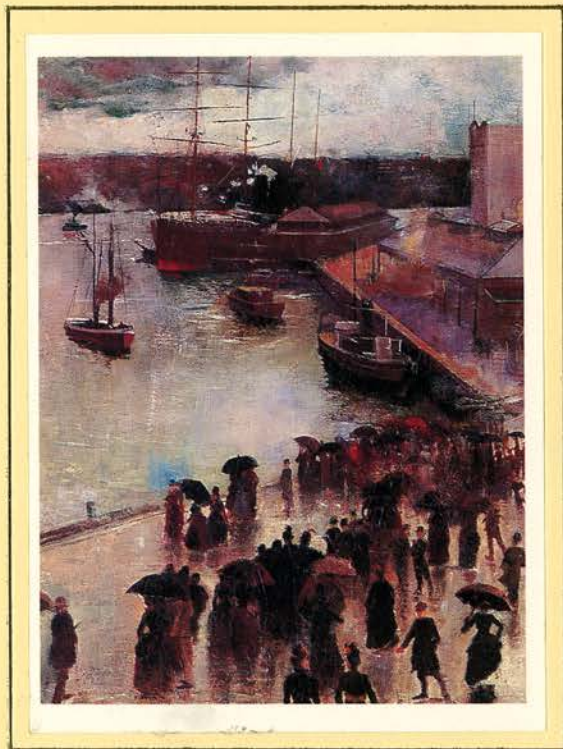


AUSTRALIANS



1888

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1888

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*Detail from Charles Conder, The departure of
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ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

FOREWORD

THIS BOOK and its ten companions have been ten years in the making. They have been created to mark the bicentenary of European settlement in this country, and they are the outcome of collaboration on a scale never before attempted in the writing of Australian history. Hundreds of people in and beyond universities have joined together to re-create the experience of people living in Australia since 1788 and to place that experience in the wider context of a human occupation that began tens of thousands of years ago.

The editors and contributors have worked in a variety of modes: from slicing into the past at fifty-year intervals (*Australians 1838, 1888 and 1938*) to laying out, in terse chronology, events as they happened year by year (*Events and places*), and from portraying processes and movements on maps of the country (*A historical atlas*) to briefing readers for explorations of their own (*A guide to sources*). The authors represent diverse approaches, in terms both of occupation—historian, economist, archaeologist, geographer, librarian, journalist—and of outlook. We have sought the best person for each part of the job, and not altered or muffled anybody's voice. We have also tried to make the work of scholars readily accessible to general readers.

In this aspiration we have been strengthened by a close working relationship with the publishers. From early days the project has benefited from continuous consultation with representatives of Fairfax, Syme & Weldon about its form and presentation. Their confidence in our enterprise has heartened us throughout the long journey.

Together, we and they present *Australians: a historical library* to the people of Australia as an offering for 1988 and beyond.

OLIVER MACDONAGH

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PREFACE

WHEN AUSTRALIANS commemorate the lengthening history of British settlement on this continent, they are adding to a tradition established by new societies and regimes. The French in 1889 proclaimed that their republican history was a century deep. Americans in 1876 celebrated the enduring success of what their founding fathers had begun by revolution in 1776, and late in the nineteenth century they coined the word 'bicentennial' to proclaim the even greater age of cities, churches and schools founded before the revolution. 'Sesquicentennial' was invented at the same time to honour American institutions only fifty years younger.

In Australia, New South Wales had patriots keen to designate 1838 as a year of jubilee. Half a century later, the idea of a centennial festivity was initiated in Sydney and taken up with more or less enthusiasm by people in other colonies who were unsure whether they wanted their shorter histories to be connected with that of the old penal colony. 'Sesquicentennial' became a word for Australians to get their mouths around in 1938, when organisers of the 150th anniversary commemoration did their best to engage citizens of other states in festivities centred on New South Wales. Readers of *Australians 1838*, *Australians 1888*, and *Australians 1938* will find these jubilee, centennial and sesquicentennial celebrations explored. Their occurrence, indeed, is a reason why we have picked those years as vehicles for one of the approaches employed in these books.

Historians are professionally interested in the passing of time, and in 1977 a few historians in Canberra began to think about 1988 as a year offering a special opportunity to their craft. That year, we guessed, would inspire a larger and more general commemoration than Australians had organised at the end of any previous half-century. The coming occasion was sure to be more *national* than those others, for advances in central government, transport and communication had accelerated the transformation of states that had once been separate colonies into provinces of a single polity, whose people travelled about as never before, talked to each other on STD, watched all over the continent the same prime ministerial news

conference and the same cricket match. Moreover, Australian history itself was gaining a new popularity, as Stuart Macintyre comments at the end of the first chapter in *Australians: a guide to sources*. The names of Manning Clark and Geoffrey Blainey were better known than those of any scholarly historian in earlier times; historical and genealogical societies were burgeoning, and tourists flocked to Ballarat to see goldrush days reconstructed at Sovereign Hill and to Old Sydney Town to see convict floggings re-enacted. Television viewers switched on to Australian costume dramas; and cinema audiences were offered, in 1977 alone, eight feature films based on life in the remote and recent Australian past.

All in all, it appeared likely that public and private enterprise would make 1988 a year for intense consciousness of Australian history. What might historians contribute? Individually, of course, whatever scholarly article or biography or general history an author was moved to attempt. Collectively? The Canberra group, consulting widely, found some antipathy towards the very idea of collaborative enterprise—‘history by committee’—and some particular doubts about proposed approaches. But it also found much interest and enthusiasm, and eventually enough support to embark on the project that has become *Australians: a historical library*.

The makers of these books do not see them as official history in any sense. The project has had no money from the Australian Bicentennial Authority. Money for general administration and for research on different volumes has been provided from universities (especially the Australian National University and the University of New South Wales), and from the Australian Research Grants Scheme. General and volume editors have taken on the job as part of their work in universities and colleges of advanced education. With few exceptions, contributors are also unpaid. Royalties will go into a fund to support Australian studies. Some advance royalties, paid years ahead of publication, have been ploughed into research for the books.

That was a source of funds unforeseen when we began. Some potential publishers told us that they would need a subsidy; Fairfax, Syme and Weldon asked for no subsidy, anticipated larger sales than any other publisher we approached, and encouraged us to plan without any inhibitions the size of the books and the quantity and quality of illustrations. The scale on which the publishers have been willing to undertake the project has helped us keep two early resolutions: to write for general readers, addressing them with respect but without assuming prior knowledge and to illustrate the books richly, not for mere decorative effect but to integrate visual material with text.

One half of our enterprise was quickly decided on. Anniversaries, like royal visits, can yield amenities that were needed anyway but required the special occasion to provoke someone into providing them. The celebrations of 1888 endowed Sydney with Centennial Park and the approach of 1988 induced politicians in Canberra to put up a new and permanent Parliament House. Historians had long lamented the absence of a set of reference books that would deliver essential information about Australian history to students, authors and browsers. Our series therefore includes *Australians: a historical atlas*, *Australians: events and places*, *Australians: a historical dictionary*, *Australians: historical statistics* and *Australians: a guide to sources*.

When we wondered about other ways of throwing new light on the past, we considered and set aside a number of approaches. In particular we decided not to add to the shelves one more general narrative history by many hands, which (it seemed to us) would merely elaborate our present understandings of the past without providing any fresh vision. We began to talk about an approach that invited and even required all authors to break new ground. Instead of inviting a

team of contributors to divide up history into chronological sections and have each fill in a stage in his or her own way, we thought of asking groups of writers to work together on a very short period; instead of inviting historians to pass the baton along a familiar track, we proposed a series of survey camps; instead of stringing events on a thread of narrative, we imagined cutting slices.

A book about Australia in a particular year would have at least some qualities in common with Sovereign Hill and Old Sydney Town—exhibitions built to show what our society was like at one moment in its past. Such a book would resemble Elie Halévy's *England in 1815* (1912), or the third chapter of Lord Macaulay's *History of England* (1848), which dealt with the nation in 1685. Both are works in which authors reconstruct a society in a particular year, and contrive perceptions of earlier events by means other than continuous narrative. Adopted by a group of writers, the approach would invite intimate collaboration between scholars with different skills. An economic historian working with a historical geographer, or a historian of medicine exchanging ideas with a social historian, would, we believed, win for readers a richer understanding of the lives Australians were living at a chosen time than any one scholar, working alone, could have achieved.

By writing about one year in people's lives, moreover, historians could avoid creating the most common illusion conveyed by narrative approaches: that history is a stream, carrying people towards a predetermined destination clearly visible to us, if not to them. Slicing through a year, we might hope to see and hear people living as we do, taking some things for granted—the sun rises and sets, the seasons pass, people grow older—but at the same time surrounded by choices and uncertainties. We might recognise people more easily as our own kind if we met them living out the daily, weekly, seasonal, annual and biological rhythms of their lives; and we would certainly understand them more fully by grasping the truth that the future that beckoned or alarmed them was not necessarily *our* past—what actually happened—but rather a hidden destiny, a precarious vision of probabilities, possibilities and uncertainties.

The slice approach could help us to recover the richness of everyday life. James Joyce, inspired to write fiction about what some people in Dublin were doing and thinking and feeling on one day in 1904, had made the discovery, his biographer Richard Ellmann suggests, 'that the ordinary is the extraordinary'. Great novelists make worlds of their own, but the historian can also seek the extraordinary in the ordinary. Indeed, that is one way of describing the kind of history newly attempted in the age of democracy, whose subject is not just public and powerful heroes and villains, but the myriad men and women who are their constituents, victims, contemporaries from womb to grave. The writers of *Australians 1838*, *Australians 1888* and *Australians 1938* have searched hard for sources giving access to the private, the domestic, the workaday, the realms of family and community, the lives of ordinary men, women and children. This is not, as G. M. Trevelyan said of his pioneering social history of England, history with the politics left out; politics is in, but placed in its social, economic and cultural contexts.

While charting the rhythms of existence, we have not ignored change and conflict. In 1838 an unprecedented overland movement of people and animals was under way across southeastern Australia. One consequence of that movement was intensified hostility between white settlers and Aborigines, and the killing of Aborigines by pastoral workers at Myall Creek is a central event in *Australians 1838*. In *Australians 1888* colonists celebrate a century of British settlement and politicians try their hardest to exclude the Chinese. *Australians 1938* records both the mild improvement in material conditions experienced by most people since the depression years, and the strike at Port Kembla about the export of pig iron to Japan.

The years 1838, 1888 and 1938 attracted us not only because they were times of commemoration, but also because they do not have historians' labels attached to them, as, say, does 1851 (gold), or 1914 (war) or 1929 (depression). Exploring years not already identified with familiar themes would serve well, we thought, our purpose of discovering things not yet in the history books about what life was like for earlier generations of Australians.

These are also years that are almost one person's lifetime apart. The slice approach does not ignore everything that happened in the intervening half-centuries. Like Australians today, the people of our chosen years were, in important ways, what their past made them, for every moment in time is at once the culmination of past events and the beginning of the future, and every generation is shaped by its own past—and by *its own* vision of the future. Slicing does not obliterate the long view backwards or forwards: instead, it tries to capture visions of the past and future as they seemed to earlier generations.

One book, we resolved, should examine the longest period of all in Australian history, the epoch in which Australia was occupied solely by Aboriginal people. The richest evidence about this ancient Aboriginal heritage often dates from initial contact with Europeans. For the people of the Sydney region, that took place in 1788; elsewhere, the experience of 1788 was re-enacted in various ways as European settlement spread. Where possible, archaeological, linguistic and other techniques of prehistory have been used in *Australians to 1788* to explore changes and continuities in Aboriginal society over thousands of years; nevertheless, the idea of '1788' as the point of contact rather than as a specific calendar year gives this first book something in common with the slice volumes. And if the concern to reconstruct Aboriginal society and culture at the coming of the European intruders involves a kind of slicing, the final chapter of *Australians to 1788* adopts the approach quite specifically. By exploring the first year of British settlement it enables the first four volumes of *Australians* to present a series of slices at half-century intervals. A twenty-year-old convict who knew the Sydney described in that chapter might, in old age, have known also the world of *Australians 1838*, just as a young woman immigrant of 1838 might, after fifty years in the colonies, have witnessed the centennial celebrations of 1888, or Aborigines alive in 1888 have watched their people incorporated into the sesquicentennial pageantry of 1938. Our slice years are thus linked by the living memories of several generations of Australians.

We decided to devote the fifth book—the last volume before the reference works—to the whole period from 1939, so that in the bicentennial year Australians old and new could read about the society they inhabited. In the pages of *Australians: a historical library*, as in all the other ways in which Australians will mark the significance of 1988, a future generation of historians may perhaps find evidence about the contemporary society. But as we write, that slice still lies in our future.

ALAN D. GILBERT

K. S. INGLIS

INTRODUCTION

ALL HISTORIES are products of their time and display the insights and blind spots of their generation. Like the large picture books published in 1888 to mark the centenary of Australia, this is a commemorative history, and its writers share the ideals and illusions of their time, just as the writers of 1888 were limited by the outlook of their day. Many of the questions that perplexed the men and women of 1888 continue to perplex Australians: the dilemma of how to use or conserve our natural resources, the inheritance of bitterness between black and white Australians, the rival claims of capital and labour to a share in the country's wealth, the proper relations between men and women, the interplay of freedom and order in public life. But this bicentennial history is different from the centennial histories in one important way.

Through all the ceremonies and celebrations, all the speeches, sermons and histories of 1888, there runs a single refrain: the material and social progress of the nation. Confident that they stood on a pinnacle of enlightenment and civilisation, the public men of 1888 looked back on earlier times as a series of stepping stones towards an independent, prosperous and federated Australia. With the advantage of hindsight, they endowed past events with an inevitability that was invisible to those who took part in them. They forgot all the detours and setbacks, all the time-consuming and heartbreaking events of everyday life that did not fit the contours of the national success story.

This book is about the daily lives of ordinary people, rich and poor, old and young, country-bred and city-born, who lived in Australia in 1888. By devoting our book to the lives of these people during a single year, we are able to dwell on many aspects of late colonial society that escaped the statesmen and historians of the time, to show how society functioned, as well as how it changed. We can take account of the limitations under which people laboured, as well as how they overcame them. We can view life through the eyes of the people of the time, rather than through the eyes of posterity.

