years after their death, when the subject’s peers are still alive and have gained a measure of objectivity through time. While there are certain benefits to this approach, much can be gained from firsthand evidence—expressivist anthropology. I knew I needed to do things differently if I was to have any hope of moving Forrest forward with the biography. I convinced him to allow the writer and biographer Peter FitzSimons to read and edit the manuscript, as both an independent third party and someone with enough gravitas to help break the impasse. FitzSimons was my writing mentor; he was also Australia’s most successful non-fiction writer, the author of 10 biographies and a further 20 history books. He liked the manuscript and told Forrest so.

‘Great!’ said Forrest. ‘And you should be co-author.’

Rendered redundant

FitzSimons and I went out to lunch to talk about it. He wanted to know whether I would consent to him becoming a co-author and whether I was comfortable with him charging Forrest a sizeable fee for doing so. I was. My reasoning was simple: I knew all along that Forrest wanted a famous author for his biography; he had that in FitzSimons. I also feared that Forrest could keep dragging out the project for years. If anyone could corral Forrest and bring the book to fruition, it was FitzSimons.

Forrest agreed to pay FitzSimons a substantial sum to become co-author. For the deal to go ahead, I would have to sign over my rights to the manuscript to Forrest, which would include all future royalties. Until that point, I had been paid approximately $120,000, which worked out at around $30,000 per annum or approximately $20,000 less than the annual minimum wage.

‘Well, Andrew,’ I said, ‘I’ve invested just as much money into this book as you have, if not more. So, whatever you pay FitzSimons would surely also be offered to me?’

His exact words were: ‘Don’t be ridiculous.’ Then he suggested that if I did not want to be involved I could just ‘step away’.

And just like that, in Forrest’s mind, I had served my purpose. I had been replaced. Except that, according to Australian law, he did not own the manuscript; I did. Irrespective of whether he commissioned the project, it remains my intellectual property and on that there was no grey area.
A week or two went past and one of Forrest’s personal assistants called to strike a deal. The agreement was for half of what FitzSimons would be paid. I received a text from Forrest to meet him for breakfast the following morning in Sydney. He only had 15 minutes, so he got straight down to business. Half of FitzSimons’s deal was too much and he negotiated $15,000 less. (Ah, the old one-two.) It was the same tactic he used on all his business transactions; send someone in to negotiate a deal and then he would push for more. I remember sitting there thinking, in the time it has taken me to drink this cup of coffee, you’ve just made $15,000 in passive income.22 This is just a game for you.

‘Fine, Andrew. Let’s just agree on it and move on.’

Forrest quickly finished his breakfast and excused himself from the table. He had meetings to get to. Moments later, the waiter arrived at the table with the bill.

By their words and deeds, you shall know them

In the end, the book never went ahead. After he negotiated with me, Forrest then tried to negotiate with the publisher, Hachette Livre. He offered them 10 per cent of sales to publish the book rather than the industry standard of around 40 per cent. It was a strange and disabling time to witness Forrest trying to take complete control over the book, including the authorship, the publication, publicity and everything else that goes into getting a book on the shelves. He did not seem able to let it run its course in the hands of people more experienced than him in the publishing industry. Samuel Johnson called it the ‘tyranny of affluence’—those with great wealth also assume great wisdom over whatever they come across.

When Hachette Livre did not agree to Forrest’s commercial terms, he simply walked away from the entire project, without so much as a backward glance. His deal with FitzSimons never went ahead and his updated deal with me never went ahead either. I tried a number of times, over the phone and via email, to talk to him about moving forward with the manuscript somehow. I suggested he release me to do an unauthorised account, but he did not want that. He kept promising the book would go ahead. But as the weeks and months drifted by, it became: we will do the book provided you make certain changes. Ironically, one of the major changes he wanted me to make was regarding his pattern of not fulfilling promises. The months became years. I was never offered an explanation nor any acknowledgement of what I had invested, financially, professionally and personally. I never saw him again. That was three years ago.

22 At the time, Forrest’s dividend payments from Fortescue Metals Group were somewhere in the region of $400 million per annum. At the time of writing this article, his dividend payments were closer to $1 billion per annum, or $20 million per week, or roughly $125,000 per hour.
Johnson believed more knowledge may be gained of a person’s real character from manners and behaviour than from a formal and studied narrative of their public life. Boswell was given the permission to write Johnson’s life, including those episodes when Johnson had not been ‘entirely perfect’. It became an exceptional biography because Boswell was given full authorisation with no strings attached; nothing was out of bounds. That access paved the way for the first expressivist anthropological study, with Boswell as both participant and observer. Johnson believed biographical knowledge is at its fullest and most lively when it arises from direct acquaintance, but the closer the relationship between biographer and subject, the greater is the risk of partiality. Johnson’s ideal biographer managed to transcend this tension, combining close personal knowledge with a commitment to knowledge, virtue and truth.

Modern expressivist anthropology is as enlightening as it is difficult. I did not just see what Forrest was like; I also experienced what he was like, and that was far more visceral. With Forrest one of the most successful entrepreneurs of our time, I lament that the forensic detail of his exploits might never be told. Yet, those same traits that make him such an effective entrepreneur—control, domination, power—do not translate well outside the ruthless environment of big business. They have served him well in the boardroom and enabled him to achieve business feats that are truly remarkable. Yet when translated to the social sphere, these very qualities risk becoming intensely unappealing, and perhaps help to explain Forrest’s contested reputation. In the process of writing a biography that will never be published, I had learnt a great deal—perhaps too much—about Forrest and how he sought to project himself. But, more than anything, I have learnt about biography. As James Clifford remarked:

The biographer’s perspective brings life together for us. And if the life does not take shape, if we do not in reading it encounter a distinct person whose voice, gestures, and moods grow familiar to us, then we judge the biography a failure.

---

REVIEW ARTICLES
Margy Burn, ‘Overwhelmed by the archive? Considering the biographies of Germaine Greer’


Germaine Greer is one of the few living Australians to have been the subject of two biographies, the first, by Christine Wallace, published in 1997 and the 2018 volume by Elizabeth Kleinhenz. Wallace took time out of working as a journalist to research and write her biography. After publishing a biography of historian Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Kleinhenz was inspired to turn to another source in the University of Melbourne Archives, the newly acquired archive of Germaine Greer. For her landmark biography, Wallace interviewed many people who knew Greer, including her mother Peggy, and also the friends, lovers and other feminists willing to speak to her. Wallace read all she could locate that Greer had written or was written about her; in the pre-internet days aided by her access to newspaper clippings libraries. She also searched for traces of Greer in archives including at Sydney and Melbourne universities and the Star of the Sea convent. Kleinhenz acknowledges her debt to Wallace, whom she quotes extensively. She revisits many of the same secondary sources and interviews some friends and acquaintances, including students and teachers from Greer’s school. For more than a year Kleinhenz ‘delved into’ the Greer archive at the University of Melbourne.

My interest in the Kleinhenz biography was aroused by what the archive might reveal about Greer. One reason for this curiosity was my involvement in unsuccessful attempts to acquire the archive for two libraries: the State Library of New South Wales in 1997 and later the National Library of Australia. In a further disclosure, after reading her book, I had approached Wallace about acquiring her research papers for the State Library once it became apparent that Greer had lost interest in selling her archive to it. Greer twice visited the National Library to discuss acquisition of her archive. I met with her agent in London and visited her Essex home to see it. The National Library made an offer for the purchase of the archive in April 2013. In October 2013 the University of Melbourne announced its purchase of the archive. Kleinhenz later contacted me to ask if I was willing to discuss my dealings with Greer concerning the acquisition of her archive, an invitation I declined.
Greer has assembled an immense archive over her working life, currently amounting to 82 metres in 487 archives boxes. Further instalments will be transferred at five-year intervals. She has long been aware of the importance of the archive. In 1994 she wrote to Wallace’s publisher indicating her disapproval of the biography project: ‘My archive, which contains thirty five years of correspondence, diaries, journals, drafts etc., and is the sole reliable source, will not be made available to Wallace or anyone else until fifty years after my death’.¹

Wallace chose Greer as a subject considering her to be one of the Australians who had made a significant impact on the world, having more concrete political influence than any Australian except Rupert Murdoch (CW, p. 204). Greer, she wrote, ‘was a familiar figure early on in my psychic landscape’ (CW, p. x). Like many other women of her time, Kleinhenz considers her life to have been changed by Greer. She said at an ANU literary event on 30 October 2018, where she was interviewed by Christine Wallace, that when she read *The Female Eunuch* in 1971 she was newly married, a secondary school English teacher and ‘all I wanted to do was get out of that school, have a baby and settle down somewhere in the suburbs … gradually it started to dawn … this isn’t quite the way I wanted it, and then I read the book and I thought … I’ve got to do something about this’.² She resumed her teaching career and bought a car.

Both biographies are unauthorised. Greer’s reply to Wallace’s approach seeking to interview her for the biography was unequivocal:

I think you should know that I deeply disapprove of literary biography. I positively contemn [sic] the concoction of the accounts of lives of writers still living, which tramples roughshod all over them and anyone who has had the misfortune to be associated with them. The kind of exercise you propose is the purest parasitism.³

Kleinhenz wrote of the reply to her letter to inform Greer of her plans, ‘she responded coldly—rudely actually’ (EK, p. 1). Greer actively discouraged her friends and family from speaking with Wallace. As Wallace arrived in the United Kingdom hoping to interview contacts, and Greer herself, Greer used her *Guardian* column of 31 October 1994 to knobble the project. ‘Those who wrote about the lives of living people, she opined, were akin to malign, flesh-eating bacteria that fed off living organisms and caused them “toxic shock, paralysis and death”. Other, probably libellous, epithets for Wallace included “dung beetle”, “amoeba” and “brain-dead hack”’ (EK, p. 283).

---

¹ Fax to Managing Editor, Pan Macmillan, 4 November 1994, MLMSS 8355, Box 1, Folder 3. Christine Wallace research papers relating to biography of Germaine Greer, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.


³ Germaine Greer to Christine Wallace, 21 January 1994, in MLMSS 8355, Box 1, Folder 3.
Both biographies take a broadly chronological approach and cover the same significant events. Both discuss Greer’s books, her journalism and her activities as a publisher of women’s writing through her imprint, Stump Cross Books. Both examine Greer’s relationships: with friends and acquaintances, her husband Paul du Feu, lovers and members of her family. Both touch on personal subjects, such as Greer’s relationship with her mother, childlessness, and her changing attitude to sex as she aged. Wallace set out to examine Greer’s impact in the three decades since she became a household name, to review and evaluate her principal works. Her book is not a conventional biography, she wrote, but ‘rather focuses on why she was so different from other second-wave feminists … It concentrates on the formative experiences and intellectual influences which made the woman, and her contribution, so distinctive’ (CW, p. x). Kleinhenz’s motivation was to consider Greer’s contribution to second-wave feminism based on ‘personal impressions about a movement from which I and my contemporaries benefitted … and to find out who she was—really’ (EK, pp. 9–10).

The two books cover much similar territory, with Kleinhenz’s account generally narrative in style, however, and Wallace’s more analytical. Of Greer’s commission from Harper’s Magazine to cover the 1972 Democratic National Convention, for instance, Kleinhenz simply notes that Greer supported the Kennedys, helping Sargent Shriver, who was married to Eunice Kennedy, to gain the vice-presidential nomination. Wallace reports Greer’s dismissiveness of the first visible feminist electoral presence, the newly formed National Women’s Political Caucus: ‘Womanlike, they did not want to get tough with their man, and so, womanlike, they got screwed’ and Gloria Steinem’s remarks to Wallace that the article was hurtful and depressing and, ‘if I had gone to another country I wouldn’t have felt free to judge with that certainty what was going on in this other country’ (CW, pp. 202–03).

The recounting of Greer’s experience of rape is another example of the depth of Wallace’s analysis. At a party during her third year at university, Kleinhenz writes that Greer was pestered to go outside by her assailant, who bashed and raped her in his car. On her return to the party the other boys were too drunk to realise what had happened and no one would take her home (EK, pp. 55–56). Wallace describes the incident but also reports Greer’s multiple accounts of it. Quoting a lengthy 1984 interview with Clyde Packer, a source also read by Kleinhenz, when Greer said, ‘I had lots of adventures then got raped and beaten up. I had affairs’, Wallace comments: ‘to speak of rape in the same breath as adventures and affairs suggests a striking lack of feminist consciousness’ (CW, p. 43). Greer described her attacker as a former Xavier College student, a rugby player. Wallace notes Greer returned to the subject in a 1995 Guardian column, writing that in this later account, the unresponsiveness of the other men at the party was explained by Greer as being due to upper-class male solidarity. Wallace then details a response to the article from an undergraduate who had been at the party and considered
himself a friend of Greer’s (CW, pp. 287–91). This man told Wallace the rapist was a high school dropout, not from Xavier; an AFL player and used-car salesman who gave students lifts to parties. The man had a bad reputation, but Germaine insisted on being introduced to him. When the friend found Greer sobbing, he wanted to call the police, to give supporting evidence; an offer she refused. Other partygoers confronted the attacker. Greer’s representation caused the man to speak about her apparent rewriting of history. ‘It just isn’t bloody true’, Wallace reported he told her. She quoted Greer’s 1972 _Playboy_ interview, long before either the Packer interview or _Guardian_ column were published: ‘My men friends were more bitter than I was’, she said, ‘lending credence to her friend’s recollection of events’ (CW, p. 290).

The writing about this episode demonstrates the strength of Wallace’s biography: sophisticated analysis following a forensic examination of all the sources available to her, including probing interviews undertaken with people from Greer’s past life.

So what advantage did Kleinhenz gain from the archive? The archive documents six decades of Greer’s life and work and, at 487 boxes, is a very large personal archive. In the National Library, only the papers of Robert Menzies are more extensive, at 639 boxes; Manning Clark comes in at 199 boxes. There are 33 series in the Greer archive including General Correspondence, Early Years, Major Works, Print Journalism, Ephemeral Publications, Publications By, With Contributions By, Or About Greer, to name just a few. There are many photographs and rich audiovisual content, much of which Greer has gone to some effort to acquire from broadcasters; there are also audio diaries recorded as she drove or walked her dogs. It has been widely reported, including by Kleinhenz, that Melbourne University purchased the archive from Greer for $3 million, but this is incorrect (EK, p. 7). That sum represents the cost of acquiring, transporting, cataloguing, curating and digitising the archive, as well as the purchase price paid to Greer (likely to have been in excess of $1 million). Most of the funds would have been applied to the two-year collection management exercise undertaken by a dedicated team of staff. Thanks to the donors who contributed funding to acquire and manage the archive, the university was able to dedicate unprecedented resources to individually describing each item in the archive, including applying multiple subject headings to support keyword searching and to improve discoverability. Up to 10 people worked on the archive for varying periods of time between March 2016 and March 2018. Access to the archive was closed for 16 months during the first phase of the work, when the major series were processed; the archive re-opening in March 2017. A second phase of collection management activity extended to March 2018.

---

To give an (admittedly extreme) example, two students worked part time for several months to catalogue each of the 551 double-sided index cards relating to Greer’s research for *The Female Eunuch*, matching the published text to references on the cards. The massive General Correspondence series occupies 120 boxes (an estimated 40,000 letters, which Greer filed alphabetically in one sequence). Each letter has been listed by correspondent and subject headings assigned to indicate the content: the listing for the General Correspondence series is 372 pages. All the finding aids created by the project team have been published online, providing keyword search access to the content of the archive. Team members also wrote articles and published blogs revealing their discoveries as they worked on the archive.

The reopening of the archive was celebrated on International Women’s Day, 8 March 2017, at a sold-out event featuring Germaine Greer and the archives team. Elizabeth Kleinhenz began to use the archive in 2015. While access was closed, from December that year, she read secondary sources and conducted interviews. Kleinhenz had drafted eight of the 10 chapters in the book by February 2017, just before the archive reopened. Speaking at ANU about the archive ‘gems’ she included in the book, Kleinhenz singled out letters from Clive James, including his judgement, having read the proofs of *The Female Eunuch*: ‘It is without question the most important single thing yet to emerge from our generation of Australian exiles’ (EH, p. 154). A fan letter from a young teacher, Helen Garner, is also highlighted; as is Greer’s touching 1980 reply to a French girl seeking advice about sex and leaving home (EH, p. 241). Kleinhenz makes good use of correspondence with Greer’s agent, lawyer, accountant and the commissioner of taxation to reveal her sometimes straitened financial situation. Other letters shed new light on Greer’s relationships: for example, with her lover Federico Fellini, a correspondence maintained until his death; and with Bruce Ruxton, whom Greer enlisted to get RSL support to better accommodate her aged father. We learn a little more of her relationship with Lillian Roxon, a friend she treated badly, who seemed to forgive her; also of Greer’s falling out with Jim Haynes, of *Suck* magazine, and Richard Neville over his writing about her in his memoir *Hippie Hippie Shake*. The 400 letters received from viewers after Greer’s appearances on *The Dick Cavett Show* are highlighted as opening up dramatic new possibilities for research on the impact of television. Perhaps the most fascinating epistolary revelation concerns John Attwood, a new ‘swain’ in Tuscany. It seems clear from Kleinhenz’s citing of correspondence from Greer’s agent, lawyer, accountant and the journalist Richard Boeth that they planned to marry; the archive also contains affectionate correspondence from and to Attwood. Kleinhenz concludes

---


6 Email from Elizabeth Kleinhenz to Margy Burn, 16 February 2017.

this episode: ‘The marriage did not eventuate. John and Germaine remained friends’ but does not speculate as to why, or what happened—an opportunity Wallace would not likely have passed up (EK, pp. 242–47).

Kleinhenz’s chapter on *The Female Eunuch* rightly heralds that little has been known about its writing until the Greer archive became available. Kleinhenz quotes early material written by Greer, including a synopsis prepared for a meeting in March 1969 with her Cambridge friend, the publisher Sonny Mehta (EK, p. 139). There are fascinating inclusions from Greer’s preliminary notes and an editorial that did not appear in the eventual publication, for example her statement: ‘I have suffered a great deal at the hands of women, nuns, nurses, sexual rivals, and I had as a result, no interest in their problems at all … I had made it in a man’s world and I reaped the fruits of the rarity of the phenomenon’ (EK, p. 141). Kleinhenz also reveals an early proposed title: ‘Strumpet Voluntary’. But, again, it is striking that Kleinhenz’s outlining of the book is mostly narrative, in contrast to Wallace’s more critical analysis of ‘feminism’s smash-hit best seller’ and its literary and feminist antecedents (CW, p. 160).

