



Frank Medworth (1892–1947), *The café, 1942, Sydney*. Oil on canvas, 55.0 × 75.5 cm.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL GALLERY

CHAPTER 18

ILLUSTRATED HISTORIES

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ILLUSTRATED HISTORY books come in two major forms: texts with added pictures, or collections of pictures with captions. Either seems an incomplete way of exploring the potential of this genre, yet a more balanced combination is rarely aimed for, let alone achieved. The notion that images and text should be complementary and interrelated is still in its infancy in this country. This selection therefore reads more like a list of casualties than a citation of heroes. Nevertheless, the healthiest specimens have been selected, except for a couple of salutary examples of the disastrously maimed.

Until quite recently, illustrated histories by professional historians were almost universally of the first category: independent texts to which illustrations were subsequently appended—frequently by a picture researcher employed by the publisher to give blocks of words more ‘general appeal’. By adding a hundred or so illustrations, the publisher could claim that the book was ‘intended for the general reader as much as for the specialist’ and print an extra 5000 copies. The illustrated edition of Russel Ward’s *The Australian legend* (1978) seems an appropriate representative of this type. Such books do what they intend to do quite competently; they drive home the general argument of the text with superficial visual appeal and no analysis, making both good and bad texts into objects suitable for the coffee table as well as the library.

On the other hand, examples of illustrated histories by freelance writers, local historians, photographers or journalists too often have been no more than a collection of images, with inadequate captions spelling out with excruciating banality the only too obvious: ‘An early Australian homestead’ or, more whimsically, ‘A family posing stiffly for the photographer while their pet dog relaxes in the best leather armchair’. The former typifies old-fashioned regional histories where the image was all-important and, with luck, previously unpublished, while the latter indicates the presence of the would-be social historian trying to convey a sense of period values with no knowledge of early photographic techniques or conventions and no research into the category or date of the image. The photographic historian might add ‘John Smith, photographer, 1854’ if such information is accessible, while the more academic historian might try to identify the family and summarise the career of the most prominent male in the photograph. Even if images are—miraculously—fully captioned, acknowledged and identified it is regularly found after the manuscript has been sent to the publisher that they in no way relate to, or assist, the general argument of the book. They are simply there as decoration, not document.

Few authors accept the notion that images should be valued as contemporary, datable and opinionated documents, just as diaries, despatches or verbal descriptions are valued. Images need to be analysed like words and treated as another tool to assist in understanding the past. Our technology and marketing systems can make a picture-book cheaper than an unillustrated specialist text; the public, like Alice, quite justifiably asks, what use is a book without pictures? Illustrations are more and more frequently provided in response to such demands, but the concept of a new methodology for this sort of book remains dormant.

The most obvious fact overlooked by historians of all kinds is that images were not divinely created and therefore eternally valid (hence, no dates), generically true (hence, no locations) and totally objective (hence, no maker). Somebody made them at a specific time, for a specific purpose and in a specific way. The information,

Joseph Lycett, 'The residence of John McArthur Esquire, near Parramatta, New South Wales', hand-coloured aquatint from his *Views in Australia* (London, 1824),

should not be mere art-historical pedantry. It can be a way of conveying the information—properly expanded in the text—that Lycett reworked a painting when he arrived back in London, as a print for an expensive picture-book about an exotic place. When we know that the artist was a doubly convicted forger notoriously loose with facts (reflected here in the spelling of John Macarthur's name), it seems obvious that his print should be treated with extreme caution before it is accepted as a faithful factual document. Yet the flattering image of rolling green English parkland, inhabited by an elegant couple indicating their possession of this Eden, cannot be dismissed as sheer artistic incompetence or a faulty memory, although it certainly denies the validity of the artist's stated aim to present 'absolute *fac-similes* of scenes and places'. Lycett's real intention was clearly propagandist. His images reveal the way colonists wished to see themselves, as well as gratifying the English belief in the unalloyed benefits of occupying 'savage' lands. If historians read such images with the same care and polite scepticism brought to bear on words and deeds, Australian histories might become very different.

Photographs are always created by human agency for particular purposes, although those photographers identified and given any context of time, place or purpose in any general history 'through the camera's eye' are fewer than the rich who pass heavenwards through the eye of a needle. Alan Davies and Peter Stanbury's new edition of *The mechanical eye in Australia* (OUP, 1984) may lead to some improvement in this vast sea of ignorance, although the historians who profited from the first edition (1977) have still to reveal themselves.

The myth of the timeless impartiality of the camera dies hard. In 1900, when George McCredie, as quarantine officer, ordered the New South Wales government photographer John Degotardi to photograph those areas of Sydney affected by bubonic plague in case of legal claims once they had been demolished, the resulting photographs were considerably less glamorous than, say, a Charles Kerry souvenir book of Sydney presented to a retiring governor about that time. To juxtapose examples of the two as proof of late Victorian public splendour and private squalor without revealing the original purpose of either is just as much a manipulation as Lycett's.