Australians 1888 aims to draw the eye of history away from the governors and politicians who dominated the centennial celebrations, focusing instead on the

anonymous men, women and children who made up the crowds. We view ceremonies at Sydney Cove and Centennial Park; we visit South Australian wheat farmers and Queensland plantation workers, Melbourne manufacturers and Sydney wharf labourers, widowed matriarchs and orphaned street arabs. Most of the people whose daily lives we describe would not have considered themselves a part of history. They would have been astonished to think that the everyday events chronicled in their diaries and letters would one day have a place in the national story.

These people were more aware of the ebb and flow of everyday life than of the tides of history. The ground rhythm of colonial life was set by the natural cycle of months and seasons. New knowledge and new tools were enabling European Australians to extend their control over the natural environment, but droughts, bushfires, floods and plagues reminded them that their mastery was still incomplete. This is the theme of part I, Land and People. As the land was settled, new industries, towns and cities grew up, creating a rich tapestry of human activity and movement. Part II, The Regional Mosaic, contrasts the seasonal routines of forestry, farming and station life with the mechanised rhythms of the mine, the factory and the railway. The days which diarists usually recorded most carefully were the birthdays, anniversaries, marriages and funerals which marked the private histories of their own families. Part III, Private Lives, describes the passage of the generations and the intimate lives of families. Finally, in part IV, The Public Domain, we re-enter the world of public events, dominated by the official calendars of churches, clubs, courts and parliaments.

A book about everyday life written collaboratively by several writers was bound to be more like a conversation among members of a crowd than a speech from a public platform. We hope that our readers will detect the different voices, not only of the men and women of 1888, but of the sixteen historians who wrote the chapters, people who come from five different states, who specialise in various branches of political, economic, social and cultural history and who hold diverse political convictions. At several conferences we planned a book that would be unified in theme and style while reflecting the diversity of the contributors' historical visions. The authors generously gave the editors considerable freedom to reshape their manuscripts in accordance with the agreed design.

The people of 1888 who heard, and sometimes applauded, the speeches of the centennial celebrations interpreted them in terms of their own diverse experiences. *Australians 1888* is a conversation, not only between the historians and the people of 1888, but also with the Australians of 1988. Many have already had a hand in the production of this book; they have attended our occasional conferences, contributed to our bulletin, *Australia 1888*, and allowed us to use their family letters, diaries and photographs. We offer the book to them, and to all our readers, in the confidence that they, like the people of 1888, will make their own judgments, based on experience.

GRAEME DAVISON
J. W. McCARTY
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Australia confronts the world to-day with a record of 100 years, with a marvellous past, a prosperous present, and a future of boundless possibilities. It may be said of her that she is only now beginning to be known and to live.

Argus, 26 January 1888.

The fact that a hundred years have elapsed since the colonisation of Australia is itself a matter of no special importance . . . The roll of empty years contains little that is worthy of any better fate than oblivion, so New South Wales is reduced to the dire extremity of keeping holiday in commemoration of the first milestone on the long, slow road to an unhonoured old age. A more imbecile subject for rejoicing could not well be conceived . . .

Bulletin, 21 January 1888.



Invitation card to the centennial state banquet. This souvenir invitation, regarded as a superior example of contemporary colour printing technique, was designed by T.F. Curtis of the printers John Sands and Company. The portrait of Queen Victoria surrounded by a laurel wreath is flanked by the colonial flags, symbolising the colonies' unity under the British crown. Captain Cook and Governor Phillip are shown in the medallions on the left and right. Around the border are scenes of the landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay; Sydney Cove in 1788; the arrival of the first fleet and Circular Quay in 1888. The central lower section of the border shows Circular Quay from Milson's Point.

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CENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS

AS DAY BROKE CLEAR and bright over Sydney Heads on 26 January 1888 Australians prepared to celebrate their first great national birthday. Exactly one hundred years had passed since Captain Arthur Phillip had hoisted the British flag and toasted the British monarch on the shores of Sydney Cove. Time had utterly transformed the scene of his arrival. The sandy, scrub-covered valley of the Tank Stream where the marines had pitched their tents was now the centre of a great metropolis. The old cart tracks down to the waterfront were choked by lines of omnibuses and steam trams. Along the shores of the cove itself, where the *Sirius* and the *Supply* had unloaded their wretched passengers, a fleet of pleasure steamers was fired up and ready to transport thousands of happy holidaymakers to the picnic grounds of Manly and Middle Harbour. Farther out, in the deep blue water off Bennelong Point, a squadron of visiting warships rode majestically at anchor, decked with flags and bunting from stem to stern.

Throughout the city there was a mounting sense of jubilation. 'Everybody', one observer noted, 'seemed bent upon deriving as much pleasure as possible from the festivities'. Something in the very air of the city seemed to reinforce the sense of national progress. Tall buildings and handsome monuments bore witness to the century's achievements. Public clocks and railway timetables measured the relentless passage of time. The cries of newspaper sellers brought word of the public festivities to the ear of every passer-by. Anniversary Day, as it was called, had long been kept as a public holiday in Sydney where it was marked with commemorative banquets and a special regatta. But for the centenary, all the Australian capital cities except Adelaide ceased their usual labours and joined in a national holiday.

Beyond the coastal cities, however, 26 January 1888 might have been as uneventful as any other hot summer day. If they noticed it at all, many Australians were aware of the centenary only as a momentary distraction from the routine of seasonal or daily labour. It commemorated events they did not know about, or preferred to forget. It presumed a feeling of national pride among people whose



Circular Quay in 1888. One hundred years after the arrival of the first fleet, Sydney Cove was the busy entrance to a great metropolis. Along Circular Quay, the newly extended customs house, completed in 1888, is flanked on the left by Mort and Company's palatial wool store and behind by the main government offices. The clock tower of the General Post Office, also opened in the late 1880s, dominates the skyline to the right. Illustrated Sydney News, 26 Jan 1888.

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loyalties were still largely parochial. It celebrated ideas of progress that were foreign to the experience of many Australians who found life a constant struggle rather than a steady upward climb.

Even in Sydney, where thousands joined in the special festivities, thousands more took advantage of the holiday to sit beside some favourite reach of the harbour, sipping bottled beer and soaking up the sun. The politicians who organised the public ceremonies were sometimes dismayed by the people's indifference, but they themselves were also a little confused about the precise significance of the day. For almost two years before the event they had argued, strenuously and sometimes bitterly, about what should be done to mark the centenary. Many of their visionary schemes were stillborn, some met political obstruction, others were considered impractical or beyond the country's means. What happened on 26 January was the outcome of this long argument and of the social conflicts it had exposed. In the eyes of the country's statesmen, the centenary was a demonstration of social concord and national unity; but even while they celebrated together, Australians revealed how many and deep were the differences that divided them.

PATRIOTS AND POLITICIANS

One hundred years is but a moment in the history of nations and Australia, as one of the youngest nations of all, was entering the company of states and empires with traditions much older and more self-confident than her own. Australia lacked both the aristocratic traditions of the old monarchies and the revolutionary ideals of the new republics. The centennial celebrations called for a spontaneous demonstration of Australian sentiment, clothed in forms that were distinctively Australian. But almost the only tunes and steps Australians knew were those they had learned from the mother country or copied from other new nations.

In 1887 Australia had joined the rest of the empire in honouring Queen Victoria's jubilee. The governors of the various colonies had held levees, city

buildings had been decorated with loyal mottoes and thousands of Sydneysiders had watched spellbound as fusillades of red, white and blue rockets burst in the darkness above the harbour. The jubilee cost a lot of money and when the centenary came round only six months later, the colony's stocks of cash and loyalty were almost exhausted. Faced with the demands for a new round of celebrations, hard-pressed politicians were inclined to play safe by restaging the former success. Flags and bunting were retrieved from the cupboards where they had been stowed after the jubilee, and Volunteer regiments were ordered to brush up their manoeuvres.

However, a few idealists welcomed the centenary as an opportunity for a more novel and independent assertion of Australian nationalism. They looked for inspiration to the United States which had celebrated its own centenary a little over a decade earlier. In May 1886 Harold Stephen, the member for Monaro and a former journalist, set the centennial ball rolling with a motion in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly in favour of a special centennial international exhibition. It was a 'recognised fact', he argued, that such national birthdays should be celebrated with an exhibition. The Americans had celebrated their centenary with a mammoth show in Philadelphia in 1876, and in 1889 the French would commemorate the hundredth birthday of their revolution with an international exhibition in Paris. The year 1888, Stephen pointed out, was not only the centenary of the arrival of the first fleet, but the two-hundredth anniversary of the landing of William Dampier on the northwest coast and therefore an event of Australia-wide importance.

Newspapers and city businessmen applauded Stephen's scheme. An exhibition would advertise the resources and prospects of New South Wales and create jobs for the growing numbers of unemployed in Sydney. But they did not expect to have to pay for the show themselves; that would be the responsibility of the colonial government. The government, naturally, was less enthusiastic. The premier, Sir Patrick Jennings, an urbane, conservative pastoralist, had taken office with a mandate to reduce the runaway public debt. To his mind, an exhibition was simply beyond the colony's means. The Garden Palace, constructed for the 1879 exhibition, had been burned down in 1882 and a new building would cost a huge £300 000. Just because the United States or some other country had put on an exhibition for its centenary, Australia did not have to blindly follow suit, he argued: 'We cannot be conning books to find precedents, but must be guided by our common sense of what is proper and fit for the occasion.' Jennings's own ideas of what was 'proper and fit' were slow to emerge and three months after Harold Stephen had launched the centennial debate the government had still to announce its plans.

Observing its apparent confusion, others leapt in with schemes of their own. At the end of August, the wily patriarch of Australian politics, Sir Henry Parkes, wrote privately to Jennings outlining his own ideas for 'our 100th birthday'. 'The centenary celebration', he insisted,

should not be of a character defusive as to time or meaning, or for a secondary object. It should solely, exclusively, definitely, emphatically and grandly mark this great event in Australian history; and the whole chain of ceremonies should not extend over more than 10 days or a fortnight in order to clearly define the birth time of British rule—the foundation of Australia's empire and nothing else.

He went on to set out his own blueprint for the centenary. A hall of science should be erected to house collections of objects 'relating to the resources, capabilities and progress of Australasia'. A prize of 200 guineas should be offered for the best work

Sir Patrick Jennings, premier of New South Wales from February 1886 to January 1887, whose government did its best to plan for the centennial celebrations. Watercolour by Alfred Clint. MITCHELL LIBRARY



on 'the first hundred years of Australia' written by a native-born Australian. And representatives of the colonies should be invited to a round of birthday celebrations including a grand banquet, a grand ball and a grand regatta. It would also add to the 'moral grandeur' of the event, he added, if all the churches agreed to participate in 'a united Service of Thanksgiving and Prayer for Australia'. All this grandeur, Parkes estimated, could be supplied for a mere £70 000.

When Sir Patrick Jennings finally unveiled his government's plans a few days later, they came as a dreadful anticlimax. The projected festivities would extend for fifteen days from 23 January, the date of Phillip's first landfall in Sydney Cove, to 7 February when he had proclaimed the new colony. The Prince of Wales would be invited to come and the eminent scientists of the British Association would be offered a free trip to the Antipodes. There would be amusements for school-children, balls and banquets for the elite, services of thanksgiving for the devout, literary competitions and art exhibitions for the intelligentsia and a regatta, athletic sports and fireworks display for the masses. But Jennings refused to consider any of the visionary schemes that members of the public urged upon him. Perhaps, he conceded, a beginning might be made upon a memorial hall as part of the National Gallery; or some works nearing completion, such as the Trades Hall, the Waverley-Homebush railway or the Sydney sewerage works, might be dedicated as part of the celebrations. But there would be no international exhibition, no grand centennial square such as the Sydney engineer Norman Selfe had proposed, and no gigantic statue of Australasia to greet the royal visitor as he entered Sydney Heads.

As the year drew to a close and Jennings wrestled with his mounting deficit, New South Wales was further humiliated by its insolent southern neighbour. While the mother colony wallowed in an economic slump, Victoria was riding high on a great land boom and its government, under the expansive Duncan Gillies, had embarked on a lavish program of public works. At the end of November, shortly after Jennings had announced a £2 million deficit, Gillies ingenuously enquired whether 'your younger sister, Victoria, might be able to aid you materially in your effort to make your centennial commemoration worthy of the occasion'. The January festivities, he thought, would draw thousands of visitors from the other colonies. Yet, to judge from discussions in the New South Wales parliament, one thing was evidently still wanting to crown the event—a great exhibition showing the material progress of New South Wales and the colonies that had once formed part of it. Here Victoria could help. 'What at present you want, we have—a grand Exhibition building', he explained.

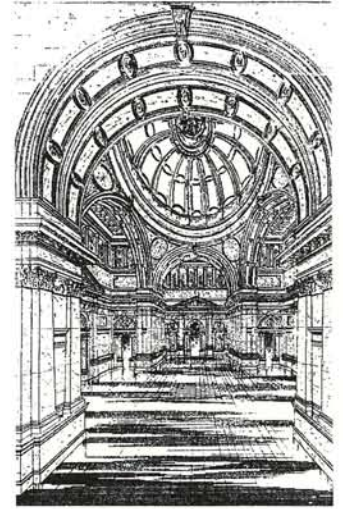
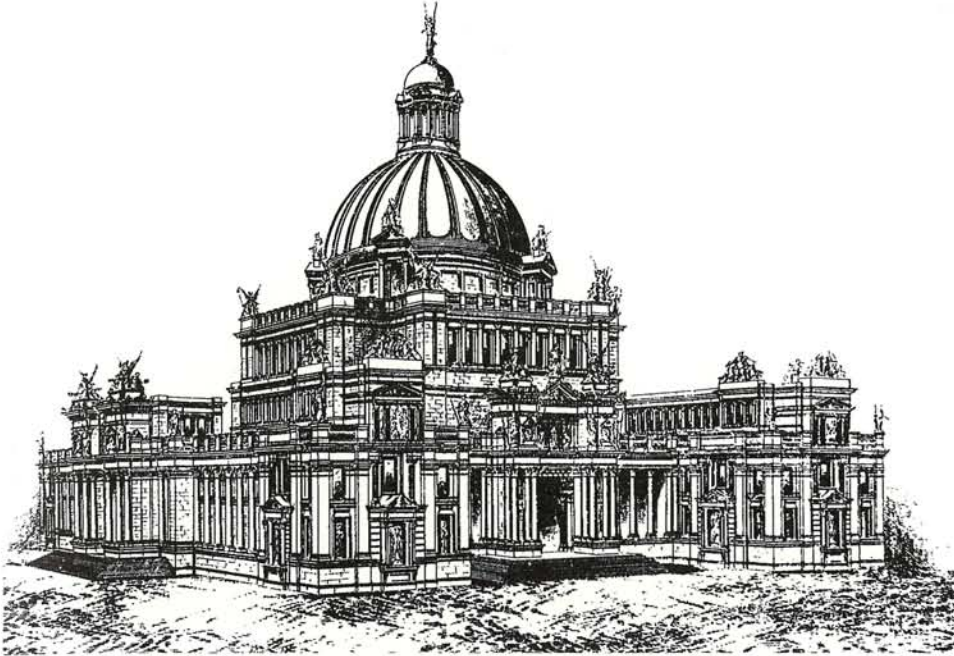
We purpose to take advantage of it, and when all your fetes are over, when your brilliant demonstrations in Sydney are brought to a close, your younger sister will invite your visitors to come and see the world's fair at an exhibition.

Although he had assumed a deferential air towards the older colony, Gillies' scheme was obviously designed to upstage Jennings's 'marvellous medley of entertainments'. The whole venture, according to one of the few Victorians who dared raise his voice against it, was the work of a 'mere huckstering showman anxious to collar the mopuses [money]'. But although New South Wales was entitled to resent the uppishness of its daughter/sister, it could not object if Victoria attempted what it had reluctantly declined to do. Jennings remained silent about the whole affair, while the Sydney press complained for the umpteenth time about the timidity of its local statesmen.

While the Jennings government dithered, plans for the centenary were being pursued more enthusiastically in a higher sphere. The governor, Lord Carrington, a young aristocrat of liberal views and winning ways, had a wife addicted to horse

Victorian premier Duncan Gillies takes the wind from the sails of New South Wales premier Sir Patrick Jennings with his proposal for a centennial international exhibition. Phil May in the Bulletin, 11 Dec 1887.





riding. Early in 1886 Carrington enquired through the secretary of state for colonies about the possibility of constructing an equestrian track, similar to London's Rotten Row, as a centennial project. An engineer, Frederick Franklin, took up the idea and inspected several sites, eventually settling upon the sandy basin south of the city known as the Lachlan Swamps, once the site of Sydney's main water catchment. Franklin was a former pupil of the celebrated English landscape gardener and designer of the Crystal Palace, Sir Joseph Paxton, and in his plan for 'a magnificent People's Park', presented to the government in December 1886, the windswept slopes of the Lachlan Swamps were to be graded into grassy terraces, planted with trees and flower beds and enhanced with fountains and statuary. Franklin emphasised the attractions of the commanding site on the park's northern edge. 'It seems to be exactly the spot for a Centennial Memorial Building', he remarked.

Parkes was a ready convert to Franklin's scheme, and after he assumed office as premier early in 1887, he began to incorporate the idea into his own centennial plans. By June 1887, when he presented those plans to parliament, the centenary park, to be known as Queen's Park, had become the setting for a grand national edifice or 'State House'. The building would comprise three main elements. A great hall or amphitheatre, to be known as Phillip Hall, would house national assemblies or commemorative events. Should there come a day when the country was attacked by an enemy—no fanciful dream, Parkes thought—then this was where its people would assemble to give thanks to those who 'manfully and successfully' defended its honour. It would also include a museum, to be known as the Macquarie Institute, to serve as a place of deposit for documents and objects 'illustrative of the historical material and industrial stages of the colony's progress, ... of the various aboriginal races of Australia, their customs, languages, and ethnological characteristics', and of the governors and other distinguished colonists. Finally, the building would include a public mausoleum—'our Westminster Abbey'—for the nation's honoured dead. It would become 'the Holy Place of New South Wales' and even perhaps 'The Holy Place of Australia'.

The competition for Sir Henry Parkes's projected State House was won by the Sydney architect John Kirkpatrick with this 'Corinthian classical' design. Beneath its mighty dome, in a complex of interconnected galleries, were to be housed Phillip Hall, accommodating up to 8000 people on state occasions, a museum called the Carrington (formerly Macquarie) Institute, a library and a mausoleum. From the cupola, 73 metres above the ground, visitors would have a fine view of the interior of Phillip Hall. By the time the results of the competition were known, Parkes's enthusiasm for the project had waned. The £250 prize was a poor reward for Kirkpatrick's hundreds of hours at the drawing board. Builders' and Contractors' News, 7 July 1888.

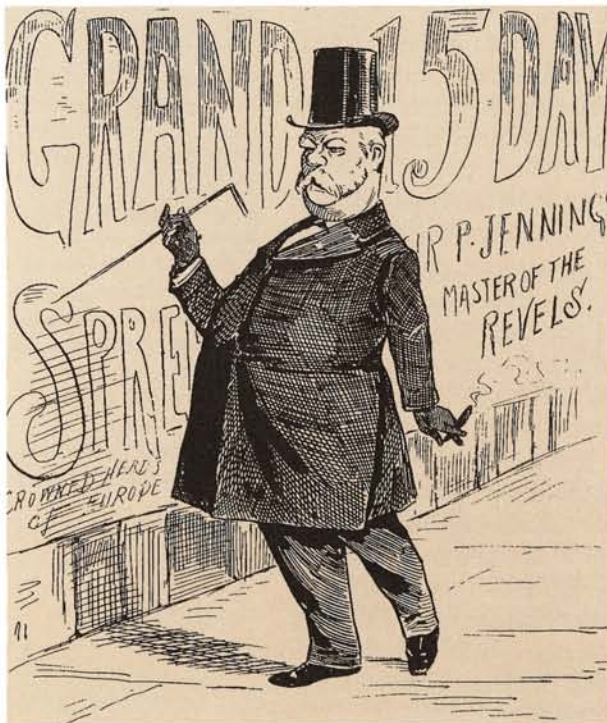
Not everyone shared Parkes's grand vision and his State House proposal was greeted with laughter. 'The fourteen days blind stone drunk of Sir Patrick Jennings is now capped by the idea of providing a huge mausoleum for decayed mortality', quipped the leader of the opposition, George Dibbs. Had Sir Henry designed the State House as the resting place for his own honoured bones? As for assembling to thank imaginary soldiers for their feats in some imaginary battle, there would be plenty of time to erect an amphitheatre when the enemy appeared and the battle was fought.

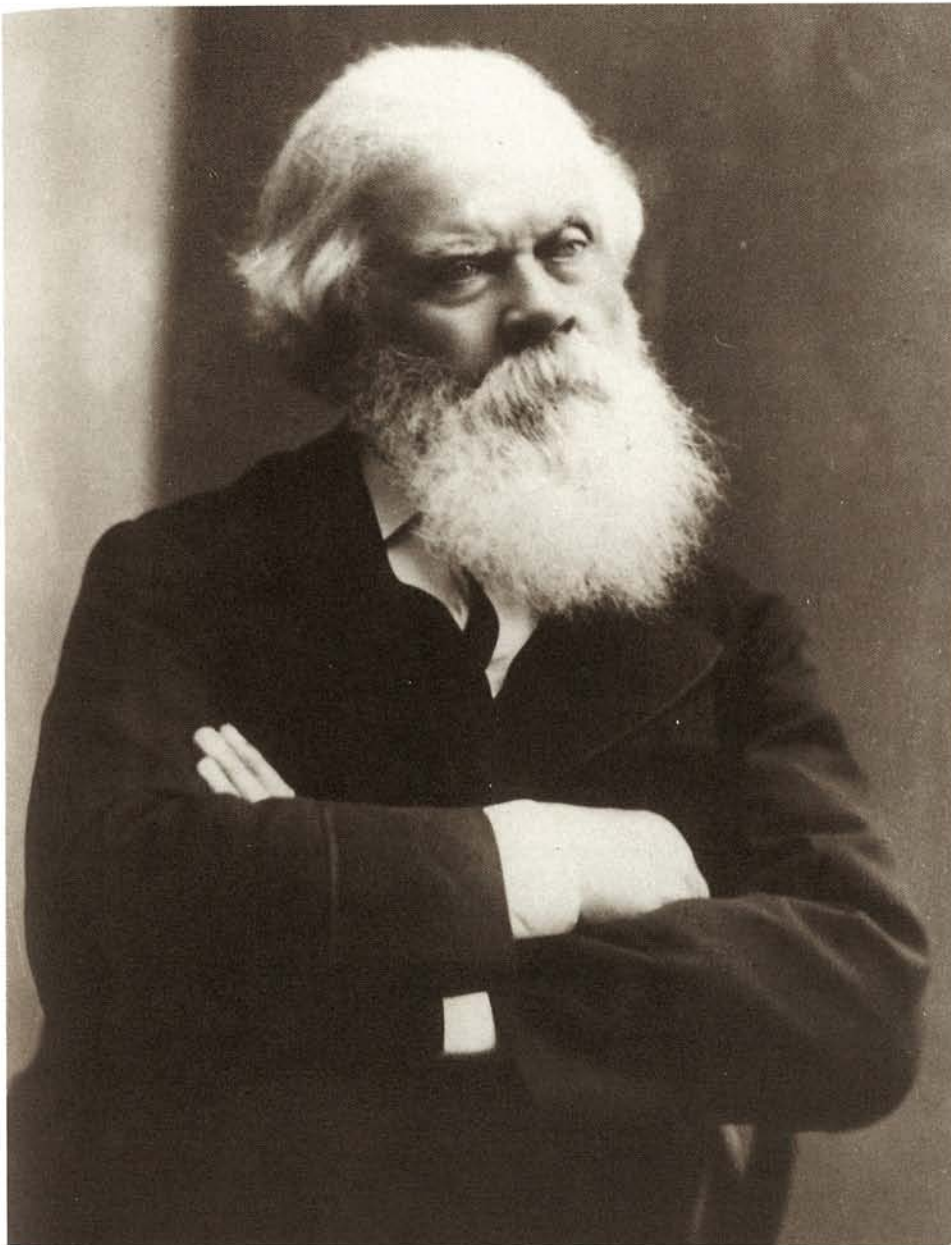
Parkes's 'Dead House' was a gift to local humorists, but his Australian Westminster Abbey represented an attempt to solve a serious problem for Australian patriots. 'Through all the ages', one of Parkes's younger supporters observed, 'the sentiment of nationality has been expressed in noble and permanent edifices'. Every nation, it seemed, had its Acropolis, its Capitol, its Westminster Abbey, its Notre Dame. But was it possible merely by the erection of a 'State House' to create a national tradition? 'We are not an impressionable people', the *Sydney Morning Herald* admitted,

and it is to be doubted whether any effect such as that produced in the imaginative and fervid mind of the Premier would be produced by rearing a stately pile in the Lachlan Swamps.

The arrangements for centennial week announced by Parkes at the beginning of November closely followed the blueprint he had submitted to Jennings. The highlight was to be the opening of Queen's Park, now to be known as Centennial Park, but there would also be a great banquet attended by representatives of all the colonies, an agricultural exhibition honouring the achievements of the colony's rural pioneers and a grand regatta in which 'the best blood of the colony' would compete for handsome trophies. A party for the elite, a show for the farmers and sports for the masses seemed to take care of everyone. Yet some were still

The beginning, and the predicted end, of the two weeks of celebration proposed by Sir Patrick Jennings. The artist Livingston Hopkins takes up George Dibbs's characterisation of the plan as 'fourteen days blind stone drunk'. Bulletin, 11 Sept 1887.





Below.
 Sir Henry Parkes, 'the new Euclid', attempting to change the unchangeable by proposing to rename New South Wales 'Australia'. Livingston Hopkins in the Bulletin, 3 Dec 1887.



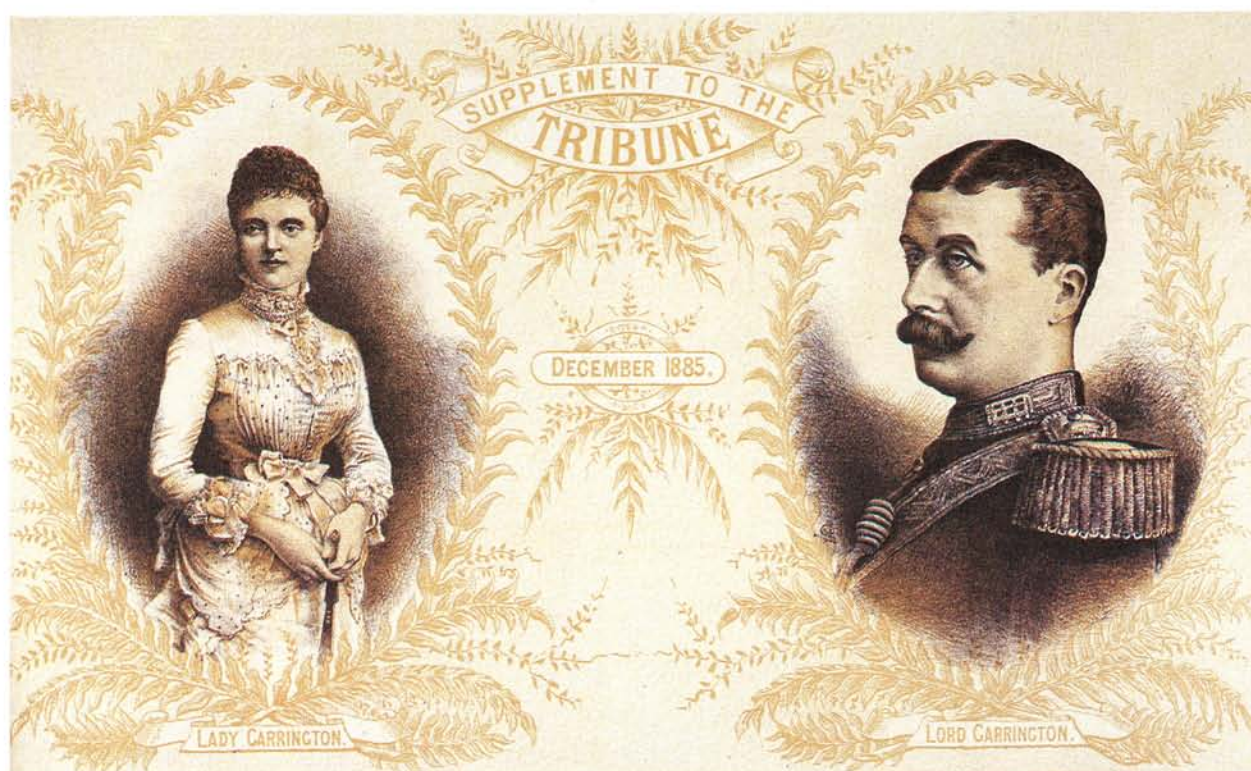
Sir Henry Parkes in 1887, aged 72, premier of New South Wales for the fourth time and in office throughout 1888.

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dissatisfied. Literary men asked why no prizes were to be awarded for intellectual attainments and friends of the working classes complained that too much government money was being spent on people well able to treat themselves. The radical Thomas Walker declared:

I have an objection to governors of the colonies, and other distinguished personages being fed at government expense, unless the Government are prepared to give the poor people in hospitals and benevolent asylums a treat in the same way.

When Parkes offered to do something for the poor, Walker demanded that something should also be done for the Aborigines. 'And remind them that we have robbed them?' was Parkes's sardonic retort.



Lord Carrington, governor of New South Wales 1885–90, and Lady Carrington. Supplement to the Tribune, Dec 1885.

The festivities were almost about to begin when Parkes attempted once again to grab the centennial spotlight for New South Wales. Suddenly late in the spring session he introduced a one-clause bill to confer upon New South Wales the new title of 'Australia'. The Colony of Australia Bill created a sensation around the country. The press almost unanimously condemned it. 'It would be an unfortunate method of celebrating the centenary to set our neighbours against us', reported the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In Melbourne, the premier was asked to introduce a bill to rename Victoria 'Australasia'. Gillies, not usually noted for his wit, declined on the ground that some other colony might go 'one higher still' and call itself 'The Southern Hemisphere'. If New South Wales required a historic name, one Victorian suggested, it could always revert to 'Botany Bay', or christen itself 'Convictoria'. For a few days, inventing new names for New South Wales became a national party game. E.W. O'Sullivan's proposal that the colony should be given 'some significant native name' was taken up by several newspaper correspondents who put forward the name of the Aboriginal king Bungaree. Others wished to honour New South Wales's British discoverer with a name such as 'Cookland'. Former schoolboys dusted off their Latin books to concoct such high-sounding titles as Arcadia, Antipodia, Centenaria and Matronia, the last signifying New South Wales's status as the 'mother colony'.

A week after the introduction of the offensive bill, the Victorian premier, acting as spokesman for the other mainland colonies, dispatched a telegram to Parkes: 'The name proposed to be taken [by New South Wales] is the name of the entire continent', Gillies insisted, 'and as such it is the common property of all the continental colonies'. Gillies also sent urgent messages through the Victorian governor, Sir Henry Loch, and the Victorian agent-general, Sir Graham Berry, alerting the British government and requesting that the bill should not receive



imperial sanction before the other colonies had been consulted. The secretary of state for colonies immediately cabled Carrington requesting him to defer giving assent to the bill should it pass the New South Wales parliament.

Sir Henry Parkes remained defiant. He was irritated by Victoria's readiness to appeal over the head of the mother colony to the imperial grandmother and continued to insist on New South Wales's traditional right to the name 'Australia'. The explorer Flinders had first suggested its application to New South Wales and 'from that time forward the name has been used interchangeably with the name of New South Wales'. Parkes knew that the Colony of Australia Bill, if it passed the New South Wales parliament, would be referred by Carrington to the Colonial Office, but he maintained in letters to Gillies that there was no point in seeking the views of the British government, since the matter was of no practical consequence to them. As Lord Carrington tactfully reminded him a few days later, this was not altogether true.

I think it my duty to notice that in your communication [to Gillies] . . . words are used which might perhaps be construed as implying that the question is one which is beyond the concern of Her Majesty's Imperial Adviser. I do not myself so understand their meaning, but I think it right to call your attention to the point, lest it should now or hereafter be thought that I had inadvertently concurred in a proposition from which I should in my opinion be bound to disagree.

Parkes's bluff had been called. Although he continued to assert 'the independent authority' of the colonial parliament, Parkes had now to recognise that in any conflict between colonial parliaments, such as that posed by the Colony of Australia Bill, the imperial government would not necessarily take the part of the 'mother

The Queen's men. For the first time, the governors of all the Australian colonies, New Zealand and Fiji were together. 'At 11.30 the 8 governors were all photographed,' Lady Carrington noted in her diary on the eve of Anniversary Day. Her husband was host. At 45 he was the youngest of this company, the only aristocrat and the only amateur in a group of experienced colonial administrators. From left, Sir Robert Hamilton (Tasmania), Sir Anthony Musgrave (Queensland), Sir Charles Mitchell (Fiji), Sir Henry Loch (Victoria), Lord Carrington (New South Wales), Sir Frederick Broome (Western Australia), Sir William Jervois (New Zealand), Sir William Robinson (South Australia).

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The Queen's statue unveiled. Lady Carrington pulls a ribbon and the royal standard rises to reveal the Queen's statue. The dais is surrounded on three sides by grandstands occupied by 3000 invited ticketholders and 1500 schoolchildren. The helmets in the foreground are worn by men of the New South Wales Permanent Artillery. Ageing immigrant politicians, who predominated among the official party, saw the occasion as a good opportunity to instil a sense of loyalty to Britain among the rising generation of young Australian natives. Illustrated Sydney News, 22 Feb 1888.

colony'. It was almost the beginning of Centennial Week, however, before the matter was amicably laid to rest. Parkes was summoned to Government House for an interview, which Carrington delicately summarised in his diary: 'Offered Sir H. Parkes the G.C.M.G. which he accepted with pleasure, promising to send me a letter abandoning the change of name from New South Wales to Australia.' The colony would keep its 'uncouth' name, but its premier would enjoy a grander title.

SYDNEY'S WEEK OF CELEBRATIONS

As Centennial Week approached, the whirl of social activity around Government House accelerated. Carrington's old friend, the former secretary of state for colonies, Lord Carnarvon, and his wife Elsie, an old chum of Lady Carrington's, returned after a tour of outback properties. The Grand Duke Alexander—a nice,

intelligent young man, the Carringtons thought—arrived aboard a Russian man-of-war. The governors of the Australasian colonies appeared a day or two later. Sir Robert Hamilton of Tasmania, Sir Anthony Musgrave of Queensland and Sir William Jervois of New Zealand arrived by sea. In a world linked by sea trade and sea power, the bonds between Australians and New Zealanders remained strong and many people expected New Zealand to join the coming federation of the colonies. Sir Henry Loch of Victoria, Sir William Robinson of South Australia, Sir Frederick Broome of Western Australia and Sir Charles Mitchell of Fiji came together by special train from Melbourne. The train had been put on by the Victorian government and carried parties of South Australian and Western Australian politicians, most of the Victorian dignitaries having accompanied their premier on a more leisurely sea voyage. When the intercolonial travellers boarded the train in Melbourne on the evening of 23 January, they were dismayed to find none of the usual liquid refreshments. On the first part of the journey they sat around glumly playing whist, and it was only after the midnight change of trains in Albury that the more generous hospitality of the New South Wales Railways revived their flagging spirits. The first official event was only hours away when the red-eyed travellers stumbled off the train in Sydney and set off in search of their lodgings.

Many of them were still unpacking when, just before noon, Lord and Lady Carrington drove to Hyde Park for the unveiling of the Queen's statue. It was fitting, some observers noted, that Australia's centennial celebrations should begin with a tribute to the British throne, even though the circumstances that had brought it about were entirely accidental. For six years Sydney had waited for a statue of the monarch to replace the one destroyed when the Garden Palace burned down in 1882. The pedestal erected at the eastern end of King Street had remained embarrassingly vacant throughout the Queen's jubilee celebrations. Only weeks before the centennial celebrations began, the long-awaited sculpture arrived from England and more than 50 000 Sydneysiders had now turned out to see it unveiled.

As the notables arrived, a band struck up the national anthem 'God Save the Queen', and four little girls in white frocks and blue sashes stepped forward to present bouquets of wildflowers to Lady Carrington and Lady Carnarvon. The clock on nearby St James's church struck twelve and Lord Carrington mounted the dais. In unveiling a statue of the Queen, he told the crowd, they were not only honouring the sovereign herself, but asserting a great principle. 'We are showing our veneration for order and we recognise that under a constitutional sovereignty we have been able to obtain the greatest amount of freedom which a country has ever enjoyed . . .' Sir Henry Parkes spoke next. The Queen, he reminded them, had reigned over the best part of their colonial existence and the fifty years of her reign were the fifty years of which they were proudest. For the young Queen's coronation he had written some verses foretelling her glorious reign. Then he had been but a 'friendless lad'; now, as premier of the colony, he asked their permission to read those lines again. In the parallels Parkes delicately drew between the monarch's reign, the progress of New South Wales and his own career, perhaps he hoped that others too would detect the influence of a kindly providence.

As Parkes concluded his speech, Lady Carrington stepped forward and untied a ribbon, and the royal standard in which the statue had been enveloped shot to the top of the mast, revealing the unsmiling, middle-aged figure of Her Majesty. A twenty-one-gun salute boomed from the Domain, the schoolchildren trilled 'God Save the Queen', and Lord Carrington called for three royal cheers. Light rain began to fall as the crowd dispersed, feeling, so one cynical Victorian remarked, that it had been 'the weakest possible thing as an introduction to the centennial'.

The Queen's statue. Joseph Edward Boehm, British sculptor, was paid £3000 by the New South Wales government for a bronze statue to replace that destroyed in the Garden Palace fire of 1882. Victoria is depicted wearing the royal robes with the star and ribbon of the Garter, with the Imperial crown on her head, the orb in her left hand and the sceptre, pointing down, in her right. 'The likeness is a good one,' the journalist Julian Thomas remarked. 'Her Majesty looks dignified, not to say slightly sulky.' Sydney Mail, 7 Jan 1888.



Having begun the centennial with a royal circus, the Parkes government followed up with a handout of bread to Sydney's poor. Around dawn next morning a shabby crowd began to form outside the premises of James Kidson, a provision merchant of James Street, Chippendale. By 9 o'clock more than 1600 people had queued up to collect their hefty brown paper parcels of meat, vegetables and groceries. Some who came equipped with sacks, buckets and even perambulators, seemed prepared to cart away as much of the excellent Bodalla cheese, fresh baker's bread and pipe tobacco as they could lay their hands on. 'Damn the rest, give us the groceries', one sturdy beggar muttered as he grabbed his rations. An illegal trade developed in the pink, yellow and blue food vouchers by which clergymen and other prominent citizens had certified worthy recipients and some rascals were seen lining up for a second or third ration.

But artisans, the majority of recipients, were duly grateful for their gifts. 'Looks respectable enough, don't they?' a watching detective remarked. 'But lots I've known for years who never wanted a pound in their pockets are now hard up.' In two days Kidson and his helpers distributed more than eleven thousand parcels, and Sydneysiders were left to contemplate the significance of so many 'confessions of pauperdom'. They had faced an insoluble dilemma. It would have been shameful for the colonial elite to banquet on pheasant and champagne while the poor went hungry. Yet by giving the poor a treat, they had shown the disturbing growth of poverty and unemployment.

Next day, Anniversary Day, was the first of the public holidays, and officialdom did its best to get into the democratic spirit of the occasion. The highlight of the day was the dedication of the 'People's Park' in the Lachlan Swamps. Lord Carrington rode his wife's horse in the body of the procession, wearing a plain civilian suit and a bowler hat, while assorted ministers and members of parliament brought up the rear of the cavalcade in an assortment of buggies and traps, looking, so someone said, like farmers going to a fair. After about three kilometres of slow driving they came to the entrance of Centennial Park and descended a newly laid asphalt road to the official enclosure. It was mid-summer in a dry year and they stood in a vast paddock of brown grass and bare soil. The snake-infested scrub had been cleared and the swamps at the foot of the hill had been drained and turned into ornamental lakes. No State House crowned the northern slopes. Centennial Park was no longer a wilderness, but it was still far from the 'magnificent People's Park' of Frederick Franklin's imagination.

Roundel at the entrance to Centennial Park.

JOHN STOREY



Only months before its opening, Centennial Park was still an almost treeless waste rather than the verdant pleasure ground of Frederick Franklin's plan. A gang of labourers pauses for a smoko in the shade of a sandstone outcrop. The scheme was proposed to relieve unemployment. To pay for it, the government sold off the attractive residential allotments overlooking the park and, in the background, the first of the 'palatial residences' appears.

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Opening Centennial Park.
Watercolour by Frank
Mahony.

ART GALLERY OF NSW

Below.

The centennial handout. Many respectable working people, believing they had as much right to a treat as the governors and politicians, queued up for their share of food intended for the poor. A full ticketholder's ration consisted of two loaves of bread, a joint of beef or mutton, two pounds (0.9 kilograms) of white sugar, a quarter of a pound (113 grams) of tea, half a pound (226 grams) of butter, one pound (0.45 kilograms) of cheese, one pound of currants, one pound of raisins, four pounds (1.8 kilograms) of flour, one cake of tobacco and pipe, one tin of preserved fish or jam, one quart (1.1 litres) of milk and seven pounds (3.1 kilograms) of assorted vegetables. Town and Country Journal, 4 Feb 1888.

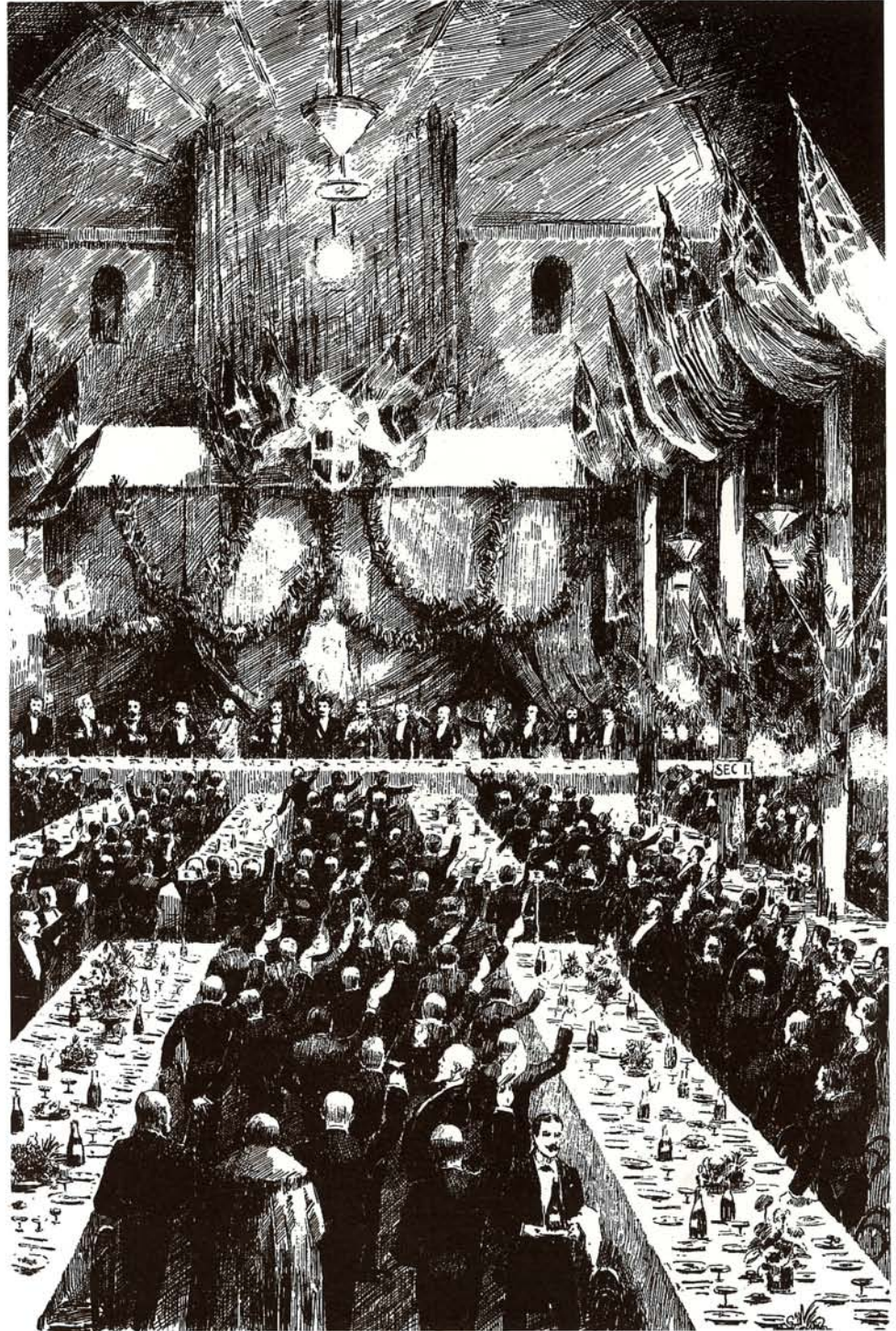


By midday the sun was scorching and, to everyone's relief, the ceremonies were brief. After calling for order, Carrington stepped forward to dedicate the park. 'I have carried the scheme', he wrote proudly in his diary, 'and I really felt glad when I declared it "The property of the people for ever"'. Parkes, who might also have felt entitled to some of the credit, proclaimed that within two or three years it would be 'a place of beauty and a joy forever'. It was above all a people's park, he told them, and it was for the people to guard and maintain it. The ceremony concluded in the usual way with the volleys of cannon from the hillside and rounds of cheers for the dignitaries, who then repaired to a nearby triangle of ground and planted trees in commemoration of the occasion. A band played the 'Centennial Quick March' while the unfortunate Volunteers plodded up and down the road, ankle deep in sand.

That evening, a thousand eminent gentlemen sat down to a state banquet in the buildings that had been erected in 1870 for an intercolonial exhibition to commemorate the arrival of Captain Cook. Never before had so many of Australia's politicians been brought together in one place. The improved railways



Livingston Hopkins, prompted by the handout to Sydney's poor, shows Parkes ladling 'Centennial Soup' to the obsequious colonial governors. Victoria's Sir Henry Loch is first in line. Bulletin, 4 Feb 1888.



The colonies' leading public men join the toast to the Queen at the centennial state banquet. The barn-like old Exhibition Building has been transformed by paint, flags, evergreen foliage and electric light into 'a hall of exceeding beauty'. Effigies (not visible here) of the great men of New South Wales history, from Macarthur and Wentworth to William Bland and J.D. Lang, looked down from the walls, while over the entrances visitors were greeted by the words 'Welcome Home' and 'Australian Unity'. Illustrated Sydney News, 22 Feb 1888.

that had helped to bring them together had also hastened the economic integration of the colonies, and conversation along the tables centred on the prospects of Australian federation.

Australia's 100th birthday party began with the reading of a congratulatory telegram from the Queen. The principal speech of the evening, proposing the toast

to 'Australia', fell to Sir Henry Parkes. He took his hearers back to the day, just 100 years before, when a small band of men had landed by the Tank Stream on Sydney Cove.

The first blow struck by the hands of these English exiles on the rough ironbark was in reality the salute of civilisation to the new world. Whatever adverse circumstances shrouded the assembly of that poor group of men, they unconsciously were laying the foundation-stone of what I believe will be the greatest Empire in the world.

There was no reason to be ashamed of their early years: the men who had founded the colony had been sent out for offences that did not reflect upon their moral character, and they had been purged by the sufferings they had endured and the fortitude they had shown in building up new industries upon this continent. He reminded them of the wonderful strides that Australia had made since its beginnings. Already the population stood at 3½ million and at the end of another century, he believed, it would have grown to 60 million at least. The conditions for growth were even more favourable than in the United States with its population of 55 million. They had reached the time for 'a new departure' that would bring the several colonies together in a 'United Australia'.

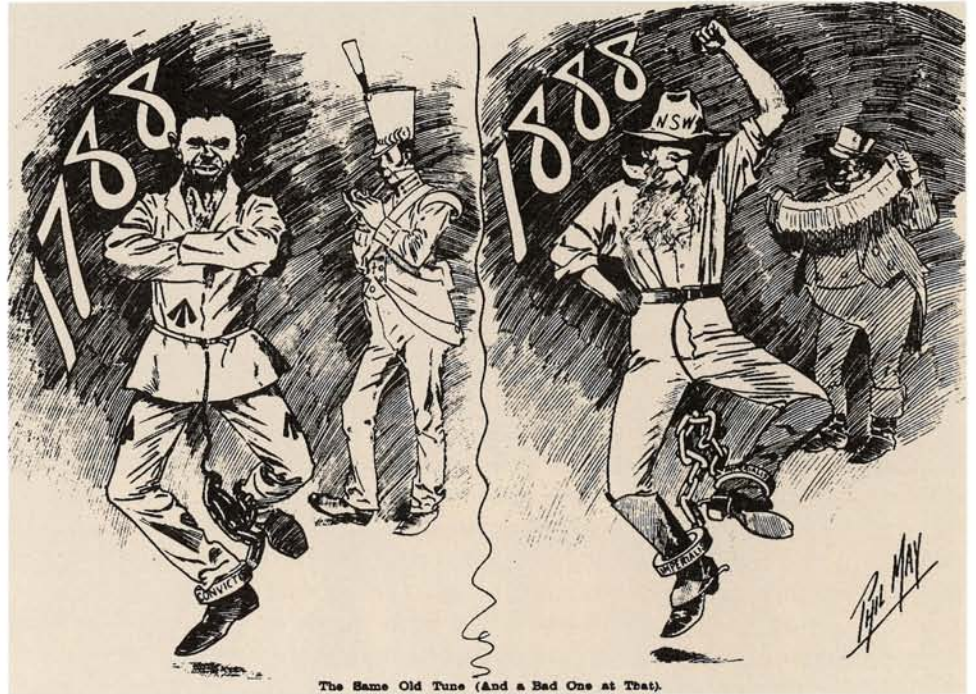
It was almost midnight and toasts had been drunk in honour of virtually everyone present before Dan O'Connor rose to propose the health of 'the Women of Australia'. Because of the demand for invitations, the organisers had excluded ladies from the banquet, but as the tipsy gentlemen turned for home they saluted the long-suffering little women who awaited them. 'It is the pure womanhood, under the sanctifying influence of Christianity, that has prospered our nation', remarked the gallant Irishman.

The next day Carrington and his guests did not appear until midday, when they boarded the Orient liner *Orizaba* to view the colony's best yachtsmen competing for the £500 Centennial Cup. After more champagne and speeches, a select party, consisting of Carrington, the governors, Parkes and Gillies, adjourned for lunch to HMS *Nelson*, the flagship of the Royal Navy's Australian station. It was a hot afternoon, and the Victorian premier, unused to so much sun and champagne, got sunstroke.

While the centennial organisers had taken a lot of trouble to entertain the elite and had arranged some charity for the poor, they appeared to have forgotten the largest class of all, the respectable working class. Not until Saturday morning, when the governor laid the foundation stone of the new Trades Hall, did they get their chance. Many independent working men abhorred the toadyism and indulgence of the official celebrations. 'I find a strong republican feeling among the masses in Sydney', reported 'Vagabond', an astute Victorian journalist. Sydney's most popular weekly, the *Bulletin*, had opposed the centennial celebrations from the outset, arguing that there was nothing worth celebrating in 'the day we were lagged'. Not all working men took such a sour view of Australia's history. Old-timers could look back upon a steady improvement in their material condition, the growth of the trade union movement, the extension of the eight-hour day and the entry of working men to parliament. John Norton's *History of capital and labour*, published in 1888, told a story of 'peaceful, rapid and sure progress'. So easy and swift had been the advance of labour that conservatives looked upon it with increasing alarm. 'We began the last century with compulsory labour; we end it with labour in the ascendant', warned the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Sydneysiders could see the strength of organised labour as the city's trade unionists marched, 13 000 strong, down George Street. Each society bore emblems

'Australia began her political history as a crouching serf kept in subjection by the whip of a ruffian gaoler, and her progress, so far, consists merely in a change of masters. Instead of a foreign slave-driver, she has a foreign admiral; the loud-mouthed tyrant has given place to the suave hireling in uniform; but when the day comes for the colonies to claim their independence the new ruler will probably prove even more dangerous and more formidable than the old.' Rather than 'the day we were lagged', said the Bulletin, Australia's national day should be 3 December, the anniversary of the Eureka rebellion, 'the day that Australia set her teeth in the face of the British Lion'. Bulletin, 21 Jan 1888.



of its trade. Carpenters carried wooden models; iron moulders hauled a locomotive boiler; the plasterers had fashioned a large plaster cast of Sir Henry Parkes's head. The seamen, wearing straw hats and blue centennial ribbons, led a six-horse dray bearing allegorical figures of Neptune, Britannia and Commerce.

At the site of the Trades Hall, on the corner of Goulburn and Dixon streets, Lord Carrington—'Charley' to his working-class admirers—saluted the legions of labour as they passed in review. Beside him, in top hat and frock coat, stood the president of the Trades and Labour Council, John West, a plumber from Ashfield. Introducing Lord Carrington, who was to lay the foundation stone, West told of the unions' difficulties in beginning the project. Only after prolonged agitation had the government granted them a site and the building itself had still to be financed by an issue of debentures. Now that hard times had come, they were struggling to find subscribers, although they remained undeterred from their aim, which was to secure 'liberty, leisure and progress for the industrial classes'. Carrington made a well-judged speech sympathising with them in their present difficulties, and commended their aim of erecting a building that would become 'a national monument of order and self-government'. Parkes, who inevitably followed him, seemed by contrast to be imprisoned in the language and outlook of his youth. While the young aristocrat conjured up the inviting prospect of independence and suburban respectability, the old Birmingham radical harped on the humble dignity of toil and ended with a sermon on the virtues of individual effort.

In all the ceremonies of the week, from the unveiling of the Queen's statue to the Trades Hall processions, religion had been conspicuous by its absence. Not until Sunday, when the churches had the day all to themselves, did Australians pay their respects to the Ruler of Nations. The combined Protestant denominations held an uncomfortably crowded service in St Andrew's Cathedral. The Presbyterian Reverend Robert Steel noted that the first fleeters might have been less godly than the Pilgrim Fathers, and their early struggles had not been as bountifully rewarded as the first harvests of the New Englanders, but there were consoling parallels to

be drawn between the 'chequered history of the people of Israel and their own'. 'Our past has been chequered too', Dr Steel observed. 'We had been in bondage, we had had our trials and hardships; but we had had numerous blessings from the divine goodness and great success.' To the Congregationalist Reverend James Jefferis, Australia's destiny was bound up with the civilising mission of the new Israel, the British race.

Through the colonising instincts of our people we had been brought across the watery wilderness to this land of promise, a land with a favourable climate and fertile soil, with lofty mountains and deep cleft valleys, with rivers and streams and subterranean waters, a land with mines of inexhaustible wealth, with corn like that of Egypt, with grapes like those of Eschol, with boundless plains for our sheep and a thousand hills for our cattle.

James Jefferis was one of the few churchmen to attempt a prophetic interpretation of Australian history. Most saw the centennial celebrations as an opportunity to build up their own institutions, rather than imbuing Australian nationality with the spirit of religion. Several denominations launched centennial appeals and most centennial sermons dwelt on the special contribution of churchmen and missionaries. But to the homely piety that infused the spirit of American nationalism, Australians were almost complete strangers. Churchmen might have believed that God was the principal stockholder in the British Empire, but to ordinary Australians he was very much a sleeping partner.

The week that had begun with the unveiling of a statue of the Queen, symbol of Australia's ties to the aristocracy of the old world, ended with the laying of a foundation stone of a new Parliament House, symbol of Australia's independence and the people's liberties. For thirty years the colony's legislators had planned to move out of the old 'rum hospital' into grander quarters. Plans had been drawn up



Laying the foundation stone of Trades Hall. Working men in dungarees and flat-brimmed hats clamber onto the platform to get a better view as Lord Carrington declares the foundation stone of the new Trades Hall well and truly laid. Lady Carrington, almost the only woman present, sits between John West (left), president of the Trades and Labour Council, and Sir Henry Parkes. The new hall, on the corner of Dixon and Goulburn streets, Sydney, is located in a shabby neighbourhood of decayed buildings. Carrington departed from the centennial theme to warn against the dangers of slum housing in inner Sydney and to preach the virtues of home ownership: a country gained greater security, he said, where men lived in freehold homes.

MITCHELL LIBRARY

and estimates prepared, but nothing had been done. At last on the very eve of the centenary, worn down perhaps by the objectors to his own State House and the enthusiasm of his younger colleagues for a new Parliament House, Parkes agreed to make a start. However, when it came time for the laying of the foundation stone, any enthusiasm he might have felt for the scheme had vanished. He was rather attached to the old building, he told his baffled audience, and would be content to complete his own labours there. It was men rather than buildings that made a parliament and the new men, he implied, were not made of the same solid material as their predecessors. As the week had worn on, a tone of nostalgia and a slight irritability had crept into Parkes's speeches. Perhaps, as his wife of fifty years lay dying, he felt the toll of the years more keenly. And as the thrusting new men such as the popular George Dibbs began to win advantage, Parkes might have sensed the ground slipping from under him. As he reached his peroration, warming again to the old imperial theme, he was greeted by jeers and hoots from a larrikin push in the crowd. His temper flared. 'Brutes, I should like to spit on you', he muttered.

Part of the trouble, it seems, was that the speakers had taken up a position at the back of the platform out of earshot of the crowd. When it came his turn to speak, Carrington ordered a table to be brought to the front and stood on it to deliver his speech. This new parliament building, he told them, represented the independence and self-government of the people of New South Wales. Their independence was now secure, but it was guaranteed only by their union with Britain. Without her support they could not hope to resist the land hunger of the great military nations of Europe and the popular catchcry 'Australia for the Australians' would become an empty dream. Britain would send its last ship and spend its last shilling to defend them.

This, then, was mother England's kindly rebuke to her adolescent children. Throughout the week Parkes and Carrington had proclaimed the same imperial theme, but while the old tribune of the people had antagonised the crowds, the young aristocrat had charmed them. 'He has done well', wrote Lady Carrington,

and it proves that the way he has hitherto gone to work in identifying himself with the people of N.S. Wales and not always being the *Governor!* has been the right way and that in no way has he lowered the dignity of his office.

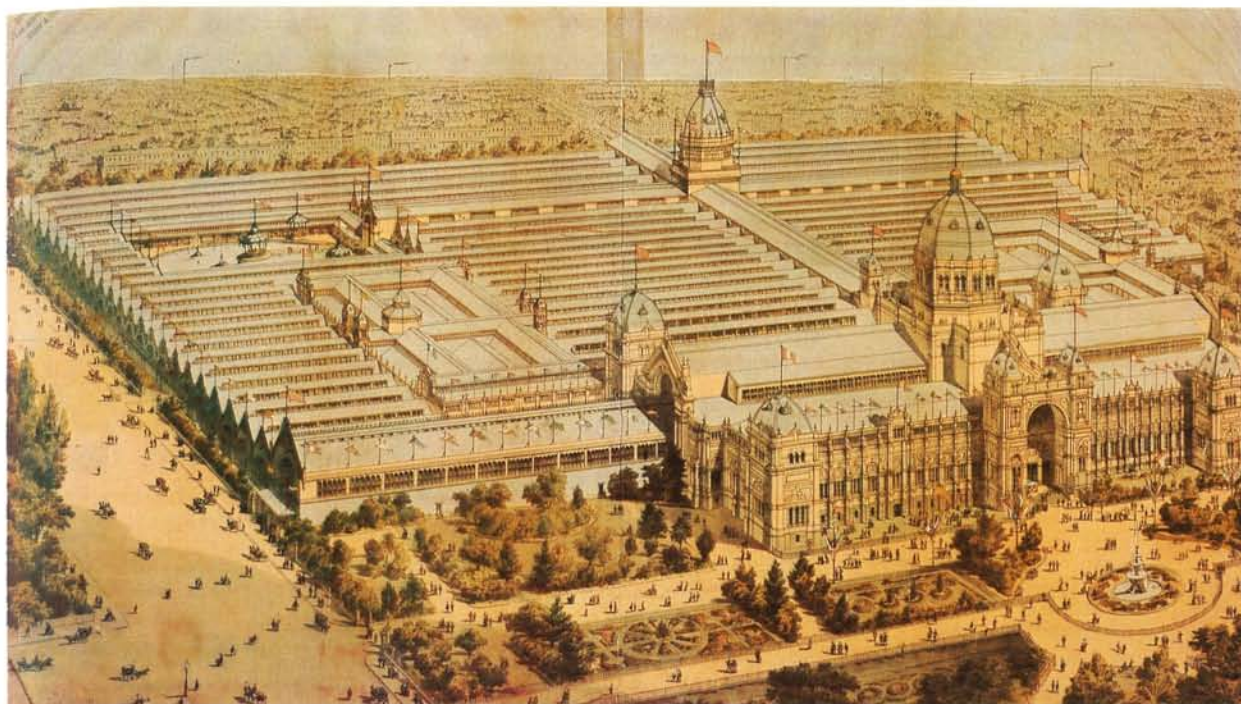
At the end of the week most observers counted the celebrations as at best a qualified success. The visiting politicians had been well fed and the public had had a welcome holiday. But as a demonstration of Australian nationality, the celebrations left impressions that were too fragmentary and contradictory to be truly memorable. The theme of the celebrations—the progress and unity of the Australian colonies—was belied by the conduct of many participants. While the politicians were proclaiming the ideal of unity between classes, the classes themselves were celebrating, or not celebrating, in their separate ways. While centennial banqueters were praising the idea of national unity, the separate colonies were manoeuvring for advantage. Even while they were rejoicing in their material prosperity and progress, people could not dismiss from their minds the plight of those, such as the Aborigines and the poor, who were shut out from the great feast.

ACROSS THE CONTINENT

'It is appalling to think how far-reaching the consequences would have been if Sydney had been swallowed up by an earthquake within the last two or three days', pondered the *Adelaide Register* in the middle of the centennial celebrations. Each colonial capital would suddenly have lost its leading politicians, church dignitaries,



The fountain at Parramatta. With its weather vane, four-faced clock and handsome gas lamps, Parramatta's centennial memorial drinking fountain was a symbol of the forces that enabled Australians to attack their vast and ill-watered land. Sydney Mail, 28 Jan 1888.



civil servants and trade union officials and many a provincial town would have been without its mayor and leading citizens. With so much of the wealth and dignity of the colonies concentrated in Sydney, it is not surprising that celebrations of 26 January throughout the rest of the country were often patchy and lacklustre.

The festivities in the metropolis drew a bitter reaction from the countryside of New South Wales. By luring all their leading citizens away with cheap rail fares, the government had undermined most local celebrations. The citizens of Narrabri, who had planned to hold a centennial banquet, were forced to cancel it when most of the guests set off for Sydney. The editor of the local newspaper alleged that it was all a plot on the part of Sydney's shopkeepers to get their hands on the bushmen's hard-earned cash.

The biggest celebrations outside Sydney were held on 27 January in the historic town of Parramatta, where a procession of friendly societies preceded the laying of the foundation stone of a centennial memorial drinking fountain. One float carried an allegorical representation of 'Australia past and present', which juxtaposed a scene of Aborigines brandishing their spears at a supine white man, and a figure of Australia sitting on a woolpack receiving the tribute of a kneeling Aborigine.

Sports and picnics were the order of the day in most towns. Yass had a centennial pigeon shoot, while the people of Bourke steamed nineteen kilometres down the Darling to a favourite picnic spot where they enjoyed the pleasures of popular games and dances such as kiss-in-the-ring, disappointment and the jolly miller. At the foot races in Inverell the main event, carrying a prize of £20 and a 50-guinea cup, was won by a 'half caste' named Murray. Elsewhere, the country's original inhabitants were largely ignored, although in Kiama the Aborigines' Protection Board held a banquet for the 'coloured population' attended by an aged Aboriginal woman, 'Queen Mary' and her six generations of descendants.

Although the day was marked by a public holiday throughout most of Australia, the other capitals refrained from anything that would detract from Sydney's big

Joseph Reed, Melbourne's most renowned architect, designed the Exhibition Buildings for the Melbourne international exhibition of 1880–81. Each exhibiting country had its own 'court', and areas were specially reserved for locomotives, machinery, armaments and the fine arts. Educational exhibits were interspersed with such popular attractions as a pleasure lake and kiosk, an aquarium, a fernery and a switchback railway.

NATIONAL LIBRARY

day. Melburnians knew their turn would come later in the year with the Centennial Exhibition and on Centennial Day itself the only events of note were the Caledonian Society's sports and a bay excursion organised by the Australian Natives' Association.

The day perhaps meant more to old-timers such as George Belcher who had arrived in the colonies in 1839, overlanded from New South Wales and eventually became a prosperous Geelong financial agent and parliamentarian. At the end of the day he wrote in his diary:

All the colonies keeping high festival on the occasion of the centenary of New South Wales—100 years ago today since Capt. Cook landed at Sydney and planted the British flag on the Australian Continent—what changes since then and what greater changes in another hundred years if the world lasts so long! My memory goes back for near a jubilee until the time Melbourne [was] then but a Settlement, the din of the Native Corroboree heard every moonlight night from Emerald Hill, and the camp fires of the natives on that Elevation plainly discernible from the infant Melbourne. Today as I was returning home thru the Botanic Gardens I saw before me walking townwards a native. Seldom are they to be seen now. I gave the old call of attention 'Wah', he turned and came up to me, I furbished up all I could remember of the native tongue (for at the time I could speak it) but alas! he spoke pure English and never knew his native tongue—what volumes this speaks and indeed it set *me* thinking.

Centenary celebrations in the Victorian countryside were organised almost single-handedly by the Australian Natives' Association; where it was strong the day was well kept up, where the Association was weak it passed almost without remark. The ANA, formed in Melbourne in 1871 as a friendly society for native-born Australians, had been active in promoting an authentically national day.

South Australia, the only colony to escape the stigma of convictism and the most economically depressed in 1888, was reluctant to spend money celebrating the foundation of a penal colony. Having just recovered from their own jubilee exhibition, Adelaidians might also have jibbed at another round of official junketing. A day or so before Centennial Day people were still wondering if anything would be done to mark it. 'I... should not like to see S.A. the only colony to back out of keeping up our first centenary,' a South Australian patriot complained. In the end, banks and government offices closed for the day but the holiday was not observed by most tradespeople. Fred Coneybeer, a young tradesman who had grown up in New South Wales, spent the day at work, but his thoughts were elsewhere. 'This is the great day in Sydney today', he noted. 'I should like to be in N.S.W. but it's no use wishing I suppose.'

Queensland, which had also known the taint of convictism, showed more daughterly feeling towards New South Wales than self-righteous South Australia or uppity Victoria. Readers of the Brisbane *Courier* opened their papers on Centennial Day to see a 'Centennial Greeting' by a local poet, Mary Hannay Foott, congratulating New South Wales on her rise from serfdom.

Thou hast crowned thyself with cities—and no stone is set on Wrong
 Freemen tend thy flocks at pasture, freemen dwell thy hills among
 Never Ural, never Andes, held such wealth as is Thine own—
 By no sweat of serfdom tainted, purchased by no bondsman's groan.

What was important, the weekly *Queenslander* insisted, was not the colony's abject past, but her glorious present. 'The difference between the *then* and the *now* is the very reason of their rejoicing.'

Celebrations in the outlying colonies were comparatively modest, perhaps because the number of celebrants was small rather than because national pride faded with distance. Hobart, the second oldest of the capitals, and blessed like Sydney with a magnificent waterway, held a jubilee regatta. The English cricketers were in town and many of the townsfolk went to see them play the local team.

The people of Perth, separated by more than three thousand kilometres of ocean and several hours of delay in telegraph communication with Sydney, kept up the day in that 'quiet, mild way' said to be characteristic of Western Australians. A centennial regatta at Fremantle drew many railway excursionists from Perth. In the evening the Perth Musical Union put on a well-attended concert of works by Haydn, Mozart and Mendelssohn which proved, at least to the gentlefolk of Perth, that the colony was as advanced in the 'higher forms of civilization' as the more populous cities further east.

MELBOURNE'S BIG SHOW

As Centennial Week drew to a close, Australians resumed business as usual. The celebrations had not been a flop, but neither had they been as 'grand' or 'emphatic' as Sir Henry Parkes had hoped. The only consolation was that if Sydney had failed to do justice to the occasion, Melbourne still had the opportunity to do better. 'The true celebration of the centennial year', the Melbourne *Argus* affirmed, 'is the International Exhibition . . . an event at which all can assist with pleasure, with pride and also with profit'.

Ever since London's Great Exhibition of 1851, international exhibitions had been the most popular form of national trumpet-blowing. Peoples who placed a

The Centennial Exhibition procession, Melbourne, 1 August. Volunteers and bluejackets of the Royal Navy march down Collins Street alongside the banners of trade unions.

LA TROBE LIBRARY



*Frederick Cowen leads his
choir of 800 voices in the
centennial cantata:*

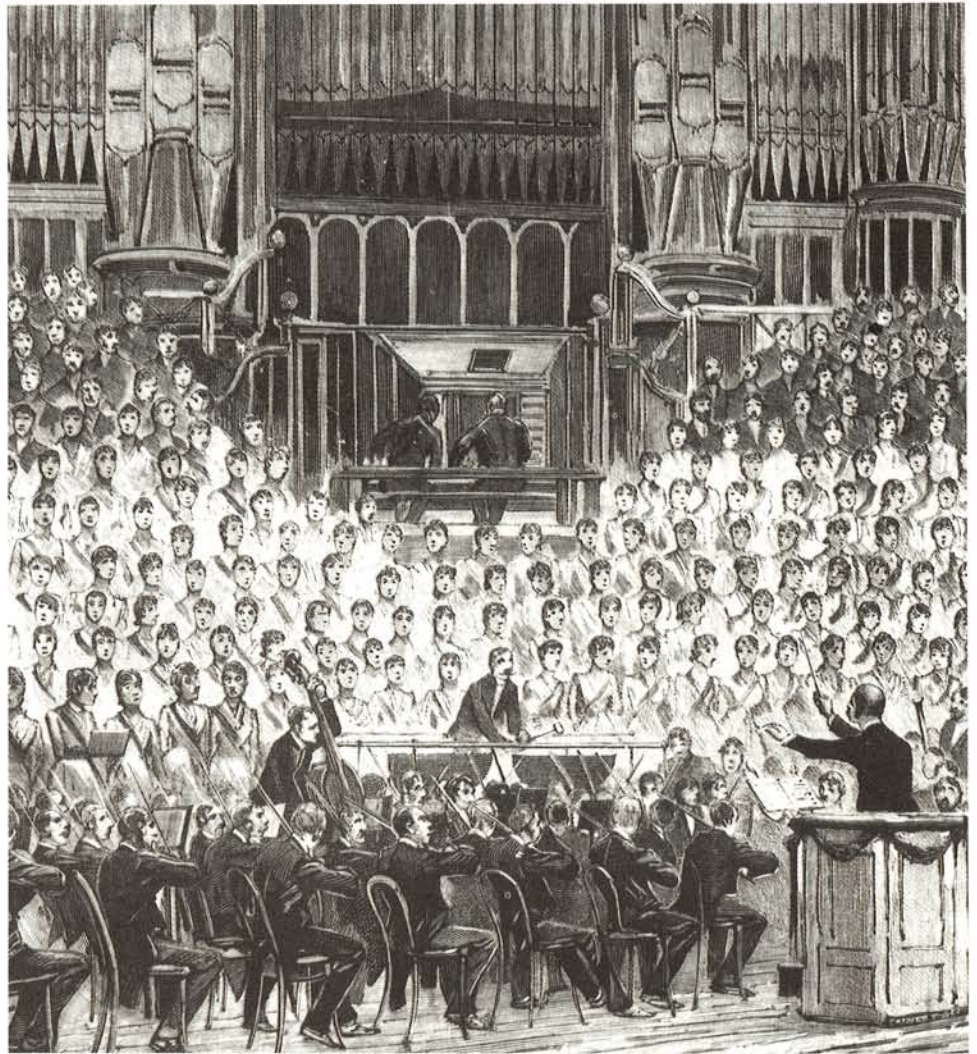
*Loyally, royally, greet we
here*

*Guests of this Centennial
Year*

*You, who over distant seas,
Sailed to our festivities;
You, allied in federal bands,
Sister States of Austral
lands;*

*Heart and hand we give to
all*

At our opening festival.
Illustrated Australian
News, 15 Aug 1888.



high value on industrial progress believed that a nation's prowess was visible in the things it produced. Exhibitions had descended from the mediaeval fairs and remained a means of promoting international trade, as well as spreading technical knowledge among the masses. But their first task was to foster the spirit of nationhood. International exhibitions provided arenas in which nation-states shaped their self-images, displayed their prowess and gauged the strength of rivals.