If it had not been preserved in the archive, moreover, much of Greer’s journalism would be hard to find as it predates the emergence of online databases of newspaper content. Some 20 sources cited by Kleinhenz derive from Greer’s journalism, either columns available in online editions of newspapers like *The Guardian* or from another major series in the archive, the 24 boxes containing 1,268 items of Greer’s print journalism. For example, Kleinhenz writes about Greer’s Carlton loft, where she lived after leaving home, based on a 1994 *Guardian* column (EK, p. 62). She uses a 1992 article published in *The Oldie* to write about Greer’s experience of depression (EK, p. 327). Publications by Dr Rachel Buchanan, curator of the Greer archive, suggest this series was underutilised.\(^8\) Kleinhenz could have made greater use of it to write about episodes in Greer’s life that are not well known and were not covered by Wallace. A major omission in Kleinhenz’s account, for instance, appears to be Greer’s visits to Ethiopia, which Buchanan describes as being the most significant collection of journalism records in the archive.\(^9\) Greer went to Ethiopia for *The Daily Mail* in 1984, with further visits for *The Observer* and a Channel 4 TV documentary in 1985. She travelled considerable distances with the Refugee Resettlement Commission convoys, as shown on a road map in the archive with the routes highlighted. She bought a camera (an audio diary records her trialling it and her anxiety about focus and framing); and there are 15 rolls of Greer’s negatives and proof sheets in the archive. In a presentation to the September 2017 conference of the Australian Society of Archivists, Buchanan describes Ethiopia as

---

being ‘threaded’ throughout the archive.\(^\text{10}\) She refers to a thick file headed ‘The true story of Ethiopia resettlement’ that documents Greer’s battle with *The Observer*: her two long feature articles were not published, and Greer has retained in the archive a photocopy of the paper’s cheque for her expenses and a kill fee. Greer also included a chapter on Ethiopian resettlement in her 1986 collection of essays *The Madwoman’s Underclothes*, an anthology Kleinhenz cites twice. By the time of the conference the University Archives had digitised and published a large selection of this Ethiopian material, which ‘showcases the scope and depth of the archive’, including the road map, Greer’s notebooks, the 560 photographs she took, the TV documentary and many of her subsequent articles which referred to Ethiopia. Buchanan’s text introducing the Ethiopia digitisation project refers to publications as diverse as a 1989 article for *The Daily Telegraph* on sex and food and a 2009 column for *The Age* about turning 70.\(^\text{11}\)

Kleinhenz was present at the 2017 event to celebrate the reopening of the Greer archive. In closing remarks Greer said, referring to her audio diaries: ‘There is for example a meditation on the Ethiopian famine which was a tremendous watershed in my life, which was actually recorded on a mortuary slab, because there was nowhere for me to sleep in the famine shelter’.\(^\text{12}\) Kleinhenz makes only three slight references to Ethiopia, however, the longest noting: ‘The time she had spent in developing countries, especially famine struck Ethiopia, had convinced her that Western urban society had lost touch with the most basic and essential human values as practised in other cultures’ (EK, p. 256). The Ethiopian photograph included in her book is taken by a press photographer, showing Greer with a group of children.

It is hard not to conclude that Kleinhenz found the extent of the Greer archive overwhelming. Indeed, she hinted as much at the ANU literary event, when she commented it was not an easy archive to work with—‘I still haven’t totally worked out how they’ve organised it’—and compared it with the eight boxes of ‘lovely letters’ in Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s archive, which were chronologically arranged.\(^\text{13}\) In her *Guardian* article excoriating Wallace’s biography project, Greer wrote that the archive, ‘would take five years of genuine commitment to read’ and would not be made available to Wallace. While this claim may be exaggerated, it seems clear that the year Kleinhenz spent examining the archive was insufficient. No doubt her plans were stymied by the closure of the archive in late 2015. Rather than

---

13 ‘In Conversation with Elizabeth Kleinhenz’, SoundCloud.
turning to secondary sources in this time, and drafting a substantial portion of the biography, perhaps it would have been better to renegotiate the date of submitting the manuscript to her publisher.

Picking up the story where Wallace’s stops, Kleinhenz’s book provides some new information in the 64 pages covering the next 20 years of Greer’s life. She describes Greer’s spending more time in Australia and becoming closer to her siblings and their families; her search for land and eventual purchase of a run-down dairy farm at Cave Creek in the Gold Coast hinterland; the bush since regenerated and its future secured through Greer’s establishment of the Friends of Gondwana Rainforest charity. Kleinhenz also touches on Greer’s attitude to Indigenous issues. As well as writing about Greer’s essays *Whitefella Jump Up* and *On Rage*, she reveals from correspondence in the archive that Greer regretfully declined an OBE, ‘Because my acceptance of such an award might conceivably alienate me from the aboriginal peoples I am trying to help and the Australian public whose attitudes I am trying to influence’ (EK, p. 343). And she reports more of Greer’s controversial journalism, in which Greer criticised people ranging from the Duchess of Cambridge and Mother Teresa to Steve Irwin—her column on the latter concluding ‘the animal world has finally taken its revenge’.14 Again, I found myself regretting that Kleinhenz did not mention that the archive contains the hundreds of vitriolic letters Greer received in response from Irwin’s irate fans. Kleinhenz’s closing chapter includes a lengthy account of the 2017 International Women’s Day event coincidentally held in the Kathleen Fitzpatrick theatre at Melbourne University. She quotes Greer, saying of the archive: ‘It is a big lump of hard evidence about the years when I have been on this earth’; and her advice to people who will use the archive: ‘just keep plugging on, doing what it is that you do, and just hanging on to your own rag of self-belief … Use [the archive] for whatever journey of discovery you’re on … be somebody who is earnest in your search for truth’ (EK, pp. 365–66).

Kleinhenz concludes that Greer’s contribution to second-wave feminism is significant because she challenged accepted beliefs, encouraged women to look hard within themselves and reached out and touched the lives of women everywhere. She confesses that she did not find the ‘real’ Germaine Greer in the archive: ‘the public Germaine Greer is also, pretty much, herself. There is no mask. What you see is what you get’ (EK, p. 376). She praises Greer’s capacity for work and ‘tends’ to agree with writer Fay Weldon and publisher Carmen Callil that Greer is a genius—not a conclusion I could draw from her book. On the opening page of Kleinhenz’s book she confesses that her knowledge of Greer’s personal life was sketchy when she embarked on the project. Her biography will fill out the gaps in knowledge for others in that position, point general readers to the existence of the archive and go some

way to alerting other scholars to its rich possibilities. It may ensure the committed reader returns to a library to check out Wallace’s book. But the Greer archive awaits a more thorough mining for a richer, more nuanced biography. Greer said at the International Women’s Day event, ‘I’m told there are a number of new biographies in the pipeline’¹⁵ and whether or not others come to pass, there will be many more journal articles, books and dissertations derived from the archive. As Marilyn Lake has noted, ‘Germaine Greer’s archive is interesting and illuminating and she is to be commended for making it available to us in all its candour … [it] will no doubt form the basis of many research projects for years to come’.¹⁶

---

¹⁵ ‘Germaine Greer Meets the Archivists’, University of Melbourne Archives.
Josh Black, ‘(Re)making history: Kevin Rudd’s approach to political autobiography and memoir’


Kevin Rudd, The PM Years (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2018), 652 pp., $34.99, ISBN 9781760556686

On 25 October 2018, Kevin Rudd headlined a function at Sydney Town Hall entitled ‘After the Crash: Australia in the World Ten Years on from the Global Financial Crisis’ (GFC). Following a panel conversation, Rudd dutifully signed copies of his new book, The PM Years, which had been officially launched just days earlier at Parliament House. Noticing my relative youth, he asked whether or not I was studying. I replied that I had just written an Honours thesis about Labor political memoirs, including his earlier work, Not for the Faint-hearted. He paused for a moment, prompting an immediate fear that I had made a faux paus. Eventually, he settled on an uncharacteristically succinct reply: ‘You poor bastard’.

Rudd’s self-deprecating barb, as well as the title of the book we referred to, tell us something about his approach to political autobiography and political memoir; they are a serious endeavour. A far cry from an older tradition of political memoirists eschewing any claims to the status of historian, Rudd is bold in his ambitions. That much is evident in the scope of his work alone. Few Australian politicians have required two large volumes to tell a comprehensive story of their political career; Menzies and Whitlam are notable exceptions to the rule. Rudd has produced two full-length books, replete with more than 70 pages of endnotes in total, which he acknowledges is ‘a feat not for the faint-hearted itself, even to read, let alone to have assembled’. His authorial ambitions are crystal clear in both texts. In the first volume, he sets out to: furnish the public with ‘an honest account of my own political formation’; encourage his readers to question ‘their deepest beliefs, values and vocational instincts’; reflect on the virtues of labourism as well as ‘the frequently sickening dimensions of raw factional power’; and recount his ‘battle royale’ with John Howard prior to November 2007 (FH, pp. x, xi, xii). Juxtaposed against this wide-ranging set of impulses, the stated goals for the second volume are politically narrow. Rudd seeks to: ‘provide an account of what our government delivered’;

better educate policy-makers grappling with the ‘complex challenges’ of foreign policy today; and, inevitably, conduct a ‘formal right of reply’ to his enemies’ version of the history of June 2010 (PM, pp. xii, xiv). All in all, Rudd demonstrates a wide spectrum of authorial ambition, necessitating an abnormally high word count and a pair of expectedly dense narratives.

For all the similarities in their size and packaging, there are fundamental differences in these two publications. The first volume is a political autobiography. Conforming to traditional notions of autobiography, the narrative deals meaningfully and at length with fundamental character questions about the author himself, including his challenging childhood, the importance of his mother in shaping his world-view, and an explanation of his theological journey. In fact, so much page space is dedicated to these revelatory passages that Robert Manne suggested that Rudd may have been in want of a more ‘courageous editor’. By contrast, the second volume is almost exclusively political in its focus, with enormous segments of narrative assigned for the dismantling of Labor’s 2010 leadership change. Seldom is this political narrative interrupted in favour of a philosophical reflection on personal values or private reminiscences. By conventional definition, Rudd’s first volume is a genuine autobiography, a medium intended to explicate ‘the history of a soul’. The second, by contrast, is political memoir pure and simple, for it ‘deals essentially with a person’s public role’. Though the latter may make for a more pointed political attack in the present the former is arguably far better placed to withstand the test of time.

There is something unique about Rudd’s framing of the first book. Beginning with a ‘Letter of Encouragement’, Rudd positions his readership alongside a class of ‘thirty or forty Harvard Undergraduates’ whom he taught in late 2013 (FH, p. x). The effect is not necessarily to belittle the reader, but simply to emphasise the seriousness of Rudd’s authorial mission. He is the man delivering a 600-page masterclass, and we are encouraged to be humble listeners, prepared to soak up his version of history and then sign up for a life of progressivism. On some level, the prerogative for most political memoirists is to encourage young people to join the party and engage in the fight, but few are as explicit about that purpose as Rudd.

Unlike some political memoirists, who bypass their pre-political lives in favour of the political story (Whitlam and Gillard are prime examples), Rudd gives extensive attention to his childhood, his family and his personal development in \textit{Not for the Faint-hearted}. In a chapter entitled ‘Towards a Political Vocation’, Rudd outlines the path that led him to work for Wayne Goss and engage in the political project of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the Queensland branch of the Australian Labor Party (ALP). Prior to that, 123 pages are used to outline Rudd’s pre-political life. Much of the first chapter recounts stories that predate even the author’s birth: he tells of his family history and of his ancestor Thomas Rudd, who ‘landed here as a guest of His Majesty on the Second Fleet in 1790’ (FH, p. 2); he tells of his father’s war stories, and of his mother, who he describes as ‘a woman ahead of her time’ (FH, p. 9). Indeed, Rudd’s mother is carefully curated in the first chapter as a placeholder for good values, a generous person who contributed to community life by often ‘taking in other people’s kids’ (FH, p. 8). He recounts in detail his early hardships, childhood illnesses, his time as a pupil of the Catholic Marist Brothers, and the impactful experience of his father’s death (FH, pp. 18, 22–24, 27–35). And following this, several chapters are spent delineating his early struggles with money, his intellectual awakening, his growing spirituality and his early romances. Though a more economical approach to syntax may have shortened and strengthened these early chapters, the narrative is mostly enjoyable to read.

There is a strong moralising undercurrent in this text, a dividing line that sets people apart as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. That the book should be morally assertive is no shock, given Rudd’s highly publicised Christian adherence. Indeed, he outlines the myriad ‘pillars of faith’ in his life to date, though these pillars are slightly indistinguishable from one another (FH, p. 55). The upshot of this proselytising is that Rudd’s depictions of friends, loved ones and former colleagues are measured up positively or negatively against this moral compass. Former Queensland premier Wayne Goss, is described as a ‘kindred soul’ in the way that he ‘thought and felt about the world’ (FH, p. 134). So, too, with Rudd’s wife Therese Rein, who is celebrated for her ‘loving support and counsel’ (FH, p. 216). In fact, the Rudd–Rein family is the central source of morality in this book. Rudd’s ambitious first attempts to sound out support for his own leadership candidacy are normalised because they are given the blessing of a ‘family conference’ on the ‘four-poster bed’, where all major family decisions were made (FH, p. 355). This is perhaps Rudd at his most striking, at once involved in the cut-throat Canberra lion’s den and still maintaining his innocent moral profile as a Christian man making family decisions on the family bed. By contrast, his factional opponents are depicted as morally broken or bankrupt. Stephen Smith is ‘the most ice-cold politician I had ever met’; Stephen Conroy, by 2007, ‘no longer had a Labor bone in his body’ (FH, pp. 234, 468). These aspersions are not just political, they are at their core highly moralised judgements about empathy, compassion and a humanism that Rudd perceives to be lacking in many former caucus colleagues.
On the political side of things, Rudd’s first volume offers a valuable window into the complex factional warfare of the parliamentary ALP in the first decade of this century. The Crean–Latham–Beazley leadership saga is narrated at length and in depth, though most of this narrative is furnished first and foremost to demonise the three ‘Roosters’, MPs Smith, Conroy and, of course, Wayne Swan. In Rudd’s words, ‘they hunted in a pack’ (FH, p. 233). Describing the aftermath of Beazley’s challenge against Crean in mid-2003, Rudd writes of a sense of alienation and disillusionment with his colleagues: ‘I almost reached a point where I no longer cared, so utterly dysfunctional had the caucus become’ (FH, p. 343). Mark Latham is given expected short shrift here: ‘Mark seems happier hating, and being hated, than running the risk of being forgotten’ (FH, p. 382). Swan is dismissed as being ‘not up to the job’ of Treasury spokesperson, and it is here that Rudd most obviously indulges in retrospective retribution (FH, p. 388). Naturally, the chapter outlining the formation of the Rudd–Gillard Pact makes for compelling reading as well, although the predictable foreshadowing of the 2010 leadership change is rather trite. Ultimately, retrojection makes these chapters less reliable as historical sources, but more revealing as expressions of surviving animosity. Rudd is simply retracing scars that have never quite healed over.

It is on questions of foreign policy and the Howard Government that this book begins to move toward the political historiographical style of the second volume. At the outset, Rudd writes that his electoral battle with Howard is the main theme of the book. This does not, however, account for the fact that the Iraq War is the subject of five chapters, and a large majority of the total endnotes. He explains his focus on Iraq thus: ‘[Howard] is totally unrepentant to this day, insisting his decision to go to war was right all along. [This account] is intended to provide a balance to the narrative before Howard’s self-hagiography becomes entrenched in the Australian historical memory’ (FH, p. 334). That Rudd should tackle Howard’s version of history is not unexpected, but the force of the narrative and expansiveness of the evidence collated in the endnotes is astonishing. Similarly, Rudd is frighteningly forensic in his retelling of the Wheat for Weapons scandal, which he describes as ‘the single biggest corruption scandal in Australian history’ (FH, p. 407). In some ways, these are simply episodes in the ‘greatest hits’ of Rudd’s parliamentary career, but they make a meaningful contribution to the historiography of Iraq and that of the Howard Government more generally.

The book ends with a rapid crescendo, in which Rudd becomes Labor leader, rebuilds the ALP’s brand ahead of the 2007 election, and suffers the heat of ‘Howard’s Dirt Unit’ along with his wife and deputy. An extensive account of the Kevin07 campaign is given. The most audacious inclusion—and possibly only new revelation—of these last chapters is an anecdote in which Rudd describes having his buttocks grabbed during a campaign photo by an unseen woman, who gave it ‘one giant, prolonged, well-coordinated squeeze’ (FH, p. 545). The joviality here
soon turns to the elation of Labor’s election victory, followed by a small epilogue outlining the Rudd Government’s greatest achievements, foreshadowing the second volume. Two major speeches—his maiden speech and a 2006 speech to the Centre for Independent Studies—are appended to the book, though these additions will perhaps be a little too much for most of the reading public. On the whole, the volume loses its strong autobiographical touch as the narrative enters the Labor leadership woes of the 2000s, and certainly Rudd abandons autobiography in favour of academic historiography when dealing with Howard and Iraq. However, there are clear autobiographical virtues in this text; its aesthetics reveal much about the author, and the importance of purpose and values in political life is espoused throughout much of the narrative.

Not so with the second volume, *The PM Years*. Rudd’s follow-up work, dealing exclusively with Labor’s period in government from 2007 to 2013, is a political memoir that abandons any pretence to autobiography, and quite often indulges in shameless revision of political history. Facets of this book may prove valuable for researchers in the future, but much of it is designed to skew the historic record in his favour, much to the detriment of his adversaries. The introduction is headlined ‘The Coup That Killed Australian Politics’, and one gets the sense that Rudd’s feelings of betrayal and heartache from 2010 have not dimmed in the slightest, no matter how much he may publicly protest to the contrary. According to Rudd, the historiography of the 2010 leadership challenge is essentially a battle between two models of explanation: in the first, Julia Gillard is drafted by the factions to take the leadership ‘to save the government from inevitable electoral defeat’ in 2010; in the second, Gillard decides more than six months before the event that she will challenge Rudd for the leadership simply because she cannot wait ‘to achieve her ambitions’ (*PM*, pp. xiv–xv). Naturally, Rudd argues the latter case. Treasurer Swan is similarly a target from the get-go: reflecting on his first ministerial line-up, Rudd writes that Swan’s ‘interests in numbers were more to be found in Newspoll than the national accounts’ (*PM*, p. 5). Gillard and Swan are the bogeymen haunting Rudd’s narrative in a manner than can only be considered unhealthy. This unhappy introduction greatly limits the potential of the rest of the narrative.

The chapter about the National Apology to the Stolen Generations is indicative of the flaws inherent throughout the book. On the one hand, it would be remiss for Rudd not to include powerful excerpts of the speech in this chapter. However, much of the chapter is simply a reproduction of the speech itself, all of which is already accessible online and in print. Little new is added to our understanding of the lead-up to this event. On the other, Rudd allows even this beautiful moment in his life to be tarnished by his hatred toward Gillard. He writes: ‘Julia said nothing much about the speech, although the following day in parliament she finally, almost grudgingly, conceded it was a good speech’ (*PM*, p. 36). Similarly, when recounting the momentous occasion of the announcement of Australia’s first female
governor-general, Quentin Bryce, Rudd says of Gillard, ‘Julia, who was agnostic on the question of gender, seemed nonplussed about Quentin’ (PM, p. 54). The Apology and the first female governor-general are legacies of which Rudd should be proud, but he does himself a great disservice by infusing them with his anti-Gillard obsession.

One of the great stories that this book tells is that of Australia’s response to the GFC. Several bulky chapters are set aside for this task, and Rudd spares few details. The central anxiety, given Australia’s dependence on overseas capital, was about ‘the liquidity requirements of the Australian economy’, which would naturally be jeopardised in the event of a global financial collapse (PM, p. 63). The collapse of the US investment bank Lehman Brothers is, of course, the point at which Rudd decided ‘the crisis was upon us’ (PM, p. 73). Helpfully for historians, Rudd goes further than some journalistic accounts of this period in an effort to situate Australia’s response in its international context. For instance, he records that around the same time as Lehman Brothers fell, ‘some twenty-seven financial institutions’ around the globe also collapsed (PM, p. 80). Equally interesting is the role of Australia in defending the American Insurance Group from collapse, which would have jeopardised 30 per cent of the insurance market in Australia had it been allowed to fail (PM, p. 81). International figures, such as British PM Gordon Brown, US Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson and, of course, newly minted US President Barack Obama, become crucial to Rudd’s narrative about the global management of the GFC. In the process of responding to the GFC, Australia’s international reputation was ascendant. Rudd’s pride in his successful advocacy of the G20, a leading international multilateral decision-making forum in which the world’s 20 largest national economies are represented, is well justified: ‘Not only did Australia have a seat at the top global table, it was now a permanent seat’ (PM, p. 190). However, the great stain upon these chapters is the absence of Rudd’s own treasurer from the narrative. According to Rudd, ‘the core policy work throughout this period was undertaken by Ken Henry, Nigel Ray and David Gruen in Treasury, Jim Chalmers in the treasurer’s office, and Andrew Charlton and Steven Kennedy in my own. Swan’s talent, in fact, may have lain in knowing to not get in their way’ (PM, p. 98). Given that Swan was highly visible in engaging in national and international forums and announcing government decisions throughout 2008–09, this erasure is untenable. Swan, by contrast, took the high road in his memoir *The Good Fight*, praising Rudd for ‘the role he played in the way we dealt with that imminent threat to the nation’s economic security’. Rudd’s airbrushing of Swan from this history is to the detriment of anyone seeking to better understand the relationship between the offices of Treasurer and Prime Minister in times of economic difficulty. If Rudd was truly devoted to serving the historical record, these chapters would have included Swan.

---

Of course, the other enormous challenge of Rudd’s first prime ministership was climate change policy, globally and domestically. There are attempts in this book to point to global climate policy achievements that Rudd contributed to, including the Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute, or the communique on rising sea levels issued at the Pacific Islands Forum in August 2009 (PM, p. 184–85). However, the Copenhagen climate change conference inevitably overshadows everything in this policy space. In fact, the tentacles of this global debacle stretch their way right through both volumes of Rudd’s writing; narrating the story of a United Nations (UN) conference on carbon abatement in the 1980s, Rudd writes in volume one, ‘Would that negotiations on a global climate change convention [in 2009] had proceeded as smoothly’ (FH, p. 101). This teleology is propelled chiefly by Rudd’s burning sense of injustice about the perceived legacy of the conference itself; ‘In cold hard policy terms, we had achieved remarkable success in the midst of a chaotic process. But back at home Copenhagen would be ridiculed as a failure and a farce’ (PM, p. 229). On the domestic front, Rudd adds nothing new to our understanding of his government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS); it is Copenhagen that drives this story.

Immediately following the ‘Copenhagen chapters’, Rudd establishes the Gillard ‘coup’ as the primary subject of his recollections. He perceives Copenhagen as the moment at which Gillard began agitating for leadership change: ‘Julia did not so much see difficulty for the government but rather an opportunity for herself’ (PM, p. 231). The Rudd Government’s decision to abandon the CPRS is given an entire chapter, and is used to blame Gillard’s office for leaking the story to Lenore Taylor (PM, pp. 257–64). Following a few short prelude chapters dealing with the Mining Tax, Rudd then dedicates almost 100 pages to the events of June 2010. He carefully lists all the people he believes to have been implicated, he argues that the oft-nominated trigger of the challenge—a Peter Hartcher story in the Sydney Morning Herald suggesting that Rudd no longer trusted Gillard—simply ‘wasn’t true’; and, as he has claimed many times, Rudd outlines the secret conversation between Rudd and Gillard on the night of 23 June 2010, a conversation in which he claims that she agreed to allow him more time, and then minutes later ‘reneged on the deal’ (PM, pp. 293, 307, 314). Four chapters are spent examining the historiography of the 2010 leadership change, including the accounts published by Gillard, Swan, Craig Emerson and Peter Garrett. Rudd indirectly provided the justification for this in his first volume, accusing his enemies of producing ‘an orchestrated defenestration of my character’ (PM, p. 570). In volume two, the purpose is clear: ‘the time for silence is over … for those prepared to navigate their way through an account of what I believe actually transpired in the lead-up to the coup, please read on’ (PM, p. 327). This is accompanied by an explicit suggestion to readers not interested in self-serving historiography: ‘fast-forward to chapter thirty-two’ (PM, p. 327). At the centre of these chapters is the spectre of Gillard, who Rudd describes as ‘a political chameleon capable of changing her position on
any issue at the drop of a hat, if it happened to suit her political interests at the
time’ (PM, p. 382). The forensic approach to the events of June 2010 makes for
fascinating reading and debate, but it must be said that it makes for neither good
autobiography nor political memoir. Political memoir accounts should always be
welcomed by scholars for their potential insight, but this type of analysis is the
responsibility of trained historians or those with some distance, and these chapters
only reinforce that point.

The chapters in *The PM Years* dealing with Rudd’s time as foreign minister vacillate
wildly between an outright assault on Gillard’s prime ministerial legacy and moments
of offhand civility and politeness. The phone call inviting Rudd to become the
foreign minister is described as ‘businesslike, but friendly’ (PM, p. 419). An episode
in which the pair discuss a Cabinet leak is profound: ‘she knew I wasn’t the source
of the leak … Occasionally, there could be civility in our relationship’ (PM, p. 484).
These pockets of humanity are stashed away among a broadly bitter narrative.
According to Rudd, Australia’s partnership with Indonesia was ‘completely derailed
in 2011 by Gillard’s unilateral decision … to ban live cattle exports’ (PM, p. 436).
On the Arab Spring in Libya and the initiative of a ‘no-fly zone’, Gillard is accused of
backgrounding against Rudd in the press (PM, pp. 461–62). Gillard’s carbon pricing
package was ‘wrong on so many levels’ (PM, p. 473). On asylum seeker policy, he
suggests that Gillard ‘had managed to lurch from one exploding cigar to the next in
her efforts to look tough’ (PM, p. 482). Even that mundane international conference,
the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), becomes grist to
Rudd’s anti-Gillard mill; a conspiracy is narrated in which Gillard reportedly sent
Rudd from the Perth CHOGM venue back to Canberra but simultaneously expected
him to continue drafting a joint communique in Perth, all of which he sees as ‘a ploy
by Gillard designed to humiliate her predecessor’ (PM, p. 485). By contrast, Gillard
in her memoir is uniquely kind to Rudd in her retelling of this story: ‘CHOGM
saw some of the best of Kevin Rudd’.7 Amid his anti-Gillard narratives, Rudd is
able to slip a few brief gems of foreign policy-making experience, including a crafty
piece of diplomacy involving Rudd, Myanmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi, the regime’s
home minister, and a letter persuading the latter to guarantee the former’s safety in
a democratic election (PM, pp. 443–44). Aside from this however, most of Rudd’s
narrative reveals little that is new about his foreign ministership, and that which
is new is exclusively to Gillard’s detriment.

The final two years of the Rudd–Gillard Government make for highly depressing
reading in this book. Expectedly, Rudd absolves himself of any responsibility for
undermining Gillard while serving as foreign minister: ‘I had kept my head down
for more than eighteen months’ (PM, p. 490). Given the volume of literature to
the contrary, this is hardly tenable. In the lead-up to March 2013, Rudd explains,

7  Gillard, *My Story*, 220.
a ‘sense of crisis was steadily building in the caucus day by day’, but does not accept any responsibility for his role in creating that atmosphere (PM, p. 515). Blame for the caucus spill on 21 March 2013 is attributed exclusively to Simon Crean, with Rudd writing sarcastically, ‘Thanks a lot, Simon’. The chapter dealing with his return to the leadership is entitled ‘Accepting the Poisoned Chalice’, and although Rudd finally implicates himself in the putsch against Gillard, he still seems not to understand the ‘eyes of liquid hatred’ he received from Gillard and Swan in the caucus room on 26 June 2013 (PM, p. 540). The rest of the book deals with Labor’s quest to win the 2013 election, an outcome that proved elusive for three reasons: (1) a media environment of ‘total war against the government by Murdoch’; (2) the fact that the ‘Liberals were totally cashed up and Labor had virtually none’; and (3) a ‘series of internal leaks from Labor campaign headquarters’, orchestrated by former Gillard loyalists (PM, p. 565). There is little or no introspection about Rudd’s own performance or morale in the campaign, though supporters and enemies have both critiqued Rudd’s efforts on the hustings in 2013; for Swan, Rudd’s campaign was only “selfie” deep’, while Bob Carr saw Rudd as a ‘tone-deaf campaigner’. Either way, Labor lost, and Rudd resigned his seat months later. Though the book does not deal with his post-prime ministerial afterlife, he leaves his reader under no illusion that the Turnbull Government’s refusal to nominate him as a candidate for UN secretary-general in 2016 smarted badly: Turnbull capitulated ‘to political pressure from Abbott, Dutton and the far right’, leaving Rudd once again out in the wilderness (PM, p. 176). All in all, there is little joy to be found in this volume. To the unprepared reader, one might say, ‘you poor bastard’.

Like his prime ministership, Rudd’s political memoirs are destined to achieve some of their goals, while others elusively pass by. Where he sets out to encourage his readers to reflect on their values, their life purpose and their political allegiance, he is likely to succeed. His political and philosophical exegeses are often clear and impactful, and the simplicity of the message he offers is deeply akin to that of his maiden speech, in which he argued that politics was ultimately about power being used ‘for the benefit of the few or the many’. Few could argue that he fails to offer a solid account of his own political formation. Where he seeks to disgust his readers by narrating the trappings and pitfalls of the ALP’s factional systems, he will also most likely succeed, though his broader message about Labor’s political virtues is hardly well served by his extensive anti-faction rants. On the flipside, Rudd’s attempts to extricate himself completely from the factional history of the caucus is transparent to any alert reader. In neither 2006 nor 2013 did Rudd fall into the leadership by accident. He, of course, conceived of his first volume as a ‘letter of encouragement’. Not for the Faint-hearted scores highly on this count, but The PM Years is its ultimate antithesis.

9 Kevin Rudd, Maiden Speech to the House of Representatives, 11 November 1998, in Rudd, Faint-hearted, 573.
There is perhaps less to be learned about policy-making in these accounts than in other political memoirs and diaries, such as Gillard’s *My Story* or Bob Carr’s *Diary of a Foreign Minister*. As a record of the Labor Government’s achievements over six years, Rudd’s *The PM Years* will be somewhat useful. However, measured against the benchmark of Rudd’s intention to enlighten an audience about foreign policy-making, his foreign minister recollections fall extremely short. There is something to be said about his account of the GFC, but, even here, his refusal to properly include the office of the treasurer amounts to a distortion of the record, something that runs counter to his sincere claim that writing a political memoir was his service to ‘the accuracy of the historical record’ (PM, p. 598). Despite the copious amounts of endnotes used across these works, there is little that is new or revolutionary in historiographical terms, and little that shines a light on how good policy-making works.

Both of these books are governed, to varying extents, by the presence of Rudd’s political enemies. In the first volume, it is Howard who performs that role, up until Rudd comes to government ‘blessed with a deputy who was competent, effective and loyal’ (FH, p. 563). In volume two, it is that same deputy who assumes the antagonist’s role, plotting ‘over many, many months’ to dispatch him from the leadership (PM, p. 597). Across both volumes, Swan is extraordinarily demonised (as are to some degree his peers Smith and Conroy) as a personal traitor to Rudd, and as an economic illiterate incapable of discharging his office. From go to woe, the spectre of Rupert Murdoch hangs above Rudd’s political narrative, a man whose empire is collectively described as the ‘third coalition partner’ (FH, p. 457). Despite all of these personal animosities, it is Tony Abbott who earns the moniker of being the ‘giant wrecking ball of Australian politics’ (PM, p. 594). In his prosecution of the case against many of his enemies, Rudd is clinically effective. Against Howard and his decision to go to war in Iraq, for instance, Rudd proves that Labor was on ‘the right side, if not exactly the convenient side, of history’ (FH, p. 305). He is arguably less effective against Gillard, who is reduced to a caricature in *The PM Years*. However, the great strength of the narrative in the first half of *Not for the Faint-hearted* is that Rudd refuses to be defined by enemies. Halfway through, that resolution is weakened, and in volume two, it becomes non-existent.

Finally, has this two-volume mammoth succeeded as a formal right of reply? Thus far, the odds are firmly stacked against the former prime minister’s accounts for a number of reasons. First, many of his opponents across the political spectrum have beaten him to the printing press by a number of years. As Mark McKenna says, ‘wait more than eighteen months in a 24/7 media culture and the subject risks being forgotten’. Rudd has simply waited too long to make his mark. Second,

these volumes have suffered greatly in the way of marketing. A surprisingly small promotional tour accompanied the first publication in 2017, and a marginally larger endeavour including a book launch at Parliament House accompanied the second. The first release was met with less than stellar sales, with journalists reporting that the first month saw less than 4,000 copies sold, while Jimmy Barnes’s *Working Class Man* was allegedly selling 8,000 copies per week. Similarly, *The PM Years* underperformed with less than 4,200 sales in the first two months of shelf-life, even factoring in the Christmas rush; “The book is projected to sell about a 20th of the copies sold of Gillard’s memoirs, weighing in at 73,000 and even fewer than Swan’s 6000 copies”. The statistics suggest, therefore, that there is a hungry market for Gillard’s testimony but not for Rudd’s. Time, of course, will be the ultimate arbiter of success in this protracted history war. However, for the time being, neither of Rudd’s volumes will achieve the serious political or historical impact that may have been desired by their author.

---

BOOK REVIEWS

Billy Griffiths begins this thoughtful, nuanced and beautifully written work with an admission: it is written by an outsider. The book is a reflection on the archaeology of Australia and its significance, but it is the product of a fringe-dwelling onlooker; a historian. In a similar spirit of full disclosure, I should warn the reader that I too am an outsider; neither historian nor archaeologist, but a philosopher of science. Worse still, an unreconstructed and unapologetic positivist. That is relevant, for Griffiths thinks of archaeology has having aspects of both a science and a humanity. Moreover, without quite saying so explicitly, it is clear that he thinks both intellectual traditions are of equal standing. Both essential; neither privileged. In contrast, in the project of uncovering and understanding Australia’s deep past—human, biological, geological, climatic—I think science, fallible though it is, is privileged. More on that shortly.

As noted above, this work is a reflection on the archaeology and archaeologists of Australia rather than a systematic history of its coming of age as a discipline over the last 60 years or so. Rather, as his analysis develops, chapter by chapter, three primary themes emerge. A fourth, usually in the background, is the growing technical sophistication of archaeological practice. Initially, that was largely due to the influence of the Cambridge school of archaeology and its emphasis on system, detail and documentation (let no shard or scrap of bone escape the sieve or the notebook). Thereafter, the growth was fuelled by the cross-pollination of archaeology, geography, geochemistry and palaeobiology. Thus the reliability of the deep Pleistocene dates of Indigenous Australia depends both on rigorous and scrupulous field methods (to ensure that samples are not accidentally contaminated from either older or younger layers) and extraordinarily refined geochemical and geophysical methods. For example, the current deepest dates (at about 65,000 years BP) depend in part on being able to tell when a grain of sand was last exposed to sunlight. But you have to make sure the right grain of sand is sampled; not one moved up or down through the layered deposits. This growing repertoire of technique is always in the matrix of Griffiths’s narratives, but it is rarely its central focus.

One theme that is a central focus, the first to emerge, the most persistent, and perhaps the most important, is the slow realisation of the great temporal depth of Indigenous Australia’s history. The book begins with John Mulvaney and his excavations in rock shelters near the Murray River and the Kenniff Cave in Queensland. He began excavating Kenniff Cave at the beginning of the 1960s, and those deposits proved
to date from the Pleistocene. At that stage it was supposed that Australia had no human history that deep (the Pleistocene epoch closed about 12,000 years ago). So this was the first clear signal of Pleistocene Australians. The final substantive chapter of the book walks us through the ups and downs of the search for the oldest Australian sites of human occupation—a tale including a spectacular overcall in the Kimberley, with a Holocene site initially dated (at one extreme of the error bars) to 176,000 years. The current oldest site—Madjedbebe—is reckoned at about 65,000 years (plus or minus about 5,000). This site is dated by a range of techniques, and so this estimate is probably reliable. The age itself is very striking; our species would not reach Western Europe for another 20,000 years and more. But so too are the artefacts found at the base of the dig. These include stone axes with the edges ground rather than flaked: a technique for stone tool working once thought to have originated with the Neolithic and the origins of agriculture, in the Levant more than 50,000 years later. Through a series of studies, mostly explored with biographic sketches of the key agents, Griffiths peels the onion of Pleistocene Australia, taking us deeper in time on the Murray, in Tasmania, in the desert country rock shelter of Puritjarra, but deepest of all in and near Arnhem Land. I should note that through this exploration of time's deeps, New Guinea barely gets a mention. While it is not part of Australia now, through the Pleistocene glaciations we were both part of the great continent of Sahul, and one possible migration route from Island South-East Asia was via New Guinea.

A second theme revolves around the idea of Indigenous Australia as a single sociocultural entity. As Griffiths sees it, early in the understanding of the deep history of Indigenous Australia, it was quickly realised that these Australians did indeed have a history. There was change over time in their material record, and in the lives recorded. But the initial attempts to understand that history took the form of continent-wide narratives. In exploring the archaeology of cave art, for example, in chapter 7, Griffiths describes Lesley Maynard’s pioneering three-stage model in which an ancient deep cave art is succeeded by Panaramitee engravings, which in turn is succeeded by somewhat more regionally varied forms of figurative art. Similarly, in his discussion of the Holocene, Harry Lourandos proposed a general model of intensification. Lourandos excavated eel traps at Mount William (Victoria), where local people had built an extensive network of trenches, extending and stabilising natural wetlands, and providing habitat in which the eels could both grow and be reliably harvested. Lourandos took this to be a signal of a more general shift to more extensive environmental engineering, and of the exploitation of a greater range of resources. A less brutal climate both allowed populations to expand, but required them to work harder for a living. Very reasonably, Griffiths sees these continental narratives as productive initial guides to research, but as knowledge accumulates, we repeatedly see them break down, as the importance of regional differences emerges. The trajectory of changes in artefacts, in material symbols, in the extent and nature of environmental engineering vary in important ways region by region.
Unsurprisingly, given its size and variability, deep history is a mosaic. That matters to Griffiths. *Deep Time Dreaming* is written in a generous spirit: he writes with insight and affection on all of his protagonists. But while this is not a book with villains, Griffiths clearly has a special sympathy for Isabel McBryde and Sylvia Hallam, two archaeologists with a special interest in understanding regions rather than sites.

A third theme is the most fraught: Indigenous Australians’ bid for an increasing control over their own history. At the beginning of this narrative, they are nowhere to be seen: Mulvaney digs; Bowler collects human remains from Lake Mungo without reference to the traditional owners. But early in the narrative, with Rhys Jones in Tasmania (especially Kutina), and in the making of *The Last Tasmanian*, and with Richard Gould in the western desert, the issue explodes. Traditional owners demand, and in the end are granted, full control over access to sites. This issue of the ownership of history has two aspects (at least). One is material. Who controls access to, and the use of, sites. Given the long and appalling history of dispossession, it is hard to resist the moral case for full local control, even when it seems to have been used arbitrarily, as seems to have happened in Tasmania (p. 230). However, there is a second issue lurking in the background. Who has authority over the narratives built from the excavations that do proceed? To what extent should we treat local cultural traditions as disguised but largely accurate histories? In a forthcoming essay in *Religion, Brain and Behavior*, Peter Hiscock develops a nuanced but sceptical view of the idea that Indigenous Australian mythology gives us and them access to the deep past: the past of the Pleistocene and the earlier Holocene. I share that scepticism. To think otherwise, we have to believe that narratives are transmitted more faithfully, by far, than the languages themselves. Moreover, in cultures with such rich oral traditions, it will always be possible to cherry-pick stories with a rough resemblance to independently attested events.

This issue is on the back-burner so long as the narrative from the archaeological sciences is congruent with the cultural self-image and interests of the traditional owners. Indigenous Australians can happily embrace evidence of an increasingly deep occupation; evidence of their central role in the formation of Australian landscapes; evidence increasingly sceptical of overkill models of the extinction of the Australian megafauna. Evidence, that is, of responsible Indigenous stewardship of country. These all support a positive cultural identity and give weight to native title claims and to an active role in land management. But there are potential fracture points. Consider, for example, a recent genetic study that suggests that genetic regionalisation established rapidly soon after colonisation. According to this study, local groups largely stayed in place, though with some intermarriage, for tens of thousands of years after initial arrival and spread. What could be better for native title? But there are reasons to be sceptical of this study. For one, it is based on a geographically limited range of samples. For another, it seems difficult to reconcile with the spread of the Pama-Nyungan language family over much of Australia,
apparently in the second half of the Holocene. Could language transformation really have taken place with so little movement of the peoples themselves? Third, where did those displaced by the rising sea levels that drowned much of Sahul go? As Griffiths notes (p. 287), close to 3 million square kilometres were flooded. Sea levels stabilised about 6,000 years ago, so surely many Indigenous Australians have their deep time ancestral lands under water. As a matter of law and logic, surely an occupation span of 500 years is long enough to establish connection to country? But 50,000 years certainly sounds better. So news, if it were to come, of a much more mobile and dynamic population history is unlikely to be welcome to Indigenous Australia.

Griffiths is sensitive to all these issues of ownership and of the status of the Indigenous narrative, but tiptoes around them. With the caution of youth, he makes no judgements, leaving these debates in the mouths of his protagonists. We often get an archaeologist’s judgement on the dates of a site interleaved with an Indigenous response, but with no further comment. He thus sits on the fence a little more than I would like. Moreover, I must, of course, leave it to those who were there to determine the extent to which he captured the temper of those exciting times. But for those of us—overwhelmingly most of us—who were not at Fromm’s Landing, Kenniff Cave, Rocky Point, Lake Mungo or Puritjarra, this work conveys a vivid sense of a new vision of Australia and its past unfolding. Moreover, Deep Time Dreaming is animated by the view that history matters: both real history—what happened and why—and our fallible but improving attempts to recover and understand that history. There is no fence-sitting on that issue. Minor reservations aside, this is a fine book, and one I read with great pleasure. I would expect it to grip anyone with an interest in our deep past and the lives of those who have studied it.
Anne Pender review of Paul Genoni and Tanya Dalziell, *Half the Perfect World: Writers, Dreamers and Drifters on Hydra, 1955–1964*


In 2016, I was one of a fortunate group of scholars who travelled to the Greek island of Hydra, to participate in a conference hosted by Paul Genoni and Tanya Dalziell. We gathered at the Bratsera Hotel, a renovated sponge factory located a short walk from the ferry terminal. After the fumes and noisy chaos of Athens the peace of carless Hydra with its pristine turquoise seas and mountain views was magnificent. The summer tourists were gone and we had the hotel to ourselves. Our group of scholars and writers, including Susan Johnson and Meaghan Delahunt, were entertained in the courtyard of the house that once belonged to George Johnston and Charmian Clift, a few streets up the hill from our lodgings, not far from the famous Douskos Taverna. A young Greek couple screened a documentary they had made about the two Australian writers who had made Hydra their home for nine years, as we sat outside under the grapevines in the evening. The Johnston–Clift house is almost unchanged since the 1960s but is now worth millions of euros. Hydra is close enough to Athens for daytrips and its proximity makes it highly attractive for wealthy Athenians as a weekend escape. There is not much to remind the visitor of the Australian writers, however, except that a few local people remember them, and it was a privilege to listen to their recollections at the conference. In fact, Leonard Cohen’s residency on the island, at the same time as Clift and Johnston, has eclipsed that of the Australians, with many a tourist climbing the steep hill through the labyrinth of alleyways in order to get a glimpse of the house in which Cohen wrote two of his books and lived with Marianne Ihlen.

Dalziell and Genoni have spent some five years or more researching the lives and work of the artists who lived on Hydra between 1955 and 1964. *Half the Perfect World* is that rare thing: a collective biography about a group of writers, painters, musicians and ‘drifters’ who accidentally congregated together on the island at a time when the rents were exceptionally low and the island was only just beginning to be discovered by tourists. This study of a disparate group of individuals and their struggles to create art on Hydra, connect with the locals and make lives for themselves and their families offers a major contribution to biography, Australian literary studies and modernist studies. It is a book that is not easily classified because of its wide-ranging subjects. It documents the work of many artists in a constellation around Clift and Johnston, who were central figures in the expatriate community. While Dalziell and
Genoni clearly acknowledge the attractions of Hydra, with its soaring cliffs, azure Aegean seas, golden summers and intriguing architecture, the tone of their analysis is decidedly unromantic, realistic and unsentimental. They convey the realities of living in a small, remote place that was extremely poor, where most food had to be brought in by boat and where there were chronic water shortages. The winters were harsh, there were few indoor toilets and no heating in the ancient stone houses. Athens was a slow ferry ride away, taking at least four hours each way. The island is still troubled by water shortage problems, the need to import much of the food and major waste issues. These difficulties have curbed the rampant development that has occurred on other islands but not entirely.

The title of the book comes from Cohen and Anjani Thomas’s song of appreciation for Hydra, with its ‘milky’ atmosphere, its glow described in the image of ‘the polished hill’. For them the beauty and sensuality is ‘transparent, weightless, luminous’. Johnston and Clift are the central figures of this book; their experiences, hardships, creative compromises, inspirations and aspirations—indeed their intense struggle for independence and success as writers—drive the narrative of this book. Much is already known about both Clift and Johnston but the strength of this study is that they are rendered here from other people’s viewpoints, from the observations of other key subjects of the book as well as from their own points of view in their own writing. In this, Genoni and Dalziell have achieved an evenness and refreshing originality of approach to the lives of two iconic Australian writers. Their actual experiences are refracted through the writing of the New Zealand novelist Redmond ‘Bim’ Wallis. This means that the attitudes held by Clift and Johnston come to us through their fictional counterparts; for example, in quoted passages from Wallis’s manuscript for his book, ‘The Unyielding Memory’. We cannot know therefore their veracity. Genoni and Dalziell concede that the views might be ‘complete fiction’, but express their conviction that they are more likely to be verbatim (p. 349) in the case of a response to Cohen’s success in 1961 with his book *The Spice-Box of Earth*. Clift expresses some distaste for Cohen’s acceptance of government funding. The discussion of views conveyed through fiction written by others reveals the tensions, disappointments and entanglements of the various Hydra artists and highlights the way in which writers live—through their work. This makes the sifting, interpreting and comparing of source materials all the more impressive on the part of Genoni and Dalziell in this book.

Throughout this study the authors allude frequently to the difficulties in the relationship between Clift and Johnston due to their own creative frustrations as writers, Johnston’s drive to provide for his expanding family, his health problems, Clift’s affairs and her excessive drinking. Genoni and Dalziell give credence to the commonly held view that Clift’s depression upon returning to Sydney after the years away was largely caused by her dread of the ‘impending publication of *Clean Straw for Nothing*, which Clift knew would once again lay bare her island infidelities,
which led her to take her own life’ (p. 404). The authors do not shy away from concluding that the writers’ lives were ‘semi-fulfilled and wastefully truncated’ (p. 404). In the light of the fact that their daughter Shane took her own life at the age of 25 in 1974 and that their older son Martin died young of ‘severe alcoholism’, they conclude bleakly that ‘even the best and most-lasting writing is of little account’. They refer to the ‘slow and inevitable tragedy of the two lives’ (p. 404) as one way of viewing the lives in hindsight.

It is important to note, however, that the book positions the two authors historically and geographically as part of a group who set out to escape their own societies and discover a different way of living, away from dreary London and the confines of conservative Melbourne. The book charts the formation of a community and its eventual demise through accounts of the personalities who inhabited it. The captivating accounts of the motivations, experiences, dalliances and achievements of the likes of Cohen, Axel Jensen, Marianne Ihlen, Redmond and Robyn Wallis, Rodney Hall, Sidney and Cynthia Nolan, to name only a sample of those included in the book, are particularly rich and engaging. The book reveals much coming and going among the expatriates and it is a complex story in that regard, with each protagonist attempting to keep a connection with metropolitan centres in order to publish or exhibit his or her work created on Hydra. Throughout the book we are reminded of Johnston and Clift’s alternating revulsion and fascination with tourists to their island: in Clift’s words, ‘Europe-sick boys … who yearn for the Europe of Gertrude Stein and Scott Fitzgerald’ (p. 116). Genoni and Dalziell briefly position the two Australian writers who travelled to London after the war in relation to the other expatriates who did the same, recognising that they had left what might have been a supportive intellectual community behind in London and ‘put everything on the line to settle on Hydra’ (p. 117).

If I have one minor criticism of this book, it is that the authors do not engage with scholarship on cultural expatriation that is of relevance to the Hydra venture.\(^1\) The breadth of their research on so many subjects and the rambling stories in the book make for a rich reading experience but there is a reluctance to frame this adventure in relation to other scholarship, and that is a shortcoming. The authors do not acknowledge the continuing interest in Hydra specifically and Greece more generally among the following generations of Australian authors. At times, therefore, the book feels as if it is marooned on an island of detail remote from its connections to context and legacy. Having said that, the strength of the book is in the detailed documenting of the Hydra community and its artistic striving, human complexity

---

and internationalist elements. Again however, there is a curiously apolitical quality to the analysis that leaves many questions unanswered, and that could have possibly been grounded through some discussion of scholarship on the topic.

The enabling activities of ‘insider’ figures on Hydra enliven the story and round out the narrative. Demetri and Carolyn Gassoumis are two interesting figures portrayed in the book. Demetri was a Greek-American painter who lived on Hydra with his American wife for some years, lending money to Redmond and Robyn Wallis and convincing them to stay on the island. The chapter in which Genoni and Dalziell document the controversial construction of the first swimming pool on the island by the Gassoumis couple is one of the most amusing in the book, because of its reflections on the couple’s irresistible impulse to make their residence as comfortable as anything in California, and all that this implied for the island residents who were aghast at the expense and rightfully fearful of the implications for water consumption.

Another of these ‘insiders’ was the wealthy modernist painter Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika, whose family mansion on Hydra offered a focal point for many visitors, and a home for Sidney and Cynthia Nolan over some months in 1955–56. Earlier on, Ghika had hosted Henry Miller, Lawrence Durrell, Norman Mailer, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Walter Gropius at his house. George and Sidney were friends, but we learn of some tension between their wives, Charmian and Cynthia, explained by the authors as generated by Clift’s fear that she may become like Cynthia, giving up her own work in service of her talented husband (p. 171).

*Half the Perfect World* rediscovers photographic treasures from the archive of photographer James Burke who also stayed at the Ghika mansion in 1960 (the house burnt down somewhat mysteriously in 1961). The other houses of Hydra’s wealthy became an object of Clift’s fascination described in *Peel Me a Lotus* and some of her comments are quoted in the chapter entitled ‘Archontika’, in which Genoni and Dalziell explain the significance of the home of Katerina Paouri to the social scene on the island. One of Burke’s photographs shows Paouri seated serenely in her living room with its grand mirrors, antique furniture and carved fireplace. Burke took a series of photographs of social gatherings on the terrace of Paouri’s house and the descriptions that accompany these images reveal a formality and propriety at her parties, as well as her association with a range of artists, including Marc Chagall. These social occasions contrast the abandon of the afternoons at Katsikas kafenio where alcohol flowed and arguments raged. It was Martin Johnston who many years later mournfully recalled his parents’ habit of spending their mornings working and afternoons ‘getting pissed’, and its effect on his life.

Burke’s photographs of an evening at Douskos Taverna are perhaps his best-known ones: there were 18 ‘foreigners’ dining and listening to Cohen singing and playing the guitar on that occasion in October 1960. Burke himself is a subject of this book as
well as the key creator of so many of its photographs (some striking photographs by Wallis are also included). Johnston and Burke met in 1944 in China where Johnston was working as a war correspondent during the Sino-Japanese War. Genoni and Dalziell explain that Burke was operating a ‘listening post’ behind Japanese lines for the Americans, and later worked for a US magazine called *Liberty*. The two men took a long trek together through Tibet in 1945. The authors document Burke’s career as a photojournalist and his interest in the abstract impressionist painters and Beat poets in New York, as well as his friendship with Johnston. It was an assignment for *LIFE* magazine that brought him to Hydra officially after he visited Clift and Johnston earlier in 1960. Burke described the atmosphere on Hydra to his editor as ‘fairly beat, with bearded barefoot types lounging about waterfront tables drinking ouzo’ (p. 117). Burke also recognised Johnston as the ‘leader’ of the permanent artists’ colony, conveying his sense of the group as unusual, radical and carefree, in order to convince his boss of the merits of a major photo assignment on the Greek island. Burke took 1,500 photographs of the figures portrayed in the book but they were not published. They are a major resource for this book and offer insight, authenticity, aesthetic counterpoint and a wealth of documentary weight to this study.

*Half the Perfect World* is a striking work of scholarship that is carefully detailed in its analysis of the work of artists on Hydra at a specific moment of mid-century transition and change. It contributes substantially to an understanding of modern literary life and its artistic contexts and conditions. One of the ironies of the lives of Johnston and Clift is that they longed, for years, for success as writers of literary work, and eventually left Hydra when Johnston was on the brink of achieving it with his best-known novel, *My Brother Jack*. He won the Miles Franklin Prize for the novel. Clift wrote the screenplay for the brilliant television adaptation of the book that featured the actor Nick Tate as Davy Meredith, in 1965. After 14 years away, the writers returned to Australia and Johnston achieved the acclaim and respect he had always wanted. Clift, on the other hand, remained something of an ‘outsider’ in Sydney, and did not receive the attention for her work that she had always desired. *Half the Perfect World* brings the lives of these two Australians into new perspective, illuminating their daring adventure in Greece with sensitivity and clarity, exploring the context of sociability and expatriatism in relation to their artistic endeavours and those of so many other interesting figures of the twentieth century.
The 1940 discovery in a disused flour mill on the outskirts of Hobart of the entire archive of the local Derwent Bank, from its founding in 1828 until its closure and liquidation, 1849–54, would thrill anyone with a historical bent, then or since. Archivists, on the other hand, might gasp at the somewhat chancy handling of the collection before what remained finally reached safe haven in the University of Tasmania archives. But at least it escaped the recycled paper drive of wartime Australia that induced the indiscriminate culling of some records, official as well as private. Eleanor Robin writes about the archive’s discovery and subsequent mining by historians and others in an absorbing introduction to this biography, which seeks to reinstate Charles Swanston (1789–1850) in Australian historical memory.¹

The book serves as a reminder for modern readers of what is now a distant period in the continent’s history, embracing inaugural European contact, European convicts and the ensuing personal and culture clashes; an era when global ocean trade had a dominant role in world politics, and when a British military career not uncommonly culminated in a colonial administrative post, with a retirement pension expected to be boosted by a land grant and/or business dealing. Charles Swanston epitomised those who served with that unique arm of colonial military and civil management, investment and trade, the Honourable East India Company, even as its influence was starting to erode in the early nineteenth century. The Anglo-Indian impact on Swanston’s life, and inherited/acquired fortune, was generations long, notably through his mother Rebecca (née Lambert). It was confirmed through his marriage in 1821 to 17-year-old Georgiana Sherson, daughter of a prominent civil servant in Madras (now Chennai), which was the home base of the Madras Native Infantry, the Indian army unit that he joined as a 15-year-old cadet in 1804. Aged 40 in 1829 having attained captaincy rank with further promotion unlikely, he began considering retirement and establishing a secure future for his growing family. The choice of Van Diemen’s Land, a British penal colony for close on three decades but with stirrings of transition to ‘free’ status, was carefully calculated over

more than two years. It was not a singular choice. Robin identifies at least a dozen others with an Indian background who were prominent in Van Diemen’s Land society at the time (pp. 24–25).