Happily, that band of historians still proudly asserting their total ignorance of visual material in the name of 'serious scholarship' is a dying generation. Their successors have begun to cope with problems of pictorial interpretation. But such is the institutional distrust of the visually beguiling that most pioneers in the 'integrated illustrated history' market have been historians outside academia (Pearl, 1974; McQueen, 1977; and Cannon, 1982–83), historical archaeologists (Birmingham, *et al.*, 1979 and 1981) or art historians (Mahood, 1973). At least Inglis (1974), Spearritt (*Sydney since the twenties*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1978) and Stannage (1979) can be cited from the universities as innovative success stories.

Cautionary tales of how not to illustrate a history book come from all ranks. The examples I have selected encompass a publisher, a non-academic art historian and both freelance and academic historians. Some of these will doubtless end up, like Fox and Spence (1982) writing and

illustrating in 1910, typifying the values of an era—their own. Manning Clark seems an excellent candidate for this sort of attention from future historiographers.

One properly expects to get a clear indication of the author's voice—not the publisher's taste—from the illustrations in a history book. This can, of course, happen unconsciously and a stodgy book will have hackneyed illustrations, conventionally employed as empty decoration. But in a more positive sense, matching text and pictures takes time, thought and experience.

The uninterested or untrained searcher after illustrations has the additional disadvantage of not knowing where to look, as well as being ignorant of how to read images once they have been unearthed. Despite the plethora of evidence to the contrary, the national and state libraries are not the sole repositories of illustrations in this country; nor has every image these places possess already been catalogued and used in someone else's book.

Although images concealed in public and private archives are less accessible, they have the advantage of freshness. Some helpful guides to repositories have been published; Mari Davis and Hilary Boyce's *Directory of Australian pictorial resources* (Melbourne, Centre for Environmental Studies, University of Melbourne, 1980) identifies in a very general way more than 600 repositories of pictorial material in Australia, while the Australia Council has published a more specific *Directory of arts libraries and resource collections in Australia* (Sydney, 1983) edited by Susan Maddrell. Both can assist local searches. When the Australian Joint Copying Project of the National Library and the Mitchell Library gives priority to visual resources, the discovery of overseas material will become a less expensive challenge.

I have concentrated on images rather than texts in this discussion, since ignorance of the former has resulted in the greatest problems with this type of book. It is hard to report glowingly on a type of publication whose form is despised by a significant number of its practitioners. But not all illustrated histories are created by loquacious blind compilers—or even professionals in full command of words who have also learned to see. Examples have been selected to represent illustrated history using a single theme; Flower (1984), for example, looks at Australia by examining the clothing worn by its inhabitants and, although flawed, it is a good example of this subspecies. Others have used advertisements, cartoons, bushrangers, children or buildings to analyse Australia's social development. Most remain a quarry for more analytical research, and too many have unlocatable and unidentified treasures. Mahood's history of political cartooning is the exceptional gem, cut, polished and given a most valuable setting.

In some ways the unequivocally personal and partisan history—such as Manning Clark's—raises fewest doubts about its worth. In particular, artists such as Petty (1976) and Looby (1979) obviously use their own visual creations to mediate between facts and interpretation. The result is Oscar Wilde's kind of history—'a collection of the most beautiful lies'—scattered with splendidly convincing insights; nobody ought to be fooled by the first nor unable to see the second. But all the creative artist needs is genius. The more mundane historians attempting to present some aspects of the past they believe worth revealing have a more difficult task. To ignore that half of the evidence presented in pictorial form is crippling; to present only unresearched visual material is to abrogate the historian's role for the antiquarian's delight in simple facts.

The potential of this kind of book is yet to be fully realised. From now on it seems certain that this will be the dominant way of publishing history, in quantity, readership and significance. Quality is another matter. We need more illustrated history books and fewer history books with pictures (or vice versa) to ensure that.





Banish the budget blues. Sheet music. Words and music by Jack Lumsdaine, sung by Art Leonard. Hince Collection, Box 1, 1930. A comment on Labor Prime Minister Scullin's tough 1930 budget. In July the government invited Sir Otto Niemeyer of the Bank of England to advise on the grim economic situation. He proposed a policy of balanced budgets and a wage cut of 10 per cent.

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BIRMINGHAM, J. et al, *Australian pioneer technology: sites and relics*. Melbourne, Heinemann Educational, 1979. 200 p, illus.

BIRMINGHAM, J. et al, *Industrial archaeology in Australia: rural industry*. Melbourne, Heinemann, 1983. 191 p, illus.

The physical evidence of Australia's earliest primary industries, revealed in a beautifully presented collection of pictures and a scholarly text. Smelter stacks, stills, boiling-down sheds and so on, are given detailed analysis. *Industrial archaeology in Australia* covers flour mills and other clay-using industries, the building industry, transport and communications etc. A chapter on sources is included.

BLAINEY, G. *The Blainey view*. Melbourne, Macmillan; ABC, 1982. 155 p, illus.

A sepia-toned version of the TV series. Very basic in both information and range of illustrations, but the thematic treatment is attractive, original and lively. Illustrations mainly collected by Maggie Weidenhofer.

BLAIR, D. *The history of Australasia* . . . Glasgow, McGready, Thompson & Niven, 1878. 711 p, illus, maps.

Stated to be the first complete history of Australasia. Lithographