

CHAPTER 2

SKELETON AT THE FEAST

GAVIN SOUTER

ON THE MORNING OF 26 January 1938, the 150th anniversary of the first British settlement in Australia, 26 Aborigines stirred themselves from the straw palliasses on which they had passed the night at Redfern police barracks. Hero Black, Archie Boney, Anzac Williams, Jimmy Wongram and the rest had been brought to Sydney from western New South Wales to take part in the celebrations that were soon to begin. After breakfast they put on aprons of cloth and gum leaves, armed themselves with boomerangs, and were driven to the Botanic Gardens.

Led by Hero Black, a stout middle-aged man with balding grey hair and a heavy white moustache, the Aborigines filed down the garden steps towards Farm Cove. Taking their appointed station among palms and grass trees planted for the occasion, they looked out past a sandstone sea wall, part of which had been removed to create a narrow beach on the shore of Sydney Harbour. Behind and beside them were thousands of spectators, and just offshore a replica of an eighteenth century warship rode at anchor near the Royal Australian Navy's flagship, *HMAS Canberra*, and a fleet of miscellaneous pleasure craft.

By 8.25 am the distinguished visitors' stand on the shore was filled with such public figures as the governor-general, Alexander Hore-Ruthven, 1st Baron Gowrie of Canberra and Dirleton, born at Windsor, educated at Eton and awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery in the Sudan; the governor of New South Wales, John de Vere Loder, 2nd Baron Wakehurst, born in London, educated at Eton and formerly a member of the House of Commons; the prime minister, the Right Honourable Joseph Aloysius Lyons, privy councillor and Companion of Honour, father of eleven children, once a Tasmanian schoolteacher, previously a Labor man but now leader of a conservative government; the premier of New South Wales, the Honourable Bertram Stevens, another conservative and an accountant by profession; and the lord mayor of Sydney, Alderman Norman Nock, proprietor of the city's largest hardware store.



Hero Black at the military review. Photograph by L. Pimblett, 1938.

The day was almost as fine as the one it was about to commemorate. A few clouds sailed in from the Pacific, but the sun soon came out again. The curtain was about to go up for the greatest commemorative show in Australia's history.



Sydney was the centre and financial beneficiary of most of the sesquicentennial celebrations. Melbourne and Adelaide had recently celebrated their own centenaries and did their best to ignore the Sydney festivities, although Sydney managed to attract many interstate visitors.

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Tasmania had little interest in the Sydney-centred sesquicentennial celebrations: the centenary of the Royal Hobart Regatta Association provided the occasion for one of the few spectacular events during the year.

BOOROWA PRODUCTIONS

By choice of the self-styled senior state and informal consent of the other five, the sesquicentennial celebrations were to take place mainly in New South Wales, and particularly in Sydney, largest of the Australian cities and, in the rhetoric of such matters, 'birthplace of the nation'. Official celebrations would start there on 26 January, known in different states as Australia Day, Anniversary Day or Foundation Day, and would end on 25 April, known and hallowed everywhere as Anzac Day.

Both days were concerned with landings: one by Governor Arthur Phillip and his convict settlers beside the Tank Stream at Sydney Cove in 1788, the other by the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) at Gallipoli in 1915. Thus, as the *Melbourne Age* observed, the alpha and omega of a sesquicentenary would be the two days of the year which above all others linked Australians most closely with the past and with each other.

Preparation for the sesquicentenary had started in 1936, when the New South Wales parliament passed an Australia's One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations Act which provided for government funding of the celebration and the formation of a Celebrations Council. In charge of the celebrations was John Dunningham, MLA, minister for Labour and Industry, a former turf bookmaker who still lived in the racing suburb of Randwick. Although Dunningham's allegedly harsh treatment of unemployed people during the recent depression had earned him the nickname of 'Slave Camp Dunningham', he was a gregarious man and well equipped by wide community connections to oversee the anniversary celebrations. He was vice-president of the Royal Life Saving Society and the New South Wales Rugby Union, council member of the National Roads and Motorists' Association and the Royal Agricultural Society of New South Wales, and office bearer in many local sporting clubs. In his approach to the sesquicentenary, Dunningham kept two precedents in mind: Adelaide's centenary of 1936 and Melbourne's centenary of 1934. 'It is intended', he wrote to the premier, 'that our celebrations shall be on a scale at least as great as those of Victoria'. Melbourne had managed to attract the Duke of Gloucester. It had staged an air race from Britain and, more imaginatively, had transplanted the two-storeyed brick home of Captain James Cook's parents in Yorkshire to Fitzroy Gardens. Sydney failed to secure a duke or even, as one of Dunningham's memoranda admitted ruefully, 'near Royalty'. It was suggested that the state government invite David Lloyd George, Winston Churchill, George Bernard Shaw, Charlie Chaplin and Field-Marshal Sir William Birdwood, the Englishman who had commanded the Anzacs at Gallipoli. If any of these invitations were extended, none was accepted. The most illustrious British guest turned out to be a mere lord privy seal, the Earl de la Warr.

To match the Cook cottage, or perhaps to outdo bricks and mortar with flesh and blood, Dunningham proposed—along with many other commemorative events, but first in priority and symbolic importance—a re-enactment of Governor Phillip's landing. This was to take place at Farm Cove, which could accommodate more spectators and provide a temporary beach more readily than the nearby Sydney Cove. Costumed actors and what the minister called 'a troupe of aborigines' would present the spectacle.

The Aborigines were not easily found. Certainly 280 descendants of Australia's original population were still living at the La Perouse reserve on Botany Bay,



J.M. Dunningham, seated, is shown a poster at the Celebrations Office in the Rural Bank, Martin Place. The poster, by F.H. Coventry, is reproduced on the front cover of this book. 17 Jan 1938.