Considerable space is devoted to Swanston’s public life in the colony, since that is the author’s rationale for endowing him with the titular label of ‘statesman’. Her arguments and analysis are not always clear or convincing. Indeed the reader is on occasions left a little confused, by slips in chronology for example (p. 87) or by ‘slicing’ Swanston’s role into his family, social, leisured and ‘scientific’ pursuits, such as horticulture, his business pursuits and his role as a Legislative Councillor. Robin’s own confusion and/or misunderstanding about the nature of government during the period is most apparent in Chapter 7, ‘Civil Unrest’. She frames the governor’s role as being an advocate for the settlers with the British Government, while at the same time tacking on the modern concept of governor as ‘titular representative of the monarch’. Using the modern designator MLC for Council members is similarly mistaken, as is suggesting that Council members were ‘legislators’. In reality the governor, or more accurately the lieutenant-governor of the day was charged with full local administration of the colony, while ultimate authority and funding arrangements remained with the Colonial Office in London. The Legislative Council was established to assist in the administration, none of its members being ‘representative’ in the modern sense or able to introduce legislation except in minor matters of local imposts and charges.

Swanston served between 1831 and 1848 as a nominated or ‘non-official’ councillor, distinguished from the official or paid post-holders who comprised the inner Executive Council, during the terms of four lieutenant-governors – Sir George Arthur, Sir John Franklin, Sir John Eardley-Wilmot and Sir William Denison. They were men of widely varying personality, ability and experience chosen by a succession of British governments, and had to deal with changing concepts of the penal system, its costs and benefits, as well as the rising colonial demand for self-government. New settlements in 1834–35 at Adelaide and what became the Port Phillip District exacerbated those demands, skewing the local economy of Van Diemen’s Land even before the economic trade crisis of the early 1840s that emanated from mercantile London. This reviewer found a way through the confusion about the ‘civil unrest’ in which Swanston participated, as well as its eventual resolution in the 1850s, by turning to the Australian Dictionary of Biography entries for the four governors. That is a not always acknowledged benefit of group biography projects, such as national dictionaries.

None of the Van Diemen’s Land agitators, the so-called ‘Patriotic Six’, displayed the disinterested statesmanship that Robin would claim for Swanston. A note to her introduction defines ‘merchant statesman’ as a ‘concept of the British Empire denoting an enterprising man who had at heart the benefit of the state’. Chapter 8 with the same title has much to say about enterprising merchant activity by Swanston and others, but virtually nothing about statesmanship. Moreover, the chapter’s opening quote from *Hunt’s Merchants Magazine* that begins ‘The great merchant should be half a statesman …’ is merely an extract from an American publication outlining the qualities required to ‘ennoble’ the merchant business to the level of a profession. Public good or the benefit of the state is only referenced indirectly.3

Firmer ground is offered for the merchant label, mostly derived from Swanston’s role in the Derwent Bank. Much of Robin’s cited evidence comes from six letterbooks in the bank’s archive, three of which concern bank matters and three, personal business and local politics, although all topics were inevitably intertwined. From 1831 Swanston was a major shareholder in the bank while also holding the post of general manager. The innovation of that appointment and the bank’s pioneering role as a mortgage or property bank was early recognised by economist and historian Syd Butlin, whose distinguished career later culminated at The Australian National University (p. 2),4 although ultimately such innovation was of minimal significance in the development of the Australian financial sector.5 The bank was in financial collapse by 1848, as was Swanston’s personal fortune and reputation as a merchant.

In its heyday with Swanston at its head, the Derwent Bank was the main financier of the Port Phillip Association (PPA), which fostered John Batman’s excursion across Bass Strait from Van Diemen’s Land in 1835 that included his ‘treaty’ with ‘Aboriginal chiefs’ of the Kulin nation. Swanston had also secured former marine officer, Calcutta merchant and Edinburgh ‘nabob’ George Mercer as a bank client and investor, so he too was an original (absentee) partner in the association. However, the Mercer family’s long impact on what became Victoria’s pastoral Western District was mostly channelled, along with fellow Scottish investors, through the Clyde Company started in 1836.6

Robin places great store on the naming of one of the main streets in Melbourne’s original grid for Swanston, despite there being minimal communal memory of who the man was. The name was bestowed by New South Wales Governor Sir

---

Richard Bourke, resulting from his visit in February–March 1837 and the official designation of Melbourne as its hub, its port at Williamstown, with directions for surveying both towns in preparation for land sales. At the time of the visit, Bourke had just sent in his resignation, so this was seemingly one of the last times he could exercise his naming prerogative on official maps of the colony. Reasons behind some Melbourne street names remain speculative, but Elizabeth was surely named for Bourke’s beloved wife who had died shortly after their arrival in Sydney rather than for famed Queen Bess. Russell and Stephen (Exhibition Street’s name until 1880) referenced officials in Lord Melbourne’s Whig governments with whom Bourke would have had most contact, but they were also prominent sponsors of Britain’s Reform Acts 1832–37 initiating extension of the franchise, a principle with which he strongly aligned. That makes it all the more likely that Spring Street honoured the liberal Anglo-Irish politician Thomas Spring Rice whose estate was in Limerick, Bourke’s home county.  

As Robin details in Chapter 11, ‘The Port Phillip Pie’, the political presence of Charles Swanston was well in evidence in the colonies and at Westminster during 1837 and for at least two years of the succeeding Gipps administration. His standing mostly arose from the large investment for which PPA members claimed and received recompense. Swanston argued the case longest among a rapidly diminishing number of association members. Bourke was well aware of this and of the association’s early influence with the flood of other Port Phillip settlers, so naming a street for its leader may have been a judicious placatory move.

Robin finds it strange that while there were brief newspapers reports of Swanston’s death in 1850, possibly by suicide from a ship returning to Australia from California, there was no obituary. Not recognising the full eclipse of his local reputation, she ascribes the omission to cultural sensitivity about ‘naming’ suicide and to the fact that only Swanston’s eldest son, Charles Lambert, remained in Australia for any substantial period after 1850. She does not reference newspaper notices about the marriage of a daughter in January 1857 and his widow’s death at Marylebone, London, in February 1867, which mention only the Madras Army association of the ‘late Captain Charles Swanston’, and not his Van Diemen’s Land experience. Perhaps the family considered the latter was best forgotten, undermining post hoc attempts to reinstate his repute.

---


8 For Rebecca’s marriage, see Argus, 12 January 1857, 4; Courier (Hobart), 15 January, 2; South Australian Register, 16 January, 2; for Georgiana’s death, Argus, 17 April 1867, 4.
An inadvertent, if anachronistic, pleasure of the book is its wraparound cover using Henry Gritten’s lively watercolour of a view up Swanston Street from Princes Bridge in 1856. Regrettably, the painting’s perspective does not reach far enough north to where Swanston had bought half-acre blocks at Melbourne’s original land sales held on 1 June and 1 November 1837. He or his agent (since no evidence that he was ever at Port Phillip has come to light) paid £30 for the north-west corner of Swanston Street and a ‘back street’ that is now Little Collins, and £40 for the north-west corner of Swanston and Bourke streets. Seventy pounds was about a third of what John Batman paid for three corner blocks between Flinders and Collins streets. How long Swanston held title and whether he profited from their subdivision is probably unknowable, as is the significance of the purchase to his life or indeed to Melbourne. Notwithstanding the above reservations, the Robin biography provides openings for insight into several other aspects of the pre-gold era in the Australian colonies.

9 Historical Records of Victoria, Foundation Series, vol. 3, p. 85. Robin's bibliography does not include the HRV series.
On the night of 29 March 1918, Dr Phoebe Chapple saw the world explode in flames. She had been inspecting a Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps camp near Abbeville in France when the site came under fire from a German aerial bombardment. Chapple and 40 other women were sheltering in a trench when a direct hit killed eight women and mortally wounded a ninth. Chapple worked for hours in the destroyed camp, tending to the wounded in the dark. For ‘gallantry and devotion to duty’ during the attack, Chapple was awarded the Military Medal, making her the first woman doctor to receive the award. Chapple had enlisted in England with the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) in 1917 as she was ineligible to join the Australian forces. At the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, women doctors were seen as unsuitable for active service in England, too. Women were allowed to serve as nurses and in a number of auxiliary roles, until the unceasing swell of wounded from the Western Front prompted the RAMC to reluctantly allow women medical practitioners into its ranks. Chapple was among dozens of women doctors who served in World War I, and who have largely been forgotten by history.

Women to the Front: The Extraordinary Australian Women Doctors of the Great War is a thoughtful tribute to an overlooked section of Australian service personnel. Heather Sheard and Ruth Lee explore the lives of 24 Australian women who served as medical practitioners and participated in medical war work during World War I, including Chapple. The complex experiences of these women have been refined into the authors’ compelling narrative, in which they argue for a reconsideration of these women, both as individuals and as a community of Australian women doctors serving amid the devastation of World War I.

It is disappointing (but not surprising) that women doctors have been relegated to the periphery of Australian histories of World War I, albeit women doctors being a relatively small and emerging group. Dr Constance Stone, the first woman to practise medicine in Australia, registered as a medical practitioner in Victoria in 1890. At the outbreak of war, 129 women were registered as medical practitioners in Australia. Often referred to as ‘lady doctors’, as indicated, women doctors were barred from service with the Australian Army Medical Corps (pp. 2, 13). Some
sought service elsewhere with medical units attached to other Allied powers, or, later, as in Chapple's case, with the RAMC. Others joined ‘free enterprises’ seeking to establish medical teams for overseas service, including the Scottish Women's Hospitals, a suffragette initiative that was staffed entirely by women. None of these women served as Australian doctors. *Women to the Front* argues, however, that they should be understood as such.

For Australian women, mobilisation for World War I took various forms, both on the front lines and on the home front. Various books have considered the work undertaken by Australian women during World War I, including Patsy Adam-Smith's *Australian Women at War* (1984) and Bruce Scates and Raelene Frances's *Women and the Great War* (1997). Australian women undertook paid and unpaid work, were involved in political and industrial movements, and acted as agents of remembrance both during and in the aftermath of the conflict. These experiences had an enduring impact on the engagement of women in the postwar workforce, but histories of Australian women on active service have focused on the many women who served as nurses, particularly army nurses or VADs (Voluntary Aid Detachment members). Research on nurses has included Kirsty Harris's *More than Bombs and Bandages: Australian Army Nurses at Work in World War I* (2011) and Jan Bassett's *Guns and Brooches: Australian Army Nursing from the Boer War to the Gulf War* (1992), while Melanie Oppenheimer has examined voluntary patriotic labour in Australia. Beyond Australia, Susan R. Grayzel's *Women and the First World War* (2002) surveyed the varied experiences and contributions of women during the conflict across the participating states. This included an examination of the increase in paid employment for women during this period, including many who served as substitutes for absent men. Little has been written, however, about the women who served as medical doctors.

Both Sheard and Lee have previously published biographies of individual Australian women doctors, Sheard with *A Heart Undivided: The Life of Dr Vera Scantlebury Brown, 1899–1946* (2016) and Lee with *Woman War Doctor: The Life of Mary De Garis* (2014). *Women to the Front* expands on previous research from both authors, reassessing traditional narratives of Australian service during World War I by way of a chronological structure. The authors seek to complicate a narrative of wartime experiences for Australian women that is often reduced to key phrases such as the ‘mourning mother’ or the ‘dutiful nurse’. The experiences of Australian women doctors during World War I are a means of exploring a broader legacy of service and of considering the enduring impact of conflict on its participants. *Women to the Front* follows the ebb and flow of the conflict through short thematic sections focused on a particular time and place. The 24 women profiled served in an estimated 12 countries and often reappear in multiple contexts. There is some slight overlap in descriptions as subjects are reintroduced in different sections, but the structure allows for these women to be presented as part of a cohesive community,
examining their service in relation to one another. These short sections are situated within broader chapters, with one or two chapters allocated for each year of the war. Sheard and Lee do an admirable job in weaving these stories together, extending this narrative to incorporate the postwar lives and careers of subjects where possible. Alongside this broader narrative, *Women to the Front* also contains biographical notes for each of its subjects, creating a useful reference work.

This imagined community of Australian women doctors is at the heart of *Women to the Front*. The structure presents these women in relation to one another, united by a common experience as women medical practitioners and motivated by a common desire for service. Most of these women came from upper-class families and were privately educated or attended academically selective schools such as Sydney Girls’ High School. In some instances, their lives directly overlapped. Brown and Dr Rachel Champion (later Shaw, having married a fellow doctor in 1917) both graduated from the University of Melbourne medical school in 1914 and lived close to one another in London in 1917. Eleven of the women were interconnected through Sydney Girls’ High School, the University of Sydney’s Women’s College and the University of Sydney. Other subjects had more tenuous connections to Australian identity, products of a broader imperial world.

The short biographies included in *Women to the Front* reflect the complicated intersections of imperial identity in the early twentieth century. In the introduction, Sheard and Lee pose a question: why would these women want to go to war? The ‘patriotic burden’ of World War I is discussed briefly, but this topic rarely reappears over the course of the book. It merits further consideration, although the absence of archival records for many of the subjects is a barrier to examining their personal motivations. For some subjects, wartime service was a brief interlude in a broader medical career. For others, their service in World War I reflected an opportunity for professional advancement otherwise denied to them in their postwar careers. Among the subjects of the book, there were substantial differences of ideology, and generational and geographical divides. In 1914, Dr Lilias Anna Hamilton was 57, while Champion was 23. Others maintained different associations with the broader feminist movement. Dr Emma Buckley was appointed to the Endell Street Military Hospital, but disagreed with political views of its founders, Dr Flora Murray and Dr Louisa Garrett Anderson, both of whom were members of the Women’s Social and Political Union, the militant organisation campaigning for women’s suffrage. Dr Josephine Letitia Denny Fairfield supported Irish independence, a view at odds with the imperial ideals held by many of the other women doctors profiled. For a book centred on ‘Australian women doctors’, it is unclear how many of them would have identified themselves as Australian. Someone like Dr Ethel Baker, for example, had an uncertain connection to the other subjects. Baker was born at Toowong, near Brisbane, Queensland, in 1885, but had been sent to England alone at the age of 10 to live with her mother’s family. She graduated from the University of Brussels
in 1913 and served with the Belgian Red Cross in September and October 1914. Baker’s connection with Australia seems to have ended with her departure as a child, and she died in Britain in 1965. The limited archival records available, however, give no suggestion as to how Baker saw herself.

*Women to the Front* is a well-crafted overview of an overlooked component of Australian service during World War I. Sheard and Lee provide a level of detail that allows for the book to serve as an accessible overview of the subject and a reference for the individual women profiled. One small omission is that, while these women are presented in relation to one another, there is limited description of their perception of or by others. Sheard’s and Lee’s previous works on Brown and De Garis respectively were drawn from detailed archival material relating to their subjects, much of which is incorporated in the profiles of Brown and De Garis included in *Women to the Front*. Sheard and Lee include an account of a 1917 meeting between Brown and Captain Norman Bullen after her first day at the Endell Street Military Hospital in London, sharing wine and coffee over lunch. Bullen was a fellow graduate from the University of Melbourne and a colleague from their earlier work at the Melbourne Hospital. The authors describe a photograph of Brown and Bullen’s class of final year medical students in 1913, with Brown and Shaw outnumbered by the men. Seven of those men would die in the war, including Bullen, who died of wounds sustained during the Third Battle of Ypres on 10 October 1917, just a few months after his meeting with Brown. Throughout *Women to the Front*, there are frequent references to male colleagues and classmates, but it remains unclear how these male medical officers perceived their female contemporaries. While the women doctors profiled in this book were prohibited from Australian service, they were clearly moving in the same social spaces as their male counterparts. Would these men have understood women doctors as colleagues? The book makes occasional reference to patients treated at a hospital where a particular woman doctor was working, but there are no firsthand accounts from patients or colleagues. This is a small complaint, however, in a well-structured book.

*Women to the Front* is an engaging overview of an overlooked component of Australian service and a compelling introduction to the subject. As Sheard and Lee note in their foreword, the list of women doctors selected for *Women to the Front* is not necessarily exhaustive, and others may qualify for inclusion. One example is Dr Susan Annie Buckingham (née Robertson), who graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 1917 with a degree in medicine, and proceeded on to service with the Royal Army Medical Corps in Egypt in 1918.\(^1\) She registered as a medical practitioner in New South Wales on 8 October 1919 and was awarded a Diploma of Public Health from the University in Sydney in 1920. While born in New Zealand, Buckingham spent the majority of her working life in Australia, and is included in

---

\(^1\) The National Archives of the UK (TNA), WO 372/23/5547, Medal card of Buckingham, Susan Annie.
the Book of Remembrance for the University of Sydney. There are sure to be others like her, and other stories to be shared. With this publication, Sheard and Lee have created empathetic profiles of women otherwise overlooked by history, placing them within an overarching narrative of service.


When Keith Murdoch died in 1952, the *Herald and Weekly Times* published a 62-page encomium, *Keith Murdoch, Journalist.*¹ Referred to in house as the ‘Sir Keith Murdoch Tribute Book’, a limited edition of 2,500 copies was published for staff, friends and business associates.² The brilliant and beneficent Murdoch of the ‘tribute book’—son of Scottish migrants to Melbourne, Rev. Patrick Murdoch and wife Annie (née Brown), and nephew of esteemed Australian academic and essayist Walter Murdoch—was a visionary who built Australia’s first national media empire. It barely mentioned his son, Keith Rupert Murdoch, 21 years old at the time, who seized the patriarch’s news baton and built the world’s most powerful international media empire.

Keith and Rupert Murdoch, father and son, are two of the most historically significant Australians ever. Yet within a few months of Keith’s death in 1952 his name ‘had already begun to fade’ even in Melbourne, one of his former journalists John Hetherington wrote in 1960, ‘where in life he had made so enormous a rumble-bumble’.³ Not so Rupert, whose global renown—or notoriety, depending on one’s point of view—is well established and which, should he live as long as his late mother Elisabeth Murdoch (née Greene) to whom he bears such a striking resemblance, is set to continue until 2034 at least.

---

The Murdoch family story underlines the past’s deep reach into the present. Patrick Murdoch was a friend of David Syme, owner of Melbourne’s Age newspaper and Australia’s most significant media figure prior to the Murdoch ascendancy. Rev. Murdoch officiated at Syme’s burial in 1908. A year earlier the family connection got teenage Keith his first reporting job, contributing suburban news to the Age at one and a half pennies a line. Patrick Murdoch was a sociable Presbyterian minister, a ‘golfing parson’ with a wide social circle which, in addition to Syme, included senior politicians like Andrew Fisher, Alfred Deakin and Robert Menzies (TR, p. 31). His shy, stammering son Keith was thus born to a family with connections, a position from which, applying grit, industry and ambition, he leveraged into so much more. In turn Keith’s charming, socially assured son Rupert was born to a family with even better connections, a position from which, applying grit, industry and ambition, he achieved so much more again. This is the positive side of the Murdoch family story—one in which, with its bold national and, later, international business gambits, there is much to admire.

There is also an unattractive, even disturbing, side to the story. Tom D. C. Roberts’s argument in Before Rupert is that what Keith Murdoch actually did has been largely obscured by half a century of Murdoch family media manipulation and image management, and that Rupert’s operating methods and business strategies follow a pattern established by his father before him. Further, Roberts persuasively shows it is a formula built on pursuit of, where possible, monopoly profit and, routinely, the exercise of media power for political purposes aligned with the Murdochs’ personal views and plutocratic interests. This is an argument demanding urgent national and international attention given the Murdoch-controlled News Corporation’s platforming of increasingly extreme right-wing populism in the western democracies, of which Fox News in the United States is the apotheosis.

Roberts’s Before Rupert was preceded by R. M. Younger’s Keith Murdoch: Founder of a Media Empire (2003), Desmond Zwar’s In Search of Keith Murdoch (1980) and Keith Murdoch, Journalist, the ‘tribute book’ described earlier. He shows how these works were captive to Murdoch family influence. The Younger and Zwar books drew selectively on an unpublished biographical manuscript, ‘A Life of Keith Murdoch, Newspaper Reporter’, by journalist-historian and David Syme biographer C. E. ‘Ted’ Sayers, which survives in Keith Murdoch’s papers at the National Library of Australia. It formed the basis of a book commissioned by the Murdoch family.

---

that Rupert refused to allow into the public realm despite it being under contract to publisher William Heinemann, and its unusual status as a prize-winning biography while still in manuscript form (TR, p. xv). Sayers's book—a ‘friendly’ that he dedicated to Keith’s widow Elisabeth Murdoch (née Greene)—was apparently just not friendly enough.

As the first independent, unauthorised biography of Keith Murdoch, Roberts’s *Before Rupert*, if not itself an indictment of the state of biography in Australia, certainly points to dire gaps. Why has it taken so long for a book-length biography of Keith Murdoch unconstrained by Murdoch family influence to appear? It is not as though clues concerning the need for one were not there, even in the most hagiographical of existing works on him. In different parts of the *Herald and Weekly Times* ‘tribute book’, for example, he is described as ‘mildly conservative’ and ‘a revolutionary conservative’. The ‘tribute book’ may have been written by committee, differing estimations like these reflecting differing viewpoints from different contributors. However, the encomium itself suggests it was more a matter of Murdoch in public muting a ‘revolutionary’ conservatism, ‘evident in his published writings, but even more so in the confidential commentaries he wrote about his own newspapers’. This should have been a matter for hot pursuit by biographers, academic and otherwise.

For here lies intriguing potential roots for the savage right turn Rupert has taken with News Corporation as he has aged. The historical perspective Roberts’s book on the father gives on the son’s rise and machinations provides a template and context for Rupert’s monopolistic drives and taste for the catnip of political power and rent-seeking, faults that have lately morphed into enabling far-right zealotry. It is hard to imagine the rise of the Tea Party in the United States, for example, without the platform and profile provided by Fox News; and without the Tea Party, it is hard to conceive of the Donald Trump presidency. This is beyond the scope of Roberts’s book, which was published in 2015 before Trump’s election, but provides meat for a potential second edition or, intriguingly, for a dual Keith and Rupert Murdoch biography that shows the operational, psychological and political continuities between them over time against the backdrop of changing twentieth- and twenty-first-century economic, technological and cultural regimes. Perhaps it is even the time for a collective biography adding the third generation of media Murdoch children—Lachlan, Elisabeth and James, born to Rupert and his second wife, journalist Anna Murdoch (née Torv)—the eldest of whom, Lachlan, is reputedly more right wing than even his father.

8 *Keith Murdoch, Journalist*, 53 and 22.
Roberts has done a better job as a biographer than his predecessors not only because he is not captive to Murdoch family sentiment but also because he has brought scholarly thinking, skills and resources to a subject with clear dividends. Before Rupert began life as a doctoral thesis concentrating on Keith Murdoch’s early life, from his birth in 1885 to Rupert’s birth in the early 1930s by which time the ‘Murdoch Press’ was already a known term synonymous, Roberts writes, with the interests of business during the Depression. The papers of Adelaide Advertiser managing editor and Murdoch confidant Lloyd Dumas proved a critical, previously unconsulted source among others for the biography. For the book of the thesis, which won the National Biography Award in 2017, Roberts extended the chronology through to Keith Murdoch’s death in 1952 and added an epilogue on Rupert’s rise in his wake.

A few matters of scholarly interest were trimmed along the way, for example the account of correspondence in 1959 between the then foreign minister Richard Casey and Keith Hancock, professor of history at The Australian National University and founding chair of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, concerning Elisabeth Murdoch’s request for advice on suitable candidates to write her late husband’s life. Those seeking the detail must go to Roberts’s thesis to see Hancock’s recommendations which fell into two main groups. These groups were: ‘experienced journalists possessing some proven academic quality’, Alan Moorehead at the top of the list followed by Geoffrey Blainey, Douglas Brass and Clive Turnbull; and ‘academic persons’ led by Melbourne University historian Kathleen Fitzpatrick, ‘a most cultured and discriminating person who has proved herself to be a good biographer (though she) has always followed political affairs from a left centre point of view’, ANU political scientist Leicester Webb and Adelaide University historian Hugh Stretton; with historian Lionel Wigmore, in Hancock’s view, falling between the other two groups. Elisabeth Murdoch did not take up Hancock’s suggestions and the matter lay until C. E. ‘Ted’ Sayers was commissioned by the family following publication of his well-reviewed David Syme biography in 1965.

‘Great affairs magnetised Murdoch’ the anonymous Herald & Weekly Times scribes wrote in their Keith Murdoch encomium, their late employer possessing the ‘ability to make his influence felt in decisive places’. The Australian parliament was one such place and Australian prime ministers have been particular targets of Murdoch

---

11 Papers of Lloyd Dumas, MS 4849, National Library of Australia.
12 One small jarring common element between Roberts’s thesis (p. 14) and Before Rupert (p. xv) is Richard Casey’s wife Maie being referred to as ‘Ethel’, a first name never used—in the same way that Rupert Murdoch was never called by his first name ‘Keith’. Similarly, C. E. Sayers is referred to as Charles E. Sayers when he was known as ‘Ted’ and published under C. E. Sayers.
15 Keith Murdoch, Journalist, 35.
influence. From the time Keith Murdoch was appointed federal parliamentary reporter for the *Age* in 1910, just before Australia’s fourth federal election, through to the forty-fourth election this year, Murdochs—Keith, then Rupert—have been players in Australian politics.

Despite 40 elections and more than a century of influence, the Murdochs have little presence in either the Paul Strangio, Paul ‘t Hart and James Walter work *The Pivot of Power: Australian Prime Ministers and Political Leadership, 1949–2016* or the companion volume *Settling the Office: The Australian Prime Ministership from Federation to Reconstruction* (2016). This is understandable in relation to *The Pivot of Power* since Keith Murdoch died just three years into the book’s span. Keith Murdoch nevertheless gets two index entries, both relating to the early years of Robert Menzies’s second prime ministership, while Rupert Murdoch is surprisingly absent from the index altogether. In contrast, prime ministerial casualties over the last decade rate Rupert Murdoch as a very significant factor in their career trajectories indeed. It is not that the authors are unconscious of media as an issue. One focus of the volume is the ‘phenomenon of leader-centred politics’ and how the ‘advent of the “celebrity” medium of television recasts the relationship between leaders and the public’ (SHW, p. 5). These and other changes like the bigger bureaucracy and burgeoning ministerial staffs have contributed, as the authors cleverly put it, to the ‘elevation of the “metabolic rate” of the prime ministership’ (SHW, p. 5).

*The Pivot of Power* historicises the changing character of the Australian prime ministership and, against the backdrop of considerable upheaval, locates the roots of recent churn at the top in the ‘seismic changes’ of recent decades (SHW, p. 6). It recaps leadership and institutional changes from the second Menzies prime ministership onwards and asks whether it is now an impossible job (SHW, pp. 292–306). This is a pertinent question, one about which they are fairly optimistic despite a recent prime ministerial turnover rate so high it has become a matter of international comment.17

Strangio, ‘t Hart and Walter point to three causes for hope: the fact that policy cycles come and go and that a ‘new dawn’ will arrive eventually, that institutional responses to changing circumstances in Australia have historically been robust and may continue to be so, and that the ‘myth of the strong leader’ is in trouble, against

---


the backdrop of recent experience, with the return of ‘talented ensembles’ possibly 
nigh (SHW, pp. 304–06). The prime ministership has been a ‘hardy and adaptable 
institution’, they argue, and may yet prove so again (SHW, p. 306).

The authors of *The Pivot of Power* and its companion volume are political scientists 
who, unusually among their number these days, bring history and biography to 
their scholarship in a really effective way. At a time when historians arguably need 
to engage with and do more political history, and when political science is groaning 
under the weight of algebraic imperatives, Strangio, ‘t Hart and Walter have provided 
a strong, historically informed overview of a key role in our national life. Paperback 
editions with wide distribution would be welcome. As political scientists, however, 
the constrained prose does not really charge the reader with a feel for the ‘seismic 
changes’ of recent decades to which they allude. While their cautious optimism 
is welcome, and comforting, they perhaps underrate the possibility that we are at 
a historic moment of change when the old self-righting mechanisms will no longer 
prevail. If that is the case, Rupert Murdoch and News Corporation are likely to be 
found to have played no small part in it.
Sophie Scott-Brown review of Georgina Arnott, *The Unknown Judith Wright*


There are two sorts of subjects that exercise particular allure to a biographer: those that do not want a biography written about them, and go to various lengths to thwart the efforts of a would-be biographer, and those who have written their own life story, or related aspects of that story, and for whom the telling of that story formed a significant part of their wider intellectual project. Judith Wright, as Georgina Arnott’s *The Unknown Judith Wright* reveals, fell into both categories.

In fact, Wright notoriously told, and then retold, her family’s story starting with the semi-fictional *The Generations of Men* (1959), later followed by the more historically robust *The Cry for the Dead* (1981), a sort of revisionist sequel. Moreover, these works were not simply amusing digressions or artistic marginalia, they were major contributions to twentieth-century Australian cultural identity. Through Wright’s ability to distil the vast physical and social landscapes of Australia into the intimate symbolism of a family story, the books did much to democratise—and problematise—what it was to be Australian. No longer was national identity the remote product of political manoeuvres but an unfolding story in which all had played a part and had a stake.

Moreover, Wright’s explicit use of, and appeal to, history in the service of storytelling did as much to interrogate the ambiguity between the two disciplines. So permeable did she render this boundary that Tom Griffiths, one of Australia’s most respected historians, was able to include her, with confidence, in his reflective tour of Australian history writing. As such, it is fair to suggest that Wright well understood the politics and poetics of life-history writing—the tensions between myth-breaking and myth-making—and proved herself exceptionally skilled in using them. This makes her a beguiling but tricky subject to tackle, setting the stage for a battle of wits.

Arnott embarks on this project in full understanding of this, confronting it directly from the outset: ‘Why a biography of someone whose legacy seems to resist it?’ (p. 2). For many reasons it would seem. Firstly, Wright both contributed to, and now constitutes, part of a modern Australian identity (she is even considered a ‘national treasure’). As Wright herself showed, national identity must have all its aspects continually interrogated to keep itself relevant, each new generation of men—and even women now too (!)—must pose new questions of elders and ancestors. And, as

---

Arnott notes, there are some highly pertinent questions to be asked about Wright: what did *Generations* and *Cry* select and omit from the Wyndham-Wright family story and why? Why have Wright’s years as a student at the University of Sydney been neglected from public versions of her story?

Secondly, Arnott has questions of a more general nature concerning the significance of formative years in intellectual development. Show me the juvenilia and I’ll show you the mature writer? Wright herself did not seem to think so. Previous biographers and academic commentators seem largely to have followed this line, placing greater stress on the impact of World War II leading up to the publication of *The Moving Image* (1946), her breakthrough poetry collection. Much less reflection has been given to the non-formal learning of Wright’s youth and family life. This seems a strange omission given how generally accepted wisdom suggests that this is the primary crucible for forging values and dispositions. Nor has much close attention been paid to her student years that saw her make an emphatic break from her rural upbringing to immerse herself in Sydney’s fast-paced life and culture. Even if, like most undergraduates, the finer points of curricular content were not to have a lasting impact, as Arnott shows, the personal significance of such a move should not be underestimated. Moreover, that first blast of independence and detachment from familiar landscapes offers a good barometer for gauging the nature, depth and endurance of the family influence. In a welter of change and new experiences, what stuck? In short, *The Unknown Judith* invites us to be less literal about the intellectual development of a writer, reminding us that while mastering the technicalities of craft and piquancy of the market are important, aesthetic sensibility is a mysterious, amorphous entity with many sources.

The book also seeks to probe one further tension. While Wright, Arnott tells us, was committed to the ‘renunciation of ego’ (p. 2), illuminating through her writing the constraints imposed by history, land and culture on human action, literary critics have tended to view her as ‘a figure akin to the idealised Romantic poet who is born different, detached from her society, inspired’ (p. 1)—arguably a strangely stubborn tendency in artist biographies. This, it is argued here, has restricted understanding of Wright’s significance to modern Australian cultural history and, in the other direction, of that history’s importance in understanding Wright’s work.

As such there are two ‘historical’ gazes with relevance here. One applies a backwards reading to Wright the writer, deconstructing her as both product and producer of a particular cultural moment. The second adopts a ‘forward’, subject-eye-view of Wright’s life as she experienced it, small, ad-hoc connections amid contingencies. Arnott, taking the biographer’s privilege of intimate detachment, attempts to combine both. In doing so, she can advance challenges to conventional understandings in both Wright scholarship and Australian cultural history. Wright’s family life and history, she contends, was far more multifaceted, and the family mythology more influential, than previously acknowledged. The complexity of these relationships
invites a reconsideration of both her poetry and her life-writing in *Generations* and *Cry*. Further, Wright’s student days were more critical on her development as writer than previously thought, not least because of her exposure and response to Sydney’s cultural and literary modernism during this time, which, as Wright can reveal, contained an often-contradictory blend of implications for young women.

*The Unknown Judith* approaches this ambitious project confidently. One of the book’s great strengths is its sustained levels of quiet control, the richness and detail of the material is never allowed to overwhelm but is always directed back towards the larger questions at stake. One elegant example of this is the ongoing conversation maintained between the alternate sources of Wright’s life: Wright, Veronica Brady, the first biographer, and Arnott herself. Interweaving the perspectives of the autobiographer, first and second biographers creates a subtle reflective commentary on the politics of historiography.

Restraint does not stop Arnott indulging in some well-observed verbal miniatures that aptly illustrate her wider points. At the close of the first three chapters, for example, comes an exquisitely agonising description of Wright’s tortured teenage years (especially painful if you are or ever have been a teenage girl):

> By the time she arrived at NEGS, at fourteen, she was intensely self-conscious. Puberty had been difficult. Her periods were heavy and it took a stranger to tell her that she needed to wear a bra. Her sense of shame extended to more public manifestations of her physicality as well: ‘I knew, painfully as many girls know it, that at the ugly age of fourteen, I was not only condemned to wear glasses … but was tongue tied and spotty and beginning to bulge awkwardly’ (pp. 88–89).

*The Unknown Judith*’s instincts are right, its questions are pertinent and the technical execution assured. Yet, for all this, the book seems, at times, to have assembled all the relevant pieces without quite bringing them all together. This is especially the case in the chapters on Wright’s student years. One reason for this, perhaps, is the more fragmentary nature of source material, requiring of the author more creative use of indirect supportive material such as the accounts of other students approximately contemporaneous to Wright or slender biographical profiles of prominent lecturers. This, in itself, is fine provided it can do more than circumstantial contextualising. But, failing this, while such material fleshes out a picture, it is limited in servicing a more forceful argument. For example, in recounting the intellectual cultures surrounding Wright’s subjects of study, Arnott makes some shrewd observations concerning Wright’s critique of the heavily European content of the History and English syllabi and the controversial charisma of philosopher John Anderson.

---

She noted also Wright's enthusiasm for anthropology under A. P. Elkin. Still, however, there felt like a further significance could be drawn out of this and connected more fulsomely to both Wright the student and Wright the mature writer.

Anderson and Elkin were, in their different ways, trailblazers. The former was, at this time, in the midst of developing his uncompromisingly empirical ‘Australian Realism’ which, while touching only lightly on a conventional undergraduate syllabus, was promulgated, in principle more than detail, through members of the Free Thought society that included several non-philosophers active in many other areas of university and Sydney’s cultural life. The latter was the first Australian-born chair of the first Australian anthropology department, receiving the appointment based on his commitment to applied anthropology, put at the disposal (whether they wanted it or not, which they generally did not) of Australian administrators. As such both men, especially when contrasted with the drearily colonial inflected courses on offer in the History and English departments, were pioneering projects aimed at systematically rethinking Australian life. Regardless of whether Wright consciously followed their thinking in detail, this says something significant about the intellectual energy infusing the specifically Australian form of urban modernism that Arnott stresses as transformative for her subject.

By contrast, the first three chapters of *The Unknown Judith*, on family life, have a fluency and intensity that the later ones lack. In part this owes much to the richer availability of direct primary material from sources other than Wright, including publications, letters and diaries from Wyndham and Wright family members, local newspapers accounts of events or places referenced and Cedric Wyndham, a living descendent and family historian in his own right. Arnott also has more to push back against on this subject. While silence characterises the student years, there has been far greater assertion of the disjuncture between the ‘left’ wing Wright and her ‘conservative’ ancestors. This is, arguably, *The Unknown Judith’s* most prized intervention into current Wright discourse, that, via her grandmother May and father Philip Wright, there was strong continuity between Wright and the historic Wyndham legacy. Such a claim might be of general interest to Wright scholars, readers and general appreciators, but it does not, at first glance, seem to fulfil the book’s grander historiographical ambitions, nor is its significance as fully developed as it could be in the later sections.

There is, throughout this book, a sense of being haunted by something almost, but not quite, at hand, of a book shying away from the full implications of its own conclusions. This is not helped by the author’s repeated defence of Wright against any possible charges of deliberate deception. More uncomfortable still, the ‘Postscript’ is made into a sort of apologia for Wright not being perfect and not having always held the same beliefs. At these points, respect and sensitivity tip over into anxiety that dilutes the potential force of the arguments at hand. There was, perhaps, something powerful to say here about the (re)making of Australian
identity in the mid-twentieth century, that may have provided the through-running thread needed to connect all the book’s rich dimensions. It could, for example, have helped Arnott collapse the binaries, country/city or traditional/modern, which she found unsatisfying in the previous interpretations of Wright’s life. It might also have allowed her to make the significance of the family continuities work harder.