Not all Victorians supported the exhibition; the exorbitant cost of Melbourne's first International Exhibition in 1880 was still fresh in the public memory. Melbourne merchants feared that once again the colony would be invaded by foreign entrepreneurs keen to cut out the colonial middleman. Working men suspected that local industries would suffer and Victorian jobs would be exported overseas. A few cautious people who refused to be carried away by the hysteria of the land boom wondered whether they were not yielding too many hostages to fortune. 'The colony was playing the part of being too big for its boots', warned William Shiels, Irish-born barrister and scourge of Melbourne's land boomers. 'They were at the top of a wave of prosperity, but just as there is a top to the wave, so there is also a trough.'

But in the free-spending atmosphere of 1888, few wanted to hear these

jeremiads. Because Melbourne already had a suitable building and the exhibitors were expected to rent their own space, the cost of the exhibition was at first estimated at a mere £25 000. But in order to attract as many exhibitors as possible, the commissioners decided to waive all rents and to provide free motive power for the machinery exhibits. As it turned out, there were twice as many applications for space as expected and some fourteen hectares of new annexes costing £170 000 had to be put up to fit everyone in.

As the costs mounted, the chairman of commissioners, the chief justice, George Higinbotham, became alarmed. He insisted that all spending proposals be submitted for his personal approval. This the commissioners refused to do, and Higinbotham resigned to be replaced by the president of the legislative council, Sir James McBain, under whom the lavish spending continued. The gas lights installed for the 1880 exhibition had been insufficient to allow the show to remain open at night, so the commissioners installed steam-powered electric generators and over one thousand incandescent bulbs and arc lights. They extended the scope of the exhibition to include fine as well as applied arts and negotiated the loan of collections of painting and sculpture from Britain, France and Germany. They added a season of orchestral concerts and paid the famous English conductor and composer, Frederick Cowen, the astonishing sum of £5000 to put it on. When all the bills were totted up, the estimated £25 000 had grown to a prodigious £400 000, less than half of which was recovered from admission charges.

The great show began on 1 August under a wintry Melbourne sky. The opening ceremony had a stronger flavour of civil religion than had the strictly secular ceremonies in Sydney. The strong evangelical contingent in the Victorian parliament might have insisted upon a more forthright acknowledgment of the God of Nations, and Victorians, who had escaped the convict stain, might have found it easier to reconcile their origins with a providential design. Since 1851, moreover, international exhibitions had always been sanctified with the trappings of Christianity. Like the Crystal Palace, the Melbourne Exhibition Building was designed on the cruciform plan of a great cathedral with a 'dome', 'nave', 'transepts' and 'choir'. The ceremonial space under the dome was decorated with godlike figures representing Art, Mining, Commerce and Agriculture and with the profiles of famous Australian pioneers. And the opening ceremony itself followed a kind of liturgy with prayers, hymns and quasi-sacred music.

Most of the ceremony was taken up with the performance of a centennial cantata. In the preceding months the commissioners had held a competition in search of suitable verses. The promise of a little brief fame and a few guineas' reward had aroused poetic inspiration in the most unlikely places. John McArthur, a pastoralist at Carramut in the Western District, scribbled his entry in a single day between bouts of farm work, but after looking it over he decided that it wanted a little knocking into shape. He polished it for several days more before concluding that it was not up to scratch. The winner, from 257 entries, was a forty-year-old Congregational minister from Carlton, Reverend William Allen, and his poem was eventually set to music by a young Melbourne-born composer, H.J. King.

Allen had excelled by sticking closely to the well-tried formula for exhibition cantatas in new countries, which dramatised the nation's history as the journey of a pilgrim people from their European homeland across the perilous seas, through the trials of the wilderness to the safety of a promised land. Unlike its American counterparts, however, which dwelt on themes of political and religious liberty, Allen's cantata was dedicated to the theme of material success. From 'a land by civilization's step untrod' Australia had been transformed by the 'pastoral pioneers' and the 'magic of gold' to a nation of 'myriad-peopled cities'.



Coming after a long procession and several speeches, the 45-minute performance of the centennial cantata was, the Argus reported, 'a very lengthy and trying ordeal to the many thousands who could see little, and hear less'. Even Lord Carrington, well placed to see and hear, became a little weary. Melbourne Punch, 2 Aug 1888.

Where the warrigal whimpered and bayed
 Where the feet of the dark hunter strayed
 See the wealth of the world is arrayed
 Where the spotted snake crawled by the stream
 See the spires of a great city gleam
 Is it all but the dream of a dream?

Whether because of Allen's hackneyed verse or King's uninspired musical score, the performance of the cantata was not a success. Government ministers stared into space, Lord Carrington yawned and poor George Belcher, trussed up in his uniform as vice-consul for Denmark, almost nodded off to sleep. By the time it was over, more than one-third of the audience had departed.

A few days later in Sydney the *Bulletin* parodied Allen's efforts in a purported 'slab from one of the unsuccessful Melbourne cantatas'. Behind the traditional 'welcome to guests' it detected more sordid commercial interests:

Brothers all with aught to sell
 Hither come, we love you all
 See the mighty dome arise
 That you all may advertise.

The *Bulletin* neatly reversed the conventional contrast between a dismal past and a glittering present into a satirical contrast between a 'Clean Past' in which crystal streams ran through an unspoiled wilderness and a 'Dirty Present' of unsewered and disease-ridden cities.

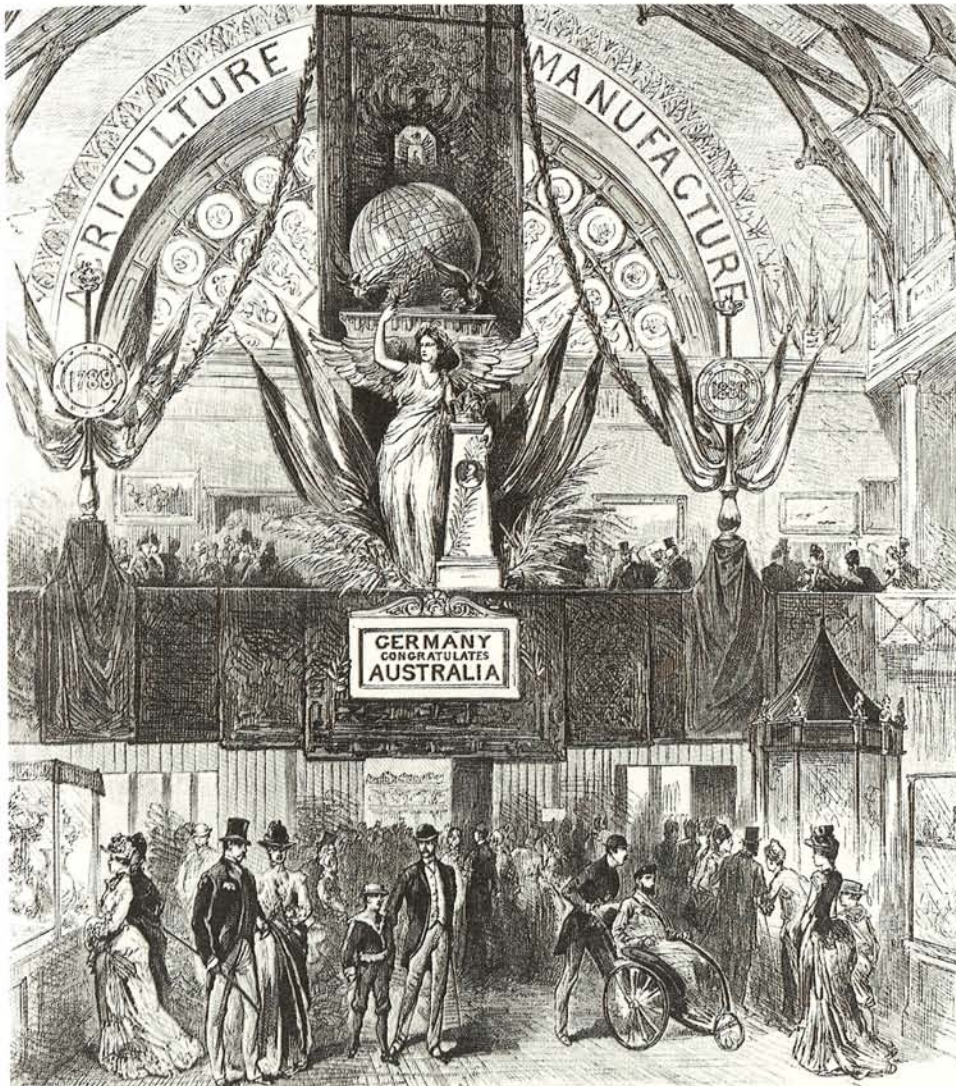
The exhibition enabled Australians to measure their progress against the standards set by other nations. Although separated by half the world from the great centres of Europe and America, they could enjoy some of the experiences of foreign travel as they passed from one national exhibit, or court, to another. Eight nations sent official delegations to the exhibition and twenty others were represented unofficially. The Prince of Wales, who had declined the Victorians' invitation to open the show, made amends by heading in London the commission that assembled the British exhibit. Besides a full display of its traditional industries, the British court included a collection of painting and sculpture selected by the president of the British Academy. Even casual visitors, however, could see that Britain, so long the pacemaker in industrial progress, was lagging in the competition with its younger rivals. The German court, dominated by a great silver statue of Germania congratulating Australia, was generally reckoned to be the most impressive overseas exhibit. But for sheer ingenuity the Americans beat all comers. They gave Australians the first glimpse of the Edison phonograph, the petrol engine and a curious substance known as chewing gum.

The comparisons that the rest of the world made between great industrial powers were those that Australians made between the industrial achievements of various colonies. In an attempt to smooth over the jealousies of preceding months, Victoria offered New South Wales first choice of space in the exhibition building. The Parkes government sent a large consignment of exhibits but the premier himself ostentatiously declined an invitation to attend the opening ceremony, pleading 'pressure of public business'. The most popular attraction in the New South Wales court was a lifelike model of Captain Cook's landing at Botany Bay (Captain Phillip and Sydney Cove again missed out). Symbolising the economic progress of the colony were a huge stack of wool bales and a silver trophy representing the newly discovered mineral wealth of Broken Hill. Queensland showed 500 samples of timber from its tropical rainforests, Tasmania a model of



James Cook, discoverer of Botany Bay, ousted Arthur Phillip, founder of Sydney, as a centennial hero. Many people in New South Wales preferred to remember the achievements of the noble navigator rather than the beginnings of their colony as a receptacle for convicts. It was commonly believed that Anniversary Day commemorated Cook's, not Phillip's, arrival. Cook's was the likeness depicted in souvenir newspaper supplements, on ceremonial arches and in Lucien Henry's stained glass window over the northern staircase of Sydney Town Hall.

RON DUNPHY



The exhibition: the German court. Above the entrance, Germania offers her centennial congratulations to Australia. Higher still, two golden eagles and a globe are surmounted by an imperial banner. Bismarck's Germany, ambitious to extend its trading empire, sent the second-largest delegation to the exhibition and made a strong showing with fine porcelain, carpets, pianos and machinery. Illustrated London News, 29 Sept 1888.

the underground workings at the Mount Bischoff tin mines, while agricultural South Australia gave pride of place to the stump-jump plough and scenes of a recent experiment in breeding ostriches.

Melbourne's was the first Australian exhibition to include an art gallery and musical concerts. The advance from the raw products of nature through machines and manufactures to high culture fittingly symbolised the progress of Australia itself. 'In a nation's history', the *Argus* explained,

intellectual and artistic culture come last. First there is the stern necessity of manual work, then the adoption of every invention that renders labour more economical and more valuable, and in the end the production of a specific art and literature ...

The idea that high culture grew from the seed of more practical endeavours was pleasing to a people immersed in money-making. To the novelist Ada Cambridge and her circle of artistic friends, the exhibition brought a welcome breath of European sophistication. Frederick Cowen's concerts converted them all into Wagnerites, while the secluded corners of the art galleries offered deliciously

intimate meeting places. 'It was', she confided, 'a very paradise for lovers'. A young engineer and volunteer soldier, John Monash, marched in the procession on opening day and promised himself a visit to the armaments display, but when he returned it was to dally with his partner's wife, Annie Gabriel, behind the potted palms of the art gallery. Like many others, young Monash derived more pleasure than instruction from the exhibition. Its promoters argued that it would advance the people's education, but the people liked the aquarium, the refreshment booths and the switchback railway better than the art gallery and machinery exhibits.

News of the exhibition appeared in local newspapers all over the continent. Special trains at reduced fares were put on throughout rural Victoria, and state school pupils within 160 kilometres of Melbourne could make the trip for as little as 2s return. These concessions did little to reconcile small-town businessmen to the big show, which they portrayed—not altogether wrongly—as a plot by Melbourne capitalists to centralise trade in the metropolis. They resented the imposition of Melbourne's social calendar on the countryside. The *Hamilton Spectator* thought it 'a perfect farce to proclaim a holiday [for the opening of the exhibition] in towns so far from the metropolis as this', and the *Ballarat Courier* asked why special fares were not put on for exhibition visitors to come to the Golden City of Ballarat as well as for Ballarat people to visit Melbourne. Yet the attractions of the exhibition seem to have speedily overcome these resentments. Within a week or two, more than two hundred Hamiltonians had boarded the exhibition special and 2500 Ballarat schoolchildren had made the excursion to the metropolis.

The journey up to Melbourne came as a welcome interruption to the tedium of rural life. Joseph Jenkins, a Welsh swagman whose thirty years' pilgrimage in the colony had never before taken him outside the central goldfields, enjoyed an 'exciting day at Melbourne', where he marvelled at the size and cost of the exhibition buildings. John Currie, a hard-working selector, had to be pestered by his wife to go. 'I hope he will enjoy himself better than he expects to', she wrote as he departed.

Many visitors were attracted from other colonies. An enterprising clothier inserted verses entitled 'The Exodus to Melbourne' in the Sydney papers:

They are going in dozens, our sisters and cousins
 The Great Exhibition to see
 By the train every day they are speeding away
 As happy as happy can be
 When Victorian belles see our young Sydney swells
 Dressed up in a style so immense
 They will make all their beaux dress in Summerfield's clothes
 Thus showing their sound commonsense.

Fred Coneybeer in Adelaide saved for several months to take his wife and infant daughter on the trip. He was proud to have seen every previous Australian exhibition and was determined not to miss this, the biggest of them all. As a tradesman—he made horse collars—he took a particular interest in the working exhibits of cream separating, bread making and wool combing machinery and in the displays of harness and saddlery. 'I think my collars in the Adelaide Show [Jubilee Exhibition of 1887] was equal to anything I saw in Melbourne', he boasted.

No previous event in Australia's history had been attended by so many people. In the nine months it was open, the exhibition drew more than two million visitors, a larger share of its surrounding population than any of its European or American counterparts. It brought Australians their first view of the art treasures



The exhibition: the silver trophy, New South Wales court. The spectacular creation displayed by the Broken Hill Proprietary Company symbolises the wealth of Australia's most celebrated new mineral field. A silver pedestal topped by the figure of Atlas reaches almost to the roof; at its foot, specimens of silver ore illustrate the various stages of smelting. In the months leading up to the exhibition, Broken Hill was the most glamorous stock on Australian exchanges.

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of Europe and their first full season of symphony concerts. It showed them the world's latest technology. But most of all, it held a mirror up to the achievements of Australia itself. 'In an exhibition such as ours', a perceptive journalist remarked, 'we not only see but are seen'.

THE EYE OF HISTORY

In the journey through time that has brought Australia from the moment of British settlement to the present day, 1888 is the halfway house. Men and women still alive in that year could reach back in memory almost to the foundations of the colony. Yet of the newborn babies of 1888, a few survive to our own day. It is a time both near and far, familiar and strange, accessible yet remote.

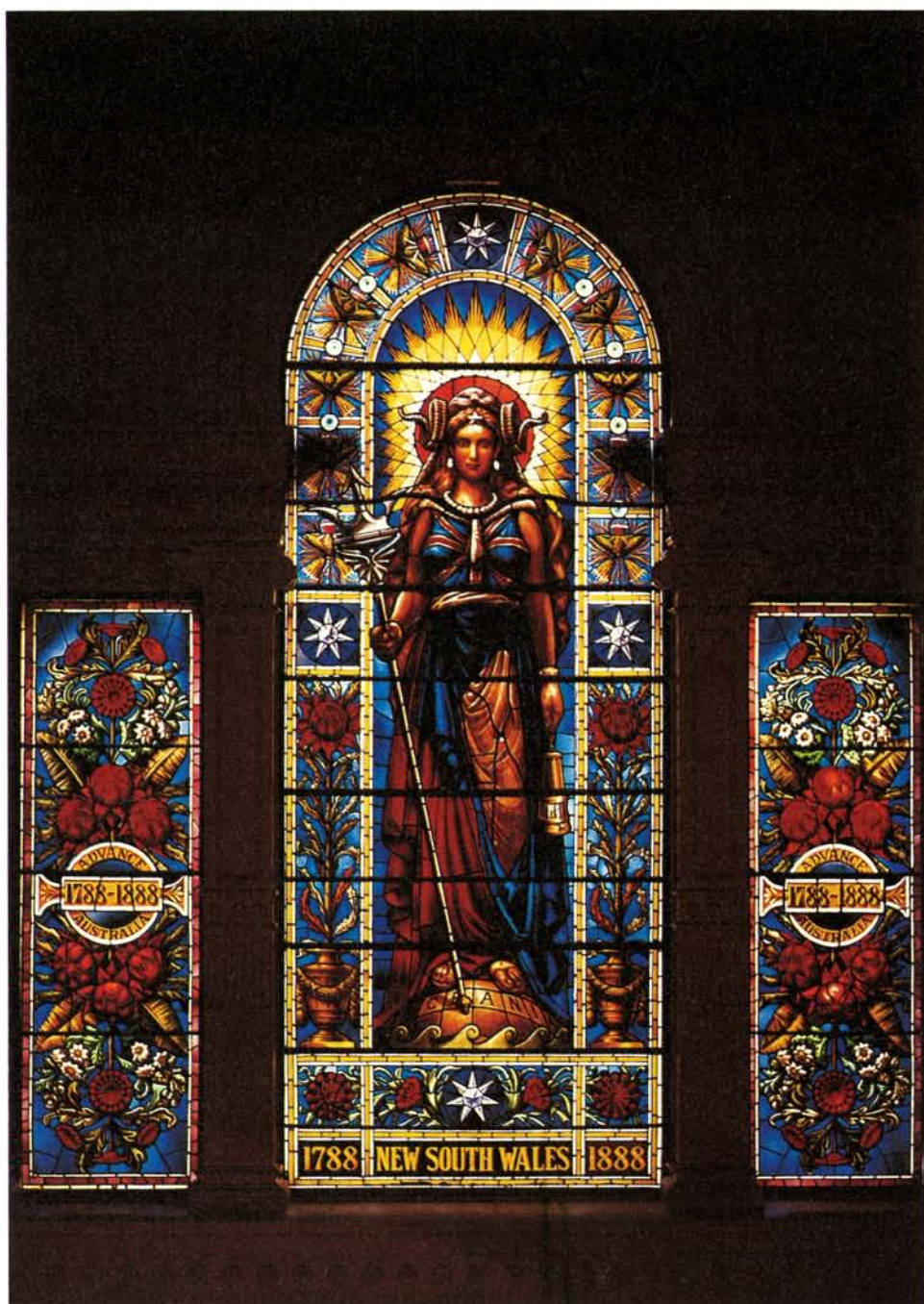
During Centennial Week a group of old colonists met, in the time-honoured way, to celebrate the birthday of New South Wales with a commemorative dinner. One guest, 69-year-old George Thornton, the son of a publican father and convict mother, had attended the similar dinner held at the Royal Hotel in 1838 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of New South Wales. Now a prominent merchant and parliamentarian, Thornton's rise to wealth and respectability mirrored the progress of the colony itself. 'Who ... could have foretold the marvellous progress and advance to be seen on this 26th January 1888?' he asked. 'I believe it to be unparalleled in the history of the world.' From looking backward, he then reached forward in time. 'Who of us now here', he wondered, 'can predict what will be the state of Australia ... a hundred years hence?'

Everyone who took part in the centennial celebrations was conscious of having to answer for his or her actions before the bar of posterity. 'Sir, the future eye of history is upon us now', warned Sir Patrick Jennings in the midst of centennial debates. Consciousness of posterity increased people's reverence for the past, and the centenary stimulated a boom in the writing and reading of Australian history. 'If we are to become a great people', another patriot argued, 'it would only be by feeling that we had a history'. Sir Henry Parkes had included a prize for the writing of Australian history in his first centennial scheme and his government advanced funds for the research and publication of the first volumes of the *Historical records of New South Wales*. On 26 January the newspapers carried long articles tracing the history of the colonies with portraits of their early governors and explorers, lists of important dates and statistics of increasing wealth and population. Young Henry Lawson, who detested the jingoism of the centennial celebrations, thought that they were partly redeemed by the opportunity they afforded Australians to learn about their history.

Long before the centennial year, shrewd publishers had foreseen the profits to be made from selling history. In August 1886 Lord and Lady Carrington visited the offices of the Picturesque Atlas Publishing Company in Wynyard Square. They were met by Dr Andrew Garran, recently retired editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who was to edit the proposed new volume, and a team of artists and engravers who were already at work illustrating the story of Australia's development with scenes of its history and landscape. The viceregal visitors were shown through the map room, where cartographers had spent several months on a large map of Australia's railway and telegraph network, and into the printery and bindery where the female employees serenaded them with the National Anthem. Later, over lunch at a nearby hotel, the governor warmly endorsed the project and one of the artists, Julian Ashton, promised that on Australia's coming anniversary the *Picturesque atlas* would be its most handsome birthday present.

In Melbourne the publishers of the city's leading financial paper had engaged

Centennial window, Sydney Town Hall. Lucien Henry, a French artist exiled to New Caledonia in 1871 and working in Sydney from 1879, pioneered the use of Australian motifs for decorative art. His stained-glass window for the southern staircase of the town hall has a female Australia, a fleece and ram's horns, a miner's lamp, a trident (for maritime power), the Union Jack, stars of the Southern Cross, a globe inscribed 'Oceania' and Australian flowers (waratah, flannel flower and stenocarpus or firewheel) in borders. B. Sherry, 'Australian themes in stained glass', Heritage Australia, Summer 1983. Photograph by R. Dunphy.

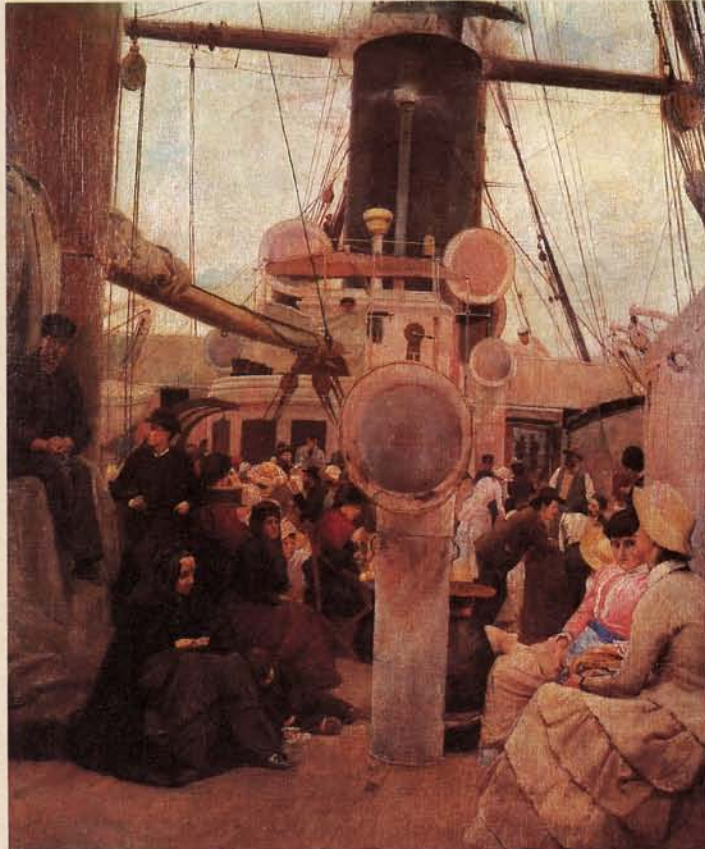


the services of the schoolmaster–historian Alexander Sutherland to produce a grand two–volume history, *Victoria and its metropolis*. In his preface to the first volume Sutherland anticipated criticism for devoting 600 pages to the history of so young and small a colony. ‘Of ordinary history’, he admitted, ‘we have none’. No battles, sieges or rebellions, no deaths of kings or potentates marked the turning points of Australian history. Theirs was the more peaceful but no less inspiring story of a people’s battle to overcome the hostile forces of nature. The great heroes of Australian history were the explorer and the pioneer.

Ernest Favenc, whose *The history of Australian exploration* was published in 1888 with assistance from the New South Wales government, saw the essential charm of his subject in 'the spectacle of one man pitted against the whole force of nature'. Australians had become great, not through military conquest, but in winning victory over a vast, uncharted and waterless land. The *Picturesque atlas* approached Australian history as 'an explorer's story' of 'how we have made ports, harbours and railways, constructed waterworks and towns and how we have grown rich'. In *Victoria and its metropolis*, Sutherland traced the evolution of the colony from the earliest explorers and pioneers, through the discovery of gold, the development of agriculture and manufactures to its culmination in the scientific and cultural life of a magnificent metropolis.

The moral courage of the great explorers was also reflected in the more mundane lives of the farmer, the miner and the manufacturer. A feature of the commemorative histories that appeared in all the colonies around 1888 was a long rollcall of representative 'men of mark'. Many of these potted biographies, one of their collectors admitted, had 'only a family or a local interest'. Yet collectively they told a 'story of courage, perseverance, and energy overcoming all disadvantages and obstacles, and eventually leading to success and independence'. The immigrants of the 1840s and 1850s were now nearing the end of their lives; the centennial histories, with their thousands of individual success stories, were the literary tombstones of a generation.

Just a few weeks before the centennial celebrations began, the Curries, a family of hard-working Gippsland dairy farmers, were visited by a salesman for the forthcoming *Victoria and its metropolis*. The book, they were told, would cost six guineas and the Curries' butter sales earned them barely three pounds a week. But the 'book feind', as the family called him, promised John Currie that his name would appear in the volume 'as one of the Pioneers of the wilds of Gippsland' and the frugal farmer signed up. In return for his six hard-earned guineas, Currie was immortalised in half a dozen lines of bland biography summarising his arrival in the colony, his farming career at Ballan and Lardner, the amount of land he had selected or purchased, the number of cows in his herd and the number of children he had fathered. All the ups and downs, the fruitful endeavours and wasted opportunities, the seasonal ebb and flow of everyday life were condensed into a fable of success. Even so, John Currie was among the tiny minority of Australians whose lives somehow found their way into the history books; many others who could not afford the publisher's stiff price, or cared less for the good opinion of posterity, remain unknown and unsung.



Tom Roberts, Coming south. Tom Roberts migrated to Australia with his family in 1869 when he was thirteen.

In 1881 he returned to England to study art at the Royal Academy in London and to travel and paint in Europe. He sailed again for Australia aboard the Lusitania in 1885, and the ship was the setting for his painting of migrants travelling to a new land. Also aboard was Australian-born J.F. Archibald of the Bulletin, who had gone to London in 1883. Oil, 1886.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

I
LAND AND PEOPLE