BOOROWA PRODUCTIONS



despite Dunningham's efforts while he had been mayor of Randwick to have them evicted. But the La Perouse people were nearly all products of intermarriage with white Australians, and nothing less than 'full bloods' would do for the re-enactment.

Because 'those procurable from around Sydney would not suit the purpose', the executive committee of the Celebrations Council resolved that '15 to 20 Aborigines be secured from Palm Island, the cost (inclusive) to be about £300'. Such latterday blackbirding, the Association for the Protection of Native Races protested, would 'humiliate a people ... dispossessed of their country'. The executive committee changed its mind, but not in response to that protest. Although the north Queensland island had plenty of 'racially pure' Aborigines, some of them were suffering from infantile paralysis.

The quandary was resolved at the eleventh hour by bringing Hero Black and his companions to Sydney. Twenty-one of them came from Menindee, a

'State Minister, J.M. Dunningham, ceremoniously smocked and created an artist, was gay with South Sea belles, Mrs George Finey (left), Mrs Jack Earl. Over his shoulder grins Artist "Wep" [William E. Pidgeon], Pix, 23 Apr 1938.

dilapidated settlement on the Darling River housing 150 people of the Wiradjuri and Barkendji language groups. The other five were from a community of 380 Murawari people at Brewarrina, about a hundred kilometres east of Bourke. Menindee settlement was a collection of metal huts in which the occupants endured summer temperatures of 45° Celsius 'like sardines in a tin'. Many of them had tuberculosis. At Brewarrina 90 per cent of the Aboriginal population suffered from a painful disease of the eyelids called trachoma. About a hundred of them received eye treatment every day. Rough though the accommodation at Redfern was, it was almost certainly an improvement on sardine tins beside the Darling.

'The aborigines seemed a trifle self-conscious about registering the emotions of alarm when they sighted the fleet', reported the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'but they made an attractive group, chocolate-skinned, and dressed partly in bunches of eucalypt leaves'. The first fleet was symbolised by a replica of Governor Phillip's flagship the *Supply*, built around the hulk of an abandoned lighter on loan from the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. Soon some amplified cockney voices came from the *Supply*, performing to a script written by the president of the Maritime Services Board, Captain G.D. Williams. One sleepy voice yearned for the Elephant and Castle; another, with no licence from recorded history, remarked excitedly on the presence of 'Injins' in the bush. A boatload of seamen and scarlet-coated marines under Lieutenant Henry Ball put off from the ship and rowed towards the beach. Hero Black and his men rushed forward, then drew back to the lawn. 'A corroboree, undoubtedly, was called for', observed the *Herald*, 'and a corroboree

Reporters, photographers and newsreel cameramen capture the re-enactment. Hero Black is just below the left-hand side of the press platform. The Bennelong Point tramshed is in the background, under the southern end of the Harbour Bridge. Pix, 26 Jan 1938.





No ceremony associated with the 150th Anniversary Celebrations was more colourful or more impressive than this re-enactment of the establishment of the first white settlement in Australia. It was appropriate that this ceremony should be the prelude to the general celebrations that followed, for throughout the whole of the festivities the great part Phillip and his gallant men played was kept vividly before the public.' O.L. Ziegler, Australia 1788-1938, Sydney 1938.

the Aborigines held ... Slowly the dark-skinned dancers moved in circles, looking uncomfortable about it all, but playing their parts as best they could. The landing party came inexorably onwards'. Over the loudspeakers the audience heard the marines prepare for more than a corroboree:

Lt BALL: Dawes, how many Indians do you think were in that party?

DAWES: At least a score, and everyone carrying lances. They may be inclined to fight, especially as there appear to be no women amongst them. Is there any likelihood of an ambush?

Lt BALL: Well, those at Botany Bay were peaceful enough, but both Captain Cook and Sir Joseph [Banks] particularly mention their treacherous traits. I think I'll call Johnston over. Hey, Johnston!

JOHNSTON: Sir!

Lt BALL: Instruct your Sergeants, Mister, to see that no Indians remain skulking about.

JOHNSTON: Aye, aye, Sir.

(Johnston raises his hat and moves off to execute the order).

The marines advanced with fixed bayonets, but the men from Menindee and Brewarrina knew better than to retreat too far, for soon they would be needed again. The governor, played in tricorne hat and white breeches by Frank Harvey, an English actor well known in Australia as the star of many J.C. Williamson plays, was about to be carried ashore in company with Judge-Advocate David Collins, the Reverend Richard Johnson and Lieutenant Philip Gidley King, the latter played by one of that officer's great-great-grandsons. Soon afterwards the governor was joined by Captain John Hunter, master of the *Sirius*, played by the scenario writer Captain Williams.

Phillip crossed the lawn and placed a length of red cloth around the neck of Hero Black. The judge-advocate read an abbreviated version of the governor's commission, which in 1788 had not been read until twelve days later, and in a brief



Drummer, resplendent in regimental colours, is poised to roll his drum during the re-enactment ceremony. O.L. Ziegler, Australia 1788-1938, Sydney 1938.

Joan Howarth (far right) came to town with her sisters and friends from *Dee Why* on the eve of the sesqui parade. They decided to stay overnight on the steps of the GPO to ensure a good view. They were joined there by sailors from HMS *Achilles*. The man in front is a newspaper reporter who had a fellow reporter take this photograph.

J. POAT, 1938 COLLECTION



Miss Hazel Tosh as Miss Queensland in Sydney's sesquicentennial procession, 28 January 1938. The dress was yellow, the headdress red poinsettia made from crepe paper. Hazel Tosh had to appear in several sesqui processions in Sydney and suburbs, and found it difficult to keep her costume clean, particularly after it rained and red from the headdress stained her dress.

H. GAMMAGE, CANBERRA

oration Phillip expressed the hope that 'this country will become the most valuable acquisition Britain has ever made'. Glasses were charged for a loyal toast, the Union Jack was raised and, suddenly drowned out by ships' sirens from all over the harbour, the landing party gave King George III three huzzas and a feu de joie.

More than half the 1487 men, women and children on board the first fleet in 1788 had been convicts, but they were not represented at Farm Cove. Nor were they anywhere in the grand procession of motorised floats, 'Australia's March to Nationhood', that started out through the city soon afterwards. This was no oversight, but the result of a decision by the Celebrations Council's executive committee that the procession should reflect 'Australia's peaceful development and progress'. The executive had been divided on this issue, but in the end convicts were banned. The council's own literary committee promptly protested at 'the absence of any reference to the convict element which was the basis of our history', but the chairman of the executive, E.C. Sommerlad, MLC, a newspaper proprietor from northern New South Wales, replied that 'it was an early decision of the executive that there should be no representations of war scenes and in his opinion it was equally undesirable to depict incidents of the convict life of the colony'. He read a letter from the president of the Royal Australian Historical Society, Karl Cramp, OBE, MA, which endorsed this view and asserted that 'the splendid work done by individual men who had been transported for offences had been done by them, not as convicts but as free citizens'.

Cramp, an English-born school inspector, believed the less said about convicts the better. The society, which he ruled with inspectorial rigour, supplied data and illustrations for a book on Australian history which the Celebrations Council produced for distribution to schoolchildren. It did not mention the convicts. In like fashion, the executive of the Celebrations Council rejected a suggestion by the literary committee that the 'March to Nationhood' include a float built in three tiers showing how some convicts had become useful pioneers. Author Flora Eldershaw and journalist Tom Inglis Moore expressed their disapproval by resigning from the literary committee.

At 10 am the first float left Queen's Square, preceded by a troop of mounted police and four mounted trumpeters clad from head to foot in shining armour. It was an Aboriginal tableau—Hero Black and others of his party 'cooking possum outside their gunyah', as the official program put it. The *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that most of the Aborigines 'appeared a little morose and disinclined to acknowledge the cheers of the crowd'. An immense crowd waited to cheer the Aborigines, 119 other floats and numerous groups of marchers along festively decorated Macquarie Street, down Martin Place and up George and Oxford streets to the showground. The spectators were officially numbered at more than one million, even though Sydney's normal population was only 1 289 000, and were described by the *Bulletin* as 'a gay, sturdy, good-tempered, well behaved million that any nation might have been proud to call its people'.

They saw floats celebrating the colonial past ('Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth Cross The Blue Mountains', 'Edward Hargraves Discovers Gold'), and floats testifying to Australia's recovery from the depression in such fields as industry and building. On the 'Commonwealth of Australia' float six girls with cornucopias represented the states which had been joined in federal union since the turn of the century, and sprays of peach blossom represented Canberra. 'Conquest of the Arts' relied mainly on Henry Lawson and Dame Nellie Melba; 'Dairying' carried a gigantic effigy of Melba XV, the nation's record producer of butterfat; and 'Womanhood' was represented by a madonna and child standing above the seated figures of a sportsgirl, a career girl, a nun and a dancer.

Apart from convicts and Anzacs (the latter represented only by piled arms and a float depicting the return of servicemen to civil life, though originally a re-enactment of the landing at Gallipoli had been suggested), the only symbols noticeably absent from the pageant were those of the labour movement. There were no trade union floats. Labour's ambivalent attitude to the celebrations was given typical expression by H.E. Boote, editor of the Australian Workers' Union paper, the *Australian Worker*.

We rejoice in our country. We give praise in the highest to its pioneers, explorers, patriots, workers and constructive geniuses. In that spirit we join in the celebration of its 150th anniversary. But the canting oratory of boastfulness and the hypocritical pretence of prosperity in a land where tens of thousands are unemployed and destitute, all decent citizens will repudiate with indignation and disgust.

Boote should perhaps have been a little less censorious about unemployment, for the rate had been falling steadily in the last few years, from 28 per cent in 1932 and 13 per cent in 1936 to 8 per cent in 1938, but he was right to remind his readers that 8 per cent still represented 36 751 people.

The absence of labour representation may have resulted partly from the Celebrations Council's determination not to sully its proclamation of peaceful progress by any reference to class conflict. Presumably that was also why labour organisations received no invitation to participate in another sesquicentennial procession, held on 10 April—the March of Industry and Commerce, £60 000 worth of floats provided by what the Communist party's paper, the *Worker's Weekly*, called 'leading capitalist firms'. Labour's turn came on May Day, which in Sydney was a more demonstrative occasion than usual, hailed by the *Worker's Weekly* as 'Labor's own Sesqui'.

At the corner of George and Park streets, where Australia's six lord mayors watched the 'March To Nationhood' from a platform outside the Town Hall, the kerbside crowd included some one hundred people of Aboriginal blood who had



Miss Phyllis Lyons, aged 38, dressed as a lady of 1810 attending the first Sydney race meeting for the 'March to Nationhood' procession. 'We assembled at the back of Sydney Hospital in the Domain and our carriage arrived and we got into it. Then we were to be followed by a drag with all our personal maids. The drag didn't turn up and they put them all in the carriage with us!' They had hardly got around the corner into Macquarie Street when one of the horses slipped and fell. It became entangled in the harness and struggled wildly. More than twenty constables were on hand immediately to quieten the horse. The passengers in the landau were put on nearby floats and Miss Lyons found herself among the 'Goldiggers from the West'. The parade, which had been held up for some fifteen minutes, moved on.

P. LYONS, 1938 COLLECTION

adjourned a 'Day of Mourning' conference in order to see the procession. It would be interesting to know whether Hero Black noticed them.

The Aborigine, as a Melbourne *Age* editorial remarked, had been cast as skeleton at the feast, although he had taken, rather than been assigned, the skeleton's ancient role as a reminder of serious and saddening things in the midst of enjoyment. A Day of Mourning for the Aboriginal race in conjunction with Australia Day had been the idea of William Cooper, an Aborigine from Victoria who was founder of the Australian Aborigines' League, and when the soberly dressed delegates resumed their conference at the Australian Hall after the procession there were only four white Australians among them. Two were policemen, one was a photographer from *Man* magazine, a popular magazine dealing with contemporary issues, and the other was probably P.R. Stephensen, editor of the journal *Publicist*. 'Inky' Stephensen was genuinely sympathetic toward Aborigines, but he was a contrary man also given to outbursts of racial prejudice. The *Sydney Morning Herald* devoted eight column-centimetres to the conference, the *Daily Telegraph* rather less. Nobody could have said that it stole much of the sesquicentenary's thunder. Yet it was as integral to that event as it was to the shifting pattern of mutual black and white awareness during 1938.

While the conference was taking place, the Australian Jockey Club held its anniversary meeting at John Dunningham's old haunt, Randwick racecourse, and to many it seemed appropriate that the 150th Anniversary Handicap was won by Hope. In the harbour an anniversary regatta luncheon was held on board the flag-decked liner *Ormonde*, from which the prime minister, the premiers (three conservative, three Labor) and the governors watched one of the world's finest sailing spectacles. In a race by Sydney's renowned 18-footers, *Dee Why* beat *All British*, an outcome that seemed almost treasonable when measured by the standards of imperial loyalty put forward in some of the luncheon speeches. Lyons reminded his listeners that the British characteristics of courage, resourcefulness, initiative and determination had been mainly responsible for the development of Australia as a

David Jones celebrated by opening a new store in Market Street, Sydney, and by producing souvenirs such as this coffee spoon.

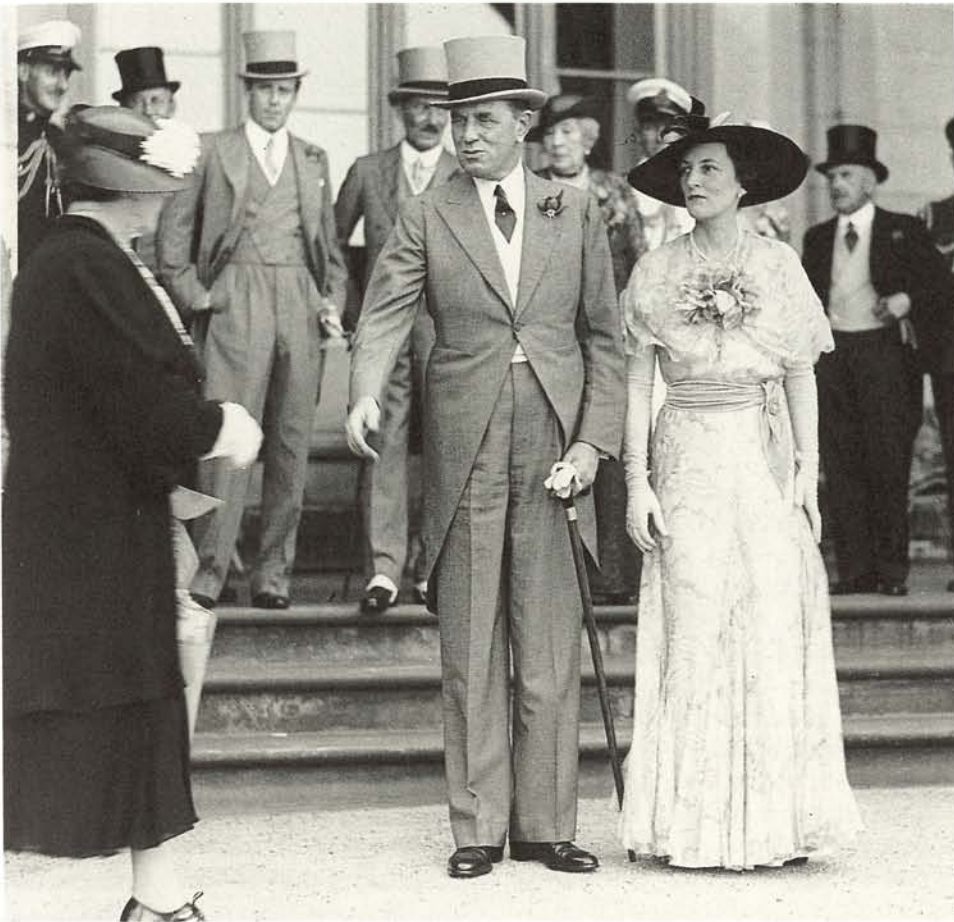
SPEARRITT COLLECTION



Aboriginal tableau staged by the Sydney department store David Jones outside its George Street shop to celebrate both the sesquicentenary and its own 100th birthday.

DAVID JONES ARCHIVES





Lord and Lady Wakehurst welcome visitors to a sesquicentennial event at Government House. Wakehurst, educated at Eton, served in Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine during the Great War. He became governor of New South Wales in 1937.

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nation of almost seven millions within six generations, and Stevens added that Australia's social and economic systems had been built upon British traditions of equality and justice.

Not everyone favoured equality. When the Institution of Engineers of Australia received a Royal Charter that year, its president likened the honour to being told, 'I dub thee Knight'. Knighthoods were at a premium. During the debate on the Celebrations bill one opposition member ventured to suggest that the burden of government spending on the sesquicentenary (£141 275 according to the auditor-general, but augmented by private expenditure to an estimated total of more than £1 million) might be eased a little if 'some esteemed gentleman in the good graces of the United Australia Party offers £5,000 or £10,000, as a result of which he is knighted'. It was even possible, he said, that after the celebrations 'we should have "Sir John Dunningham" amongst us'.

On the evening of 26 January the Australian Broadcasting Commission's national network carried a broadcast by state presidents of the Australian Natives' Association, an organisation that had nothing to do with Aborigines and much to do with patriotism; Lord and Lady Gowrie held an official dinner party at Admiralty House, the governor-general's Sydney residence, within hearing of rail and motor traffic crossing Sydney's six-year-old harbour bridge which was illuminated by 200 green floodlights; and at the Royal Agricultural Society's showground the 'March to Nationhood' floats took part in a gala production during which emu-plumed light horsemen formed a map of Australia, Hero

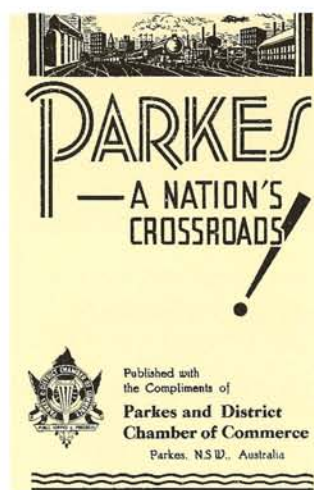


New Zealanders chose the occasion of the sesquicentenary to remind Australians that New Zealand was an integral part of the ANZAC legend.

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Newcastle juxtaposed Phillip's landing in Sydney with its own spectacular growth, indicated on this pamphlet by the large civic buildings.

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The town of Parkes, 370 kilometres inland from Sydney, encouraged sesquicentennial visitors.

BOOROWA PRODUCTIONS

Black's men performed another corroboree and were chased across the ring by armed marines, and the popular vocalist Gladys Moncrieff sang 'Land of hope and glory'. Later that week the guests at Redfern police barracks boarded trains bound for western New South Wales. They received no payment for their performance. Their float had been awarded first prize in the procession, but was ruled ineligible because it had been entered by the Celebrations Council.

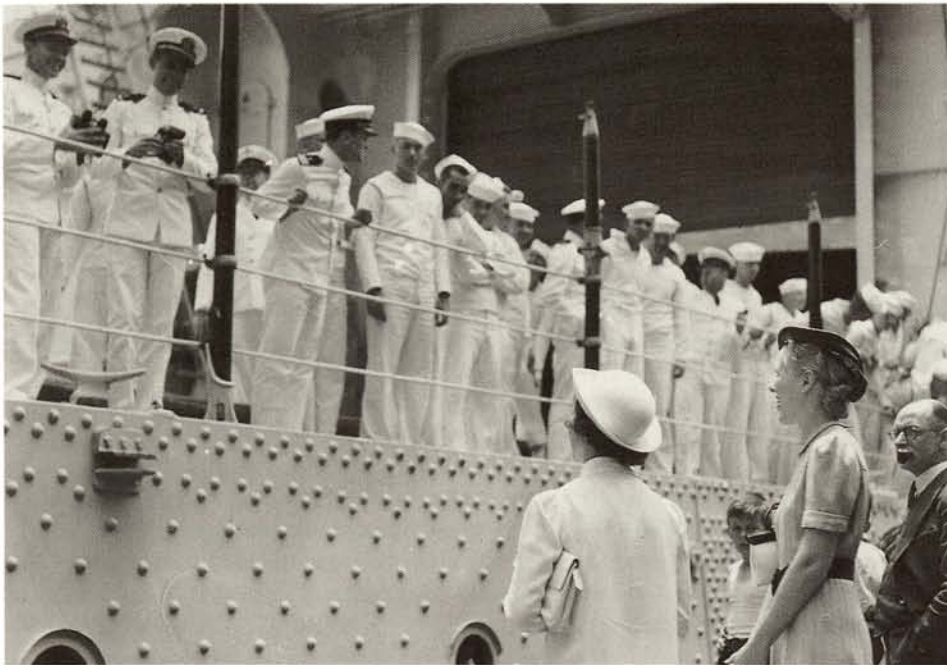
Newspapers in other states carried extensive and enthusiastic accounts of the opening sesquicentennial ceremonies, but the states themselves merely observed the usual public holiday for Australia Day on the following Monday. The Victorian branch of the Australian Natives' Association held an Australia Day smoke night at the Melbourne Town Hall, where a toast to 'The Day We Celebrate' was proposed by a former federal politician, high court judge and governor-general, Sir Isaac Isaacs. Darwin held an Australia Day procession on the Monday, but otherwise it was hard to discern much sesquicentennial fervour south of the Murray River or north of the Tweed.

Between those boundaries the scene of celebration widened in February and March to encompass Newcastle, Wollongong and twelve country towns including Orange, Lismore, Parkes, Bathurst, Wagga and Grafton. Lord and Lady Wakehurst lent their viceregal presence to main street processions and the unveiling of plaques. Orange constructed a memorial fernery costing £6000; at Narrandera on Arbor Day three high school prefects each planted an oriental plane tree to remind posterity how Australia had grown from small beginnings to nationhood; and Lithgow preened itself for having been the cradle of Australia's iron and steel industry, and the district which not only pioneered machine clippers for shearing but also distilled the first gallon of Australian petrol.

From beginning to end, however, Sydney remained the principal seat of celebration. On Sunday 30 January, 40 000 Protestants gathered for a thanksgiving service conducted in the Domain by the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, the English-born Most Reverend Dr H.W. Mowll, and nearby at St Mary's Cathedral 5000 Catholics attended pontifical high mass celebrated by the Apostolic Delegate, His Excellency the Most Reverend Archbishop John Panico. Mowll used the same Bible as Richard Johnson had used for the first religious service in Sydney, and took the same text, a question more comprehensible to his listeners than to some of Johnson's: 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?' At St Mary's the Apostolic Delegate was assisted by the aged Irish-born Archbishop of Sydney, Dr Michael Kelly, and his younger Sydney-born Coadjutor, Dr Norman Gilroy. One of the first to take communion was the prime minister, the second Catholic to have attained that office.

For Irish Catholics St Patrick's Day, 17 March, would be another special occasion during the official celebration period. At the Sydney showground that day several thousand schoolgirls wearing coloured scarves formed a Celtic cross and a Southern Cross, and later at a Town Hall concert the tenor Danny Malone sang 'Snowy-breasted pearl' and 'Eily Aroon'.

At a summer school held by the Australian Institute of Political Science in Canberra during the first sesquicentennial weekend, speakers warned that Australia was not bearing its full share of responsibility for imperial defence. W.C. Wentworth, a great-grandson of his colonial namesake, warned that the army had only six tanks and that Australia's munitions program was two years behind schedule. In fact Australia was responding earnestly to what its defence planners now perceived as the growing danger of war. Defence expenditure had risen from £5 400 000 in 1934–35 to £8 800 000 in 1936–37 and £11 500 000 in 1937–38. In May the federal government introduced a three-year defence program sharing



Sydneysiders greet American sailors on board the US light cruiser Milwaukee at Woolloomooloo, 11 February 1938. A week before, the American fleet, including the Memphis birthed at Walsh Bay and the Trenton at Circular Quay, had joined contingents from Great Britain, France, Italy, Holland, Australia and New Zealand on a march through the streets of Sydney as part of a goodwill visit for the sesquicentenary.

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£43 million between the three armed services and for the first time allocating a larger vote to the air force than to the navy. The Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, formed by an Australian industrial consortium, was tooling up to make the North American NA-16 trainer, known in Australia as the Wirraway.

The sesquicentenary may well have heightened public interest in defence matters, for the visiting warships of four nations were berthed conspicuously in Sydney Harbour and illuminated at night. Five RAF Saro London flying boats flew in to Sydney; 150 000 people attended a naval, military and air force review in Centennial Park; and at an air pageant at Richmond the RAAF displayed most of its Avro Anson coastal patrol bombers (it then had 38, but would have 62 before the end of the year) and its 63 Hawker Demon biplane fighters. The Ansons and Demons put on a good show, but it would not have been lost upon some spectators that other air forces were developing aircraft such as the Flying Fortress, the Spitfire and the Messerschmidt.

War was in the air metaphorically as well, for the German army was soon to occupy Austria, and Japan was overrunning China. The German consul-general in Sydney declined to take part in the 150th anniversary celebrations because of what he regarded as discrimination against German doctors in the New South Wales Medical Practitioners' Act. The Italian consul-general may well have wished that he too had abstained. He was about to attend a reception at Paddington Town Hall for the crew of a visiting Italian cruiser when a crowd mobbed him with placards proclaiming 'Down With Mussolini' and 'Down with Italian Intervention in Spain'. Japan was not represented but, like many other countries, in response to an invitation it had sent the premier its national flag and a message of congratulation.

Adelaide had staged a national games in conjunction with its centenary, but Sydney went one better as host city for the third British Empire Games. Athletes wearing British, Canadian, South African and New Zealand blazers were as common a sight during the sesquicentennial period as French, Italian, Dutch and American sailors. Other continuing events were a four months' long Big Game Angling World Championship and Sydney's annual Royal Easter Show. In spite of



The big-game angling contest won by Jesse Sams was widely advertised with this pamphlet.

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a drought in some parts of New South Wales, the show attracted more than one million people for the first time in its history. One exhibitor—W.R. Hindmarsh from Alanwick near Robertson, whose cow, 'Daisy 8th of Alanwick', won its class championship for the third year in succession—held the unique distinction of having also exhibited at the Centennial Show of 1888. The show was no longer the purely agricultural, country-orientated occasion it had been half a century before: exhibits from 550 city-based extractive, manufacturing and service firms were valued at a record £1 575 000. Most of these were shown in two new pavilions paid for by the New South Wales government, the Hall of Manufactures and the Commemorative Pavilion. These large pavilions were Sydney's only sesquicentennial monuments of any note, and as gifts to posterity they paled by comparison with the dedication of Centennial Park in 1888.

Although Sydney did not attempt to match the size of Melbourne's centenary air race, two aircraft competed in a sesquicentennial race from London to Sydney and New Zealand, and back again. The winners, A.E. Clouston and V. Ricketts in a De Havilland Comet, completed the outward flight in 4 days 8 hours 7 minutes, and returned in 6 days 12 hours 41 minutes. Sydney's anniversary program also included cricket matches, performances by a 5000-voice choir, conferences of the Empire Parliamentary Association and the International Institute of Accountants, brass band and roller skating championships, a World Convention of Radio Engineers and a Women's International Conference. The women's executive committee of the Celebrations Council sponsored the building of a Women's Memorial Garden in the Botanic Gardens, and published *The peaceful army: a memorial to the pioneer women of Australia 1788–1938*, a book produced by Flora Eldershaw (editor), Dame Mary Gilmore, Dora Wilcox and Marjorie Barnard.

There were also art exhibitions and orchestral concerts, undistinguished in the main, and a 150th anniversary literary competition won by two works of enduring value. The fiction judges (Flora Eldershaw, Marjorie Barnard and Frank Dalby Davison) awarded the commonwealth literary prize of £250 to Xavier Herbert's first book, *Capricornia*, which had been published the previous year. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reviewer hailed this rumbustious protest against the treatment of 'half-castes' in the Northern Territory as 'a plea for the scorned and helpless', 'as Australian as a gum tree or an old man kangaroo'. The poetry judges (H.M. Green, R.G. Howarth and Ian Maxwell) awarded their first prize of £50 to 'Essay on memory', a long meditative work by an established poet and third generation Irish–Australian, Robert D. Fitzgerald. It dealt with the influence of the past upon the present, both universally and within the Australian compass:

... for Memory does not fail though men forget,
but pokes a ghost-finger into all our pies
and jabs out the dead meat, a grim Jack Horner,
mocking the mild dream, half guess, half lies,
of History babbling from his chimney corner.

With similar plum-pulling discrimination, but rather more preference for dreams, Memory helped itself to the sesquicentennial feast. In newspaper editorials, special supplements and anniversary films Australians congratulated themselves on having kept their nation 98 per cent British, and thanked their Protestant–Catholic God for having permitted them to survive war and depression and attain rising standards of production, employment and material comfort. In a London *Punch* cartoon the shade of Governor Phillip looked out over 1938 Sydney and observed (wrongly, if Calcutta had been taken into account): 'I little thought when I landed here that the settlement I founded would become the second city of the Empire'.



The three stamps issued for the sesquicentenary.

AUSTRALIA POST

Sydney was also said to be 'larger than eternal Rome', which it was, with 'a little of Paris, perhaps a little of New York, and scarcely any of London at all'.

'Hail festal morn!' began a seventeen-stanza 'Ode for Australia's 150th anniversary' by the Honourable H.E. Horne, a grazier from Leadville who was also government whip in the Legislative Council of New South Wales,

In joyful song all hail!
Let music sound across the sunlit way,
Australia's birthday tells its wondrous tale.

The Celebrations Council told the wondrous tale in *Australia 1788–1938*, a work of 336 pages crammed with photographs of wheatfields and merinos and decorated with mock Aboriginal artwork. 'Nor do we forget the aborigine', said an ingenuous foreword, 'and that this was his land before we claimed it. We recognise the romantic side of his existence, and, in an endeavour to perpetuate the memory of his dying race, we have designed this book in a modern manner with an aboriginal motif as the background'. Australia's 'dying race' was commemorated in another publication, Daisy Bates' *The passing of the Aborigines*. 'I did what I set out to do', wrote Mrs Bates, '—to make their passing easier and to keep the dreaded half-caste menace from our great continent'.

Two documentary films were made for the sesquicentenary: *March to nationhood*, a compilation of Movietone News coverage of the celebrations, and *A nation is built*, a fulsome 'visualisation' of Australia by the photographer Frank Hurley. 'A climate without peer', declaimed the familiar voice of Hurley's commentator, the radio announcer Harry Dearth, 'fabulous national resources, unsurpassed scenery and limitless sporting facilities combine to make Australia the natural setting for the new Anglo-Saxon Empire under the Southern Cross'. Plums were also eagerly extracted from Australia's past and present for anniversary supplements and special editions of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Sydney Mail*, the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, the *London Illustrated News* and the *London Times*.

One of the few editorial attempts to place Australia in a wider context was made by the *West Australian* in Perth, from which distance perhaps the sesquicentennial hyperbole of eastern Australia could more easily be regarded with some detachment:

What has Australia done? It is an incomplete reply to say that she has lived for one and a half centuries and grown fatter. We should be able to find more to our credit than that. Can we do so? Probably one great achievement will be found in the courage and resourcefulness with which we have overcome great natural difficulties for ourselves; and another in the way we have faithfully groped towards our ideals of a certain standard of material good for all. Can we also claim to have sought as high a cultural level as we might have done, to have always honoured the things of the mind, and to have applied justice and mercy at all times to all those within our borders?