The larger issue at stake here is the extent to which Australia, bucking recent trends in European theory, has, to some extent, always been modern, with each generation called upon to reinvent itself, from convicts to colonists, settlers to citizens, with comparative rapidity. The settings may change—from forging a life in the unforgiving bush of an ancient land to negotiating one in the modern city of a young nation state—but the need to continually improvise between the old and the new remained constant. This was the mercurial poetic truth which Wright, through her writing and activism, wove into potent cultural scripts, defining, and definitive, of her times. But, as Arnott shows here, she was only able to do this well because the private Wright was so deeply immersed in them. What The Unknown Judith does, even if it does not always signpost this explicitly, is to use Wright’s formative years as a magnifying lens into the micro-mechanics of cultural metamorphosis, the messy drafts before the polished edit. For all the affectionate elegance of its insights into a much-loved national figure it is, as ever it was, Wright’s ability to compress the political into the personal and, in doing so, show us ourselves in a new light, that is the true value of this book.

Wilbert W. W. Wong review of Philippe Paquet, 
*Simon Leys: Navigator between Worlds*

(Carlton, Vic.: La Trobe University Press/Black Inc., 2017), 664 pp., HB $59.99 
ISBN 9781863959209

A senior academic at The Australian National University described Pierre Ryckmans, as soon as he learned that I was writing this book review, as quiet, but having the look of a person with a strong sense of character and determination. This was the impression that Ryckmans gave to a person who had seen him on campus but not spoken to him. Nonetheless, it was an accurate portrayal of Ryckmans, and fits in nicely with the Ryckmans (also popularly known as Simon Leys, his pen-name) that Philippe Paquet captures in *Simon Leys: Navigator between Worlds*, an impressive biography that is both scholarly and well written. This biography is a translation by Julie Rose from the original French version, which was published in 2016.

Born in Brussels on 28 September 1935, an auspicious day for a future Chinese scholar and man of letters since, as Paquet points out, it is officially the birthday of Confucius, Ryckmans grew up in a family with a strong Catholic, legal, political and colonial background. His uncle, also Pierre Ryckmans, was governor-general of the Belgian colony of Congo (1934–46) and was offered a post in the Ministry of Colonies in 1958, which he declined due to ill health. Ryckmans’s first encounter with China came in 1955, when, while studying at the Université catholique de Louvain, he joined a Belgian delegation to the country in a trip that was funded by the young communist government (pp. 74, 86). This initiative was intended to improve the regime’s image internationally, the hope being that the individuals they funded, many of whom became journalists and lecturers, would sway public and political opinion in their respective countries. During this first trip to China, he and his companions were able to have an audience with the Chinese premier and foreign minister, Zhao Enlai (1898–1976), whom he would later describe in an essay in his book *The Hall of Uselessness* as charismatic, and who ‘had a talent for telling blatant lies with angelic suavity … the kind of man who could stick a knife in your back and do it with such disarming grace that you would still feel compelled to thank him for the deed’ (p. 88). The young Ryckmans would return from China optimistic of the country’s future and its revolution (p. 79). Paquet reminds us that Ryckmans’s early enthusiasm came at a time before Maoism would produce the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and the other disastrous repressions that would discredit it (p. 79).

The trip to China proved to be a life-changing experience for Ryckmans that drove him to learn Chinese after his return, while continuing with law and art history. However, he felt that his experiences in China were limited by his inability to
converse with the locals. Wanting to take his Chinese studies further, he sensed that he needed to be immersed in the language for a long period of time to master it. With the People’s Republic of China being closed at the time for political reasons, he was lucky to be able to secure a scholarship to study in Taiwan. The island proved to be an ideal training ground for the future sinologist, being a site where the great number of literary figures, artists, intellectuals and scholars fleeing the Chinese communist regime would cultivate and transmit their knowledge. It was also home to a multitude of Chinese cultural treasures and historical artefacts that were transported by the Nationalist Government during the civil war on the mainland, and where he would meet his future wife, Chang HanFang. His classmate at the National Taiwan Normal University, Lee Wen-ts’ien, would spark his interest in Shitao’s treatise of Chinese painting, which translation into French Ryckmans would later undertake as his final-year art history thesis in Louvain, and which he would pursue further in his doctoral thesis (pp. 93, 147). While in Taiwan, Ryckmans was able to gain an audience with the figurehead of the now-exiled Chinese Nationalist Government, Chiang Khai Shek (1887–1975). Unlike his earlier encounter with Chiang’s charismatic communist counterpart, Zhou, Ryckmans did not find anything remarkable and memorable about his one-hour meeting with the stoic and stiff Chiang.

After returning to Belgium to defend his final-year thesis for his art history degree, Ryckmans set out to Asia again. Through the help of the famed author Han Suyin (Rosalie Matilda Kuangchu Chou) whom he met earlier in Singapore, he managed to land himself a position as a French teacher in Nanyang University, a Chinese-based university that catered to provide higher education for the majority of the port city’s ethnically Chinese population, which she played a key role in founding. The position enabled Ryckmans to further his intellectual pursuits, taking various courses in Chinese literature. He would have gladly stayed on in Singapore but became caught up in the city’s anti-communist tide. The Chinese university during this period was treated with suspicion by the authorities and became a target of communist subversion. Of this episode, Paquet did not mince words, associating Lee Kuan Yew, ‘Singapore’s strong man’, and his ‘paranoid government’ with embodying ‘this phobia about communism’ (p. 170). Ryckmans was a subscriber of the *People’s Daily*. Buying the official paper of the Chinese Communist Party was not illegal in Singapore but it was frowned upon (p. 170). Students would habitually come to his apartment to read the *People’s Daily* until he was, one day, denounced by a mole. Although the authorities did not find anything but, as Ryckmans recounted to Paquet, ‘piles of newspapers’, he saw that his fate was sealed and was forced to leave Singapore (p. 170). Paquet, with justification, calls Ryckmans’s expulsion from Singapore ‘ironic’, given that he would later become one of the voices against the communist regime in China (p. 170). Hong Kong would be Ryckmans’s next base for furthering his intellectual pursuits and career as a Chinese expert.
During his time in Hong Kong, Ryckmans also worked with the Belgian diplomatic corps compiling information from publications in mainland China and relaying it to the embassy (1967–70). The information he obtained from this assignment provided the content for his book *The Chairman’s New Clothes: Mao and the Cultural Revolution*, which denounced the communist regime in China, and Maoism. The book was first published in French in 1971 (*Les habits neufs du président Mao*) under the pen-name Simon Leys, which he would continue using thereafter. The Cultural Revolution and other repressions in China shattered the earlier optimism Ryckmans had about the communist government in China. Further publications, commentaries and public engagements criticising the communist regime would follow the success of *The Chairman’s New Clothes*. Ryckmans’s political position on China, however, would cost him his friendship with Han Suyin, who was one of the supporting voices of the communist regime and Maoism, and who had earlier helped Ryckmans secure a teaching post in Nanyang University. The falling out between Han Suyin and Ryckmans, and the latter’s war of words with proponents of Maoism, which has a fair share of supporters in the free world, are among the most engaging parts of this biography.

Responding to an invitation from Professor Liu Ts’un-yan—who headed the Chinese department of The Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra—to join his department, Ryckmans and his wife decided in 1970 that it was time to move from the noisy and congested environment in Hong Kong to an environment that would be better for their four children. In his career as an academic in Australia, he would count an Australian prime minister, Kevin Rudd, as one of his distinguished students. Ryckmans was able to carry on the family tradition in the civil service, although briefly, returning to China in 1972 to work as a cultural attaché for the new Belgian Embassy in Beijing for six months. The China he saw in the 1970s, however, was a stark contrast to the China he knew in 1955, when everything seemed new, youthful and full of life (p. 279). His observations during his brief stint as a cultural attaché, and his one-month visit a year later as part of an ANU delegation, were featured in *Chinese Shadows* (1977), which was published in French in 1974 (*Ombres Chinoises*).

As a writer, Ryckmans proved to be adept at writing books that appealed to a general audience. Among the list of his literary accomplishments are the highly acclaimed *The Wreck of the Batavia and Prosper* (2005) and a historical novel, *The Death of Napoleon* (1992, published in French in 1986), that were both prize-winning publications. The popularity of *The Death of Napoleon* was such that it was translated into eight languages and adapted into an English film. Paquet highlights that Ryckmans’s familiarity with the totalitarianism of Maoist China and other similar regimes in the twentieth century inspired the writing of *The Wreck of the Batavia* (pp. 395–96, 398–99). Disheartened by the commercialisation of universities around the world, Ryckmans decided to take an early retirement from academia in
1994. The sinologist told Paquet that he made the ultimate decision after reading an internal university review in which the vice-chancellor instructed all staff to regard their students not as students but as customers (p. 440). Ryckmans would continue to make headlines as a public intellectual and writer long after he retired, being invited to give the ABC’s (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) Boyer Lectures in 1996 for which only the most eminent figures in the country are chosen (p. 448). His book, *The Hall of Uselessness: Collected Essays* (2011), was among his last publications before his death in 2014.

Paquet makes sure that the central role of Christianity in Ryckmans’s life is well documented, as it played a key part in his life as a scholar and public intellectual. Ryckmans came from, as Paquet describes, ‘a very Catholic family’ with close family members who had served in the clergy, and as missionaries overseas (pp. 21, 32–34, 37). His uncle and godfather Monseigneur Gonzague Ryckmans, a priest and himself a Chinese scholar, inspired him to go to China, and would remain an influential figure to him after his death. Ryckmans’s religious conviction would drive him to defend the Catholic faith and the values it upholds, as much as he would engage his Maoist opponents. In the letters pages of the *New York Times Review of Books*, he sparred with the evangelical atheist author Christopher Hitchens’s attacks on Mother Teresa and, in Australia, opposed gay marriage and euthanasia.

When reading Ryckmans’s biography, the reader would be struck by the quality of Paquet’s research, made evident by the way he obtains documents and meticulously explains his sources in his endnotes. His major advantage was the cooperation and support he secured from Ryckmans, his family and his acquaintances when writing this biography, which enabled the author to secure crucial insights into Ryckmans’s life. To the historian, this biography would serve as a valuable primary source on the sinologist, given the subject’s input into this biography. Ryckmans, according to Paquet, had himself read the final draft of his book ‘as he lay in a Sydney hospital fighting the disease that would carry him off’ (p. 15). Paquet’s attention to detail, taking the trouble, for instance, to provide the history and background of the community of Servite Sisters of Mary who ran the nursery school Ryckmans went to, ensures that his readers are well informed and the book easy to follow—the reader not having to rely on internet searches for clarity (p. 39).

The book is not merely a biography of Ryckmans, but is also a collection of mini biographies of the important figures of his life: the people he had worked with, and the scholars, writers and painters he admired. Paquet also captures the histories and political scene of the regions that Ryckmans navigated to in his life, charting the history of the twentieth-century world in the process. As such, this biography is a perfect example of what microhistory can accomplish. The same level of attention is given by the author when he discusses Ryckmans’s intellectual and literary
engagements. Readers will find themselves immersed in the intellectual world of Ryckmans, exploring Chinese art and literature, and learning about the Chinese works he was translating.

Nonetheless, with all his great attention to detail, it is surprising that Pacquet does not clarify what the ‘Catholic debacle of the 1911 elections’ was when explaining Ryckman’s grandfather’s exit as local councillor for Antwerp (1899–1901) (p. 19). This explanation would be helpful to readers outside of Western Europe who may not be familiar with the event (p. 19). Paquet also refers to Han Suyin living in Malaysia in the 1950s when the country had yet to exist, and was then only known as the Federation of Malaya (or casually as Malaya) even after the region’s independence from Britain in 1957 (p. 77). Malaysia only came into being in 1963, when the region merged with Singapore (which left the union to become a separate country in 1965), and the Bornean states of Sabah and Sarawak. Even if Paquet’s referring to Malaysia is intentional to make it easier for his readers to follow, as is commonly practised among scholars, he should still document the distinction as an endnote.

Rose’s excellent translation of Ryckmans’s biography into English does justice to the scholar who built his intellectual career as a translator of Chinese works into French and English and had proven adept in writing in the three languages. Her skilled interpretation fully complements the section of the book that details Ryckmans’s discussions on the art of translating and the qualities of a good translation, where he points out that the translator’s goal is to be as invisible as possible, to give the reader the illusion that he or she is reading the original (p. 128). The translator, says Ryckmans, only fails when spotted (p. 128). Rose’s translation reflects the qualities that Ryckmans saw in a translated work. Her efforts have not gone unnoticed, however, with her being the recipient of the Australian Academy of the Humanities 2018 Medal of Excellence for her work on Ryckmans’s biography.¹

Paquet sets a benchmark for scholars and writers on how a historical and intellectual biography can be done that is both scholarly and engaging. The skilled translation by Rose ensures that the broader English-speaking audience is able to enjoy and appreciate the quality of Paquet’s masterpiece as well as making certain that the story of Ryckmans, one of Australia’s greatest public intellectuals and sinologists, gets told in Australia, his adopted home and final resting place. The book’s length of about 600 pages may seem overlong for some readers and reviewers, but the length is necessary to accommodate the approach that Paquet uses to comprehensively document the life of Ryckmans and the world he lived in, which future scholars would certainly appreciate. The title of his biography is fitting for someone who loved the sea and had spent a significant portion of his life navigating between worlds.


From the outset Kirsten McKenzie lays out the potential for a salacious and scandalous (bordering on the comedic) narrative by providing a cast of main characters for quick reference for the reader to know who’s who in the theatre that was the British colonial administration in the midst of transformation in the 1820s. The protagonist William Edwards, also known as Alexander Loe Kaye (hereafter known as Edwards), a notary and escaped convict, is craftily woven through the dialogue as what McKenzie describes as ‘a fulcrum around which much larger changes in imperial administration would revolve’ (p. 3). Edwards, she reveals, was a reluctant player ‘in an uncanny series of temporal and geographic connections’ (p. 6). Coinciding with John Thomas Bigge’s Commission of Inquiry in New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land, and the Commission of Eastern Inquiry (along with William Colebrooke) at the Cape of Good Hope, Edwards played a pivotal role in agitating political and colonial administrative unrest. He was involved in the prize slave criminal libel trial as a result of his client, merchant Lancelot Cooke, having a disagreement with Charles Blair over the assignment of Jean Ellé that provoked a scandal over the treatment of liberated Africans. Both Edwards and Cooke were charged and after inducing large public interest, they were acquitted. A second criminal libel case was brought against Edwards a month later for sending two libellous letters to Governor Somerset. This time he was found guilty and sentenced to transportation to New South Wales. Finally, the placard scandal broke, which concerned Governor Somerset and James Berry being caught in a compromising position. Edwards was suspected of involvement in writing the placard even though he was imprisoned at the time. All three cases occurred in the Cape Colony in 1824. As a result, Edwards challenged the legalities of criminal libel, banishment and transportation, freedom of the press, as well as vexed issues over transnational laws and sovereignty. He was an enigma, described as a patriot and an activist, and accused of being Bigge’s covert agent. He was a case of both acquired identity and mistaken identity. Or was he? Not even in death was this certain.
But far from a ‘rollicking convict anecdote’, McKenzie, a professor of history at the University of Sydney, uses biography as her approach with which to reveal the unfolding transformation of the British colonial order (p. 13).\(^1\) Simply put, biography allows the reconstruction and an examination of a life course in which meaning can be drawn. The question of the historiographical and methodological value of an individual life is raised here. Historians Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart have considered this in their book *Chain Letters: Narrating Convict Lives*. They explain:

> The intellectual challenge faced by anyone who was to narrate convict lives is epistemological; what meanings can we legitimately attach to documents (textual or material) which are the source for knowing the past? How can we narrate the lives of people long dead?.\(^2\)

Further, they say, ‘[a]s a conceptual problem, the issue is highly complex and theoretical’.\(^3\) This has not deterred McKenzie, and she shows the usefulness of the single case in history. She places Edwards’s story in the context of the British colonial administration to elucidate political and social change. She contends that ‘the view from the margins provides us with a different way of understanding the cultural history of imperial politics’ (p. 8). Moreover, she claims: “The book … highlights the importance of taking gossip, paranoia, factional infighting and political spin seriously to show the extent to which ostensibly marginal figures and events influenced the transformation of nineteenth-century British empire’ (Back cover).

An interesting twist is that we see these events from a different perspective, one other than the traditional biographies of ‘great men’. With main players such as Lord Charles Henry Somerset, Governor of the Cape, Charles Blair and William Wilberforce Bird, the Comptrollers of Customs, and Daniel Dennysen, Cape fiscal, not to mention Bigge, as well as bit players such as James Barry, army medical officer and inspector-general of hospitals at the Cape, Ralph Darling, Governor of New South Wales and Francis Forbes, Chief Justice of New South Wales, it is easy to see why marginal characters such as Edwards get sidelined. McKenzie, however, was alert to Edwards’s duplicity and his ability to place himself in positions of influence. She was able to see Edwards as an individual agent in the larger story.

Overlooked by other historians, McKenzie was in search of reasons why Edwards was written out or pushed to the side of existing historical narratives (p. 13). She says many of her questions were inspired by tracking Edwards through unpublished

---

1 McKenzie describes Frank Clune’s depiction of Kaye/Edwards in *Scallywags of Sydney Cove* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1968), as being ‘consigned firmly to the annals of rollicking convict anecdote’.


manuscripts, and confidential and public sources (p. 17). The value of sources cannot be overstated in biography, for if they are limited, what meanings can we assign to them? Can we effectively reconstruct and examine a life course?

The bulk of the sources McKenzie consults focus predominantly on the early 1820s in the Cape Colony. In fact, the bulk of the book also focuses on that period, most notably on the events in the year 1824. Nevertheless, she weaves expertly through the fragmentary evidence to expose not only the machinations of colonial administrations but also the tightknit relationships within them. The use of both private and public correspondence in colonial times served as protection as well as deflection for the authors. They were designed to act together (p. 80). We can hear Edwards's voice as well as his character in his correspondence and from the testimony of others. For instance, McKenzie examines Somerset's candid relationship with Bigge through their private correspondence. Although only one side of their correspondence is available, she recognises that Somerset's writing becomes 'increasingly strained and emotional', ‘[d]escending into an illegible scrawl' as the events provoked by Edwards unfolded (pp. 194–95). These narratives previously ignored or overlooked are complex, and at times messy, but are elements of the whole. McKenzie goes to pains to confirm or dismiss sources, all the while cross-checking, analysing and explaining all to the reader.

Even though Edwards was fundamental to the story, I was occasionally left feeling like he had all but disappeared, so much focus on context and exchanges between others were made. But these are important too. For the biographer, their subject is central to the narrative; this is not necessarily so for the historian.

McKenzie places large quotes from private and public correspondence throughout the book. Usually this is seen as distracting and demonstrating little analysis. In this case, however, the dialogue is rich for its prose and content: it speaks for itself. So titillating in parts no other author could do them justice. Here the direct quotes signpost authenticity in a somewhat murky and almost unbelievable story. As the saying goes, 'you can't make this stuff up'!

This style opens itself to explore relationships of the marginal and the main characters. McKenzie artfully peels back the layers of individuals, their interpersonal networks and the colonial society that they lived within and exposes the challenges and issues of how the British rule of law operated in the colonies. These interconnected, transnational relationships reveal the importance of reputation and honour, status and class, and manipulation and corruption within the colonial administration. The parliamentary commissions of enquiry were the impetus of imperial reform where the commissioners's role was to investigate but not take action (p. 128). For their part, they were observers, confidants, recorders, but unable to take immediate action. The government, on the other hand, took matters into its own hands. For example, McKenzie relates correspondence around
the government suppressing the South African Commercial Advertiser to avoid publicity over the second libel trial. Farcical scenes played out when a warrant for the suppression of the press was enacted. A member of the Court of Justice was covered in printing ink, the fiscal nearly lost his hand on an iron plate, and yet the news was still distributed, thrown from an upper-storey window on hand-laid inked sheets because the government had failed to also seal the type (pp. 192–93). And with rumours of spies, conspiracies and espionage underlining the colonial administration, although McKenzie rightly points out they would more commonly be ad hoc and opportunistic members of the wider community, all the elements were there for a grand theatrical production (p. 93).

Even though the fair weight of the book focuses on one period of significant events, Edwards’s life plays out chronologically. We are taken through his background, his career, his convictions, his transportation, his escape, his time in the Cape, his marriage to Elizabeth, his transportation, his time in New South Wales and finally his sudden death on Norfolk Island. Throughout, McKenzie tussles with Edwards’s actions. She says: ‘Of all the difficulties in telling Edwards’s story, the most challenging is the near impossibility of interpreting his reasoning and motives’ (p. 160). Eventually she concedes Edwards had ‘an apparent inability to refrain from injudicious personal attacks on any figure in authority’ (p. 162). Nevertheless, she claims Edwards played both a deliberate and inadvertent role in the transformation of imperial structures of the New South Wales and Cape colonies (p. 8). She does well to navigate the intricacies of his life. Convicts having an alias was not unusual for the time; however, not all convicts escaped the colony and turned up in another causing so much havoc with a colonial administration.

McKenzie made concessions too. Increasingly, colonial histories are noted for their inclusion, or more importantly exclusion, of indigenous peoples and their place in the evolving society. She admits there is little focus on missionaries and indigenous peoples in the book because they did not factor in the life and activities of Edwards (p. 48). It was likely Edwards had some sort of interaction with indigenous peoples, both in New South Wales and South Africa, but without evidence it would be pure speculation. Bookended by Norfolk Island, I would have like to have known more about Edwards’s short time there, particularly his relationships with others on the island. I wonder if he was able to undermine the colonial administration there before he hanged himself, or was it in itself another protest against them? In any case, it was the closing act of this fascinating story.

McKenzie could have chosen any one of the ‘great men’ to take centre stage of this history. Instead, she chose an apparent outlier. The dialogue is richer for it. She makes a convincing argument to use biography to provide new understandings of our colonial past. Her intriguing and meticulously researched analysis demonstrates individual convicts were instrumental in the transformation of administration of the British colonies and should not be written out or pushed to the side of historical
narratives. We have moved beyond the rollicking convict anecdote to a place where the serious biographical approach reveals that individuals had agency within the administration and were active participants, whether as agitators or agents of change. Further historical life course analysis of individuals, particularly those who are seemingly outliers, would add to the debate. Using the sensational life and death of an escaped convict to tell the story of the transformation of the British colonial order is a huge ask of any person; however, Edwards, through McKenzie, has found his place in history. I can only imagine he would be quite pleased at being recognised in this way!
Darryn Ansted review of Rex Butler and Sheridan Palmer (eds), Antipodean Perspective: Selected Writings of Bernard Smith

(Clayton, Vic.: Monash University Publishing, 2018), 401 pp., PB $29.95, ISBN 9781925495669

A new book on the seminal Australian art historian Bernard Smith recognises that he remains one of the most interesting figures in Australian art history. Antipodean Perspective, edited by Rex Butler and Sheridan Palmer, is a guided tour of Bernard Smith's persistent, fine-grained, analytical and expert accounts of art and its cultures. Born in 1916, Smith ascended from a bleak beginning to the pinnacle of art history scholarship in Australia. In 1955 he became a lecturer at the University of Melbourne and in 1967 he became director of the Power Institute of Fine Arts in Sydney. This text traverses Smith's major contributions to the field during his long academic life. In it, 28 leading scholars and artists supplement carefully chosen excerpts from Smith's books, papers, speeches, autobiography and manifesto with passages that explain how his writing influenced the course of their own thoughts and speculate on what his passages on art represent today.

The authors point out how Smith's encyclopaedic and taxonomical tendencies are underwritten by a steadfast sense of a duty of care to Australia and its art. Smith was able to extend his academic gaze not only to regard the past and the future, but also into the horrors of colonial dispossession and urgency of antipodean vision, and he researched how both of these tendencies permeate Australian identity both internally and when viewed from afar. The hallmark of Smith's work was perhaps its production of this unified panorama of disunity.

As the chapters couple Smith's primary texts with accompanying interpretive glosses, the book undulates in tone but this makes it an interesting read. The reader learns how Smith was uncannily prophetic of shifts in art and society (pp. 176, 199). He grasped cultural phenomena as being never explained entirely by either a pattern of evolution or demise. Rather, he had an unbending appreciation of culture's constant dynamic relationships, both spatially and temporally. It was only in the broad sense, concerning the entirety of modernism, that he ventured to definitively identify it as ending. To Smith, modernist art's apotheosis of ‘form’ (seen in Art Informel and Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s) was a mark of modernism's decline. It seems that the aspiration for a pure or high modernism that was provocatively abstract, autonomous and indirectly related to content was so premised on pushing boundaries that it resulted in atrophy (p. 152). The subsequent
generation of contemporary artists of the 1960s, intent on finding ways to
dematerialise art’s forms, was, in many cases, feeling the same way, and many of that
generation sought to recalibrate their work to a socio-political axis that ‘cuts across
stylistic divisions’ in order to be ‘involved in social change’ (p. 160). From corralling
figurative painters in Melbourne in the 1950s (into a group mounting a counter-
attack on derivative, effect-based neo-avantgarde art) through to his publishing of
The Formalesque: A Guide to Modern Art and Its History (an obscure parting gift
to the discipline 50 years later) he lived to catalyse big thinking and adventurous
engagement rather than posturing and gestures that relied on superficial appeal
to novelty. He preferred that things, people, places and events be addressed in an
accessible and transparent way. Stains, blots or drips for their own sake were too
introspective, ascetic, anodyne and inhibited, too remote from things, people, places
and events. In the collection, Ian McLean writes briefly of Smith’s concept of the
Formalesque, calling it Smith’s last great folly, ‘Who could argue with that? No one
did. Rather it was ignored’. The only notable omission from the program assembled
in the text is deeper discussion of this unfashionable concept of the Formalesque.
McLean chooses the word ‘folly’ as an insurance policy. It could be a dismissive
judgement, as ‘folly’ means ‘foolish act’, but ‘folly’ also has another meaning, more
like ‘cabaret’. Smith would have preferred a book about him to be solely focused on
his concept of the Formalesque—and I hope that one is on the horizon. One thing
this text shows is that Smith has left behind an oeuvre that, through its examination
of the battles in Australian art, operates like a Bayeux tapestry, and awaits yet
further scholarship.

Ronald Millar, an artist and critic invited to contribute to the collection, accuses
Smith of bigotry and exclusiveness in arguably Smith’s most famous piece of writing,
the provocative Antipodean Manifesto, citing Smith’s view that abstract painting
carried a less tangible connection to life than representational, figurative painting.
Perhaps the Antipodean Manifesto is heavy handed. At first, it reads like a plot device
from a Shakespearean play. An orator gives a background, setting the scene with
(figurative) heroes and (abstract) villains poised to spar in an ‘Indian Summer’
(p. 57). The script imagines a feud not unlike that between Capulet and Montague
clans. Unimpressed, Millar accuses Smith of snobbery. However, to be fair, Smith
was always attempting to take into account the vast number of people customarily
left aside by the art world establishment, people who do not attend art exhibition
openings and for whom art does not require decoding. This collection does a great
service by incorporating a range of perspectives like this, which can be unpacked at
a variety of levels, from the academy to the tavern.

The book shines on perhaps the central motif punctuating Smith’s opus. It
illuminates how there are inevitably both advantages and drawbacks to Smith’s
means of addressing issues philosophically. Contributors Heather Barker and Charles
Green intimate Smith’s belief was that (formal) ‘freedom’ in art associated with
a then new art ‘centre’ in New York, dislodged figuration from fashion partly due to an irrational fear of the other of Socialist Realism. Smith believed in a transparent connection to one’s ideological surrounds and one’s community. However, the intense light Smith’s thought sheds also dazzled his own view. His clarity of purpose was without question. However, it may be that he did not sufficiently distinguish that camp, which was a mode that comprises some contributions to late modernist art, was at times manifesting the very same social agency, rooted in exactly the sense of community, that he suspected high modernist art to disavow. Perhaps, overzealous to dismiss art that was obliquely codified as flippant or overconfident, Smith’s commitment was also his weakness, as Millar dares to hint.

By collecting Smith’s most significant tracts of text on art, Australia and the cultures they circumscribe, and placing them beside texts written by those inheriting this task, Antipodean Perspective opens Smith’s work to a new, wider audience. Smith survived the period of the slaying of Hegelian methodology because, although he built a system, he focused more on its flows and exchanges, than its compartments and hierarchies, demonstrating as Peter Beilharz notes, in his separate, brilliant biography of Smith, a foreshadowing of the methodologies art history now takes as fundamental tools for understanding the relays of power and identity in a postcolonial paradigm. Rex Butler labels Smith a neo-Hegelian in the introduction, reflecting that it is Smith’s blend of criticality with common sense that makes his work eminently readable.

Smith’s work is engrossing because it conveys how theory and practice are entwined in a relationship that can be simultaneously both a love affair and a wrestling match. He was a vocal pacifist, sought ‘more representative’ institutions (pp. 20, 162) and exposed Fascism and anti-Semitism in the 1940s (p. 36). He cautioned the art museum against bowing to pressure to turn a profit rather than seeking to educate throughout the 1960s, he championed social justice for Aboriginal people into the 1980s and discussed the colonial frontier honestly as one of murder, rape, abduction, servitude and slavery (pp. 190, 193). Near the end, one afternoon in his terraced house at 168 Nicholson Street, Fitzroy, he spoke to me of the reverence he had for John Ruskin, whose 39 volumes lined his study, which is an opus, that, he said, still inspired him to keep working into his nineties. His work is a doorway to similarly vast thinking as that of Ruskin and Antipodean Perspective is a doorway into Smith’s thinking. The short-passage format makes it as accessible as Harrison and Wood’s classic Art in Theory, and equally a tome for the ‘time-poor’ or those who tend to find themselves needing to compile a lecture or write an essay in a single evening.

In his autobiography, Smith writes of the garden of his childhood foster home: ‘so that had I not written this down no trace of that garden would have survived.’ Although he refers to the Japanese plum tree, the loquat trees, the Jerusalem artichokes and various types of roses forming an Arcadian frame to his childhood
in Sydney, he could equally have been describing the oeuvre that he left behind. Australian art history is a field that his scholarship filled with an abundance of still-fruiting, organised labours. Smith insisted on disclosing it to be a rich and varied world that all art historians and artists should feel at home in, nurtured by and free to critique. Often misunderstood in his lifetime, this book offers to return Smith to a prominent position in the discourse of Australian art history.
Notes on contributors

Darryn Ansted is a Lecturer in Painting in the School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry at Curtin University. He studied Fine Arts at the University of Western Australia and Royal Academy, Antwerp, and is the author of *The Artwork of Gerhard Richter: Painting, Critical Theory and Cultural Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2017).

Kate Bagnall’s research focuses on the history of Chinese migrants, their families and descendants in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia and New Zealand. She is particularly interested in histories of women, children and the family, and in legal histories of migration and citizenship. From 2016 to 2019 Kate was an ARC DECRA Research Fellow at the University of Wollongong, and she has recently taken up a position as Senior Lecturer in Humanities at the University of Tasmania.

Jennifer Bird has a BA (Hons) in Australian History and Writing from the University of New England. She has a strong interest in Australian convict history, colonial history, Indigenous history, oral history and biography. She is currently a PhD candidate with the National Centre of Biography in the School of History at The Australian National University (ANU). She is researching an individual experience of the colonial penal system during the years 1829 to 1869, that of recidivist convict, Robert Edward Knox, who was incarcerated for around 30 of his 40 years in the New South Wales colony.

Joshua Black is a postgraduate student in political history at the National Centre for Biography at ANU. He completed his BA (Hons) at the University of Wollongong in 2018; his thesis was entitled ‘For What Purpose?: The Political Memoirs and Diaries of the Rudd–Gillard Labor Cabinet’, and it examined the authorial intent and historiographical construction of the previous Labor Cabinet’s political memoir output. He continues to expand this field of research in his doctoral thesis, ‘Inside the Recent Political Past: Memoirs, Autobiographies and Diaries in Australian Political History’. In 2019 he was awarded the Research School of Social Science (RSSS), ANU Director’s Award for Higher Degree Research.

Pat Buckridge retired as professor of literary studies at Griffith University in 2013 after teaching there for over thirty years. Among his publications are a biography of Brian Penton (*The Scandalous Penton*, 1994) and (with Belinda McKay) *By the Book: A Literary History of Queensland* (2007). He has contributed 10 articles to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* on Australian writers, journalists and others,
and has also published widely on Australian literature and the history of reading in Australia. His other research interests include Renaissance English literature and the Shakespeare authorship debate.

Margy Burn has held senior positions at the State Libraries of New South Wales and South Australia and recently retired from the position of Assistant Director-General, Australian Collections & Readers Services, at the National Library of Australia. She has been involved with the Australian Women’s Archives Project since its inception nearly 20 years ago.

Peter Crabb is an Honorary Senior Lecturer in the Fenner School of Environment and Society at ANU. His main area of research has long been water resources management, with a particular interest in the Murray-Darling Basin. More recently, he has been investigating some of the newspaper reporters who worked on the goldfields in nineteenth century New South Wales and Victoria. Of particular interest is Charles de Boos, who worked for The Argus and the Sydney Morning Herald. The story of John Hux, a relative of de Boos through marriage, is one outcome of the on-going research.

Jackie Dickenson completed a PhD in labour history at the University of Melbourne in 2005 after a career in the advertising industry. Her doctoral thesis was published as Renegades and Rats: Betrayal and the Remaking of Radical Organisations in Britain and Australia (2006). She has subsequently published on Australian history, labour history, political history, and advertising history, including Trust Me: Australians and their Politicians (2013) and, with Robert Crawford, Behind Glass Doors: The World of Australian Advertising Agencies 1959–1989 (2016). Her 2016 publication Australian Women in Advertising in the Twentieth Century includes a chapter on the advertising achievements of Elma Kelly.

Nichola Garvey is a PhD candidate at the National Centre of Biography, ANU. She has a Masters in Creative Writing and combines the disciplines of biography and creative writing to produce vivid portraiture. Her PhD thesis is entitled ‘Second Fleet Women: First Rate Survivors’ and is due for submission in 2021.

Alexandra McKinnon is an MPhil candidate at ANU, exploring memory, commemoration and loss in the aftermath of World War I. She has worked with a range of cultural institutions as an interpreter, including the Canadian National Vimy Memorial and the Australian War Memorial. She holds a BA (Hons) in History and Material Culture from the University of Toronto (2017), and graduated with High Distinction (First Class Honours). She was a recipient of the Summer Vacation Scholarship Scheme at the Australian War Memorial (2019).

Anne Pender was Professor of English and Theatre Studies at the University of New England from 2016 to 2019, and has recently taken up the Kidman Chair in Australian Studies at the University of Adelaide. She has taught Australian literature
at King’s College London and at the University of Copenhagen. Anne’s books include *Seven Big Australians: Adventures with Comic Actors* (2019) and *From a Distant Shore: Australian Writers in Britain 1820–2012* (2013). Anne held a prestigious Fulbright Senior Scholarship at Harvard University in 2018 and is currently working on an analysis of Australian writers and performers residing in the United States.

Susan Priestley has been for many years a freelance historian. She served for 20 years on the Council of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria from 1991 and was President 1999–2004. She is a contributor to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and her many published works include Victorian local and institutional histories and *Making Their Mark* (volume 3 of *The Victorians*). A biography of the activist Henrietta Augusta Dugdale was published in 2011. She is currently enrolled in a PhD in the School of History, ANU, to write a thesis on ‘Threads in the tapestry: Federation-era migrants and Australian identity’.

Suzanne Robinson’s biography of the Australian-born composer and critic Peggy Glanville-Hicks was published by the University of Illinois Press in 2019. She is the editor or co-editor of five other books, including *Grainger the Modernist* (Ashgate, 2015) and *Marshall-Hall’s Melbourne* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2012), and is currently Series Editor at Lyrebird Press, based at the University of Melbourne. Her ABC Radio interview about the biography can be heard at www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/musicshow/suzanne-robinson-on-peggy-glanville-hicks-biography/11504616.

Sophie Scott-Brown is a lecturer in philosophy at the University of East Anglia, UK, with research interests in modern intellectual history, life writing and performance theory. Her book, *The Histories of Raphael Samuel: A Portrait of a People’s Historian* (2017) addressed the poetics of pluralism in modern British historiography. She is currently working on a biography of Colin Ward, the most prominent British anarchist writer of the twentieth century.

Kim Sterelny is Professor of Philosophy at ANU and Chief Investigator and leader of the Language Evolution program at the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language. He was an ARC Laureate Professor of Philosophy 2014–19. His research in the last decade and a half has been particularly interested in human evolution, and in understanding the evolution of the distinctive features of human social life, and of the cognitive capacities that make that life possible.

Wilbert Wong Wei Wen has a BA (Hons) from the University of Otago, was a research fellow at the Singapore National Library for the first half of 2016, and has tutored courses in world history at the University of Waikato and, later, at ANU. Wilbert has a strong interest in world history particularly the history of ideas, focusing on cross-cultural encounters between Asia and the West. He is currently a PhD candidate with the School of History, ANU, researching British productions of knowledge on the Malay Peninsula.