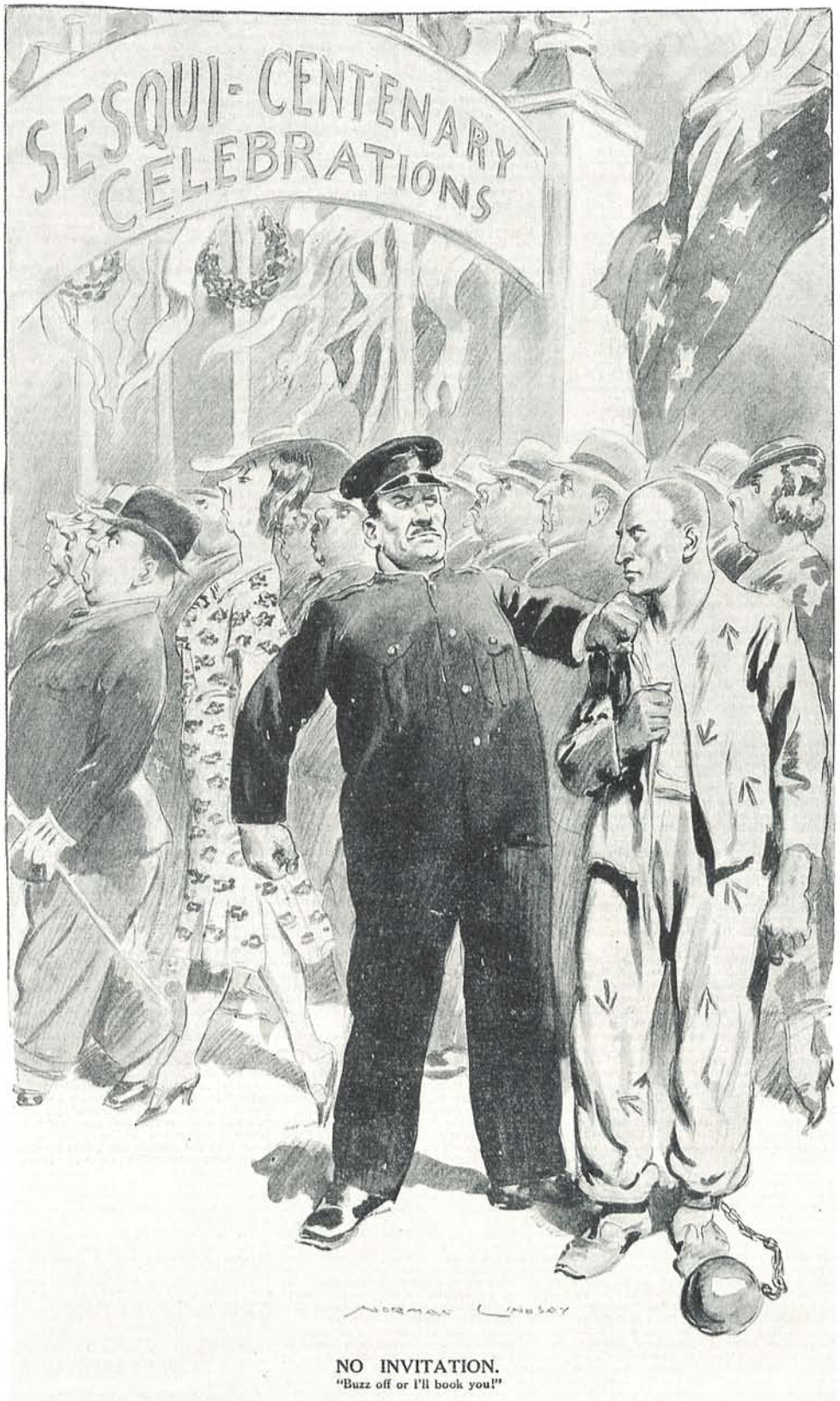
Beyond our borders, have we contributed anything to the common good of humanity? Undoubtedly we have done our part in adding to the common store of knowledge and in discovering new methods and processes; we have given to the world a small number of creative and interpretative artists, and a few scientists and outstanding men of action.

We had a singular opportunity and some ambition, too, to do another thing: to show the world how a people may live without privilege, class prejudice or private greed under a democratic system and, by a high level of citizenship, a wise moderation and a sense of responsibility and trust in both the governors



Aboriginal designs were often reworked by white graphic artists in an attempt to create a distinctive Australian imagery. O.L. Ziegler, Australia 1788–1938, Sydney 1938.

In 1888 the Bulletin had sneered at celebration of 'the day we were lagged'. In 1938 Norman Lindsay depicted the convict as an unwanted guest at stuffy festivities. Bulletin, 5 Jan 1938.



and the governed, enjoy progress without oppression. If we could put our hands on our hearts and say that we really had done that, then the 150th milestone would still be a place for proud rejoicing even if the encampment by the Tank Stream had grown to nothing more than a modest little town.

Any self-doubt engendered by such observations would probably have been dispelled, or at least assuaged, by the final rite of Australia's 150th anniversary. The *West Australian* had not alluded directly to Australia's part in the Great War, yet the annual recollection of that experience on 25 April invariably evoked wider and deeper emotion than Australia Day. Anzac Day could fairly be described by Archbishop Mowll as Australia's national festival.

One in every ten of Australia's adult males was a returned serviceman, and together with 1837 ex-servicewomen they numbered 227 374. In towns and cities around the continent, the 23rd anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli was commemorated at dawn services and processions organised by the Returned Soldiers' and Sailors' Imperial League of Australia (RSL) and other war service organisations. In Hobart there were 1500 marchers, in Perth 3297, in Brisbane 3848. In London an Anzac Day service at St Clement Dane's was attended by Don Bradman and other members of the touring Australian cricket team. In Bradman's adopted city, Adelaide, 6650 bemedalled veterans marched through heavy and almost constant rain. In Melbourne, where Anzac Day 1938 became an occasion for sectarian protest and controversy, there were 22 285 marchers; in Sydney 43 000 marched in a procession preceded as usual by a motorcade of sick and maimed. Then came a vanguard of 32 Victoria Cross winners, followed by eleven kilometres of men marching twelve abreast between cheering crowds. Two hours it took them to pass the Cenotaph, its bronze soldier and sailor almost completely hidden by 3000 wreaths. To anyone familiar with Will Longstaff's allegorical painting *Menin Gate at midnight* (without whose ghostly columns no Australian high school was quite complete), it was chastening to think that the number of Australia's war dead amounted to all of the Sydney marchers and most of Melbourne's as well.

Anzac Day provided 'a glorious climax' to the sesquicentenary, said John Dunningham. A month later, on 26 May, while working at his office, Dunningham died of a heart attack. He was not a returned soldier, but after death he was accorded rank of a different kind. In the King's Birthday Honours List he was made posthumously a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

An advertisement for Minties, depicting a 'Two-up' school on Anzac Day. The artist imagined police disturbing returned soldiers playing the illegal game openly in the streets of Sydney, as was traditional on 25 April. Silver linings! Anzac Day 1938, Sydney 1938.





'A LARGE BLACKBOARD displayed outside the hall proclaims, "Day of Mourning". Leaflets warned that, "Aborigines and persons of Aboriginal blood only are invited to attend." At 5 o'clock in the afternoon resolution of indignation, protest was moved, passed.' Man, Mar 1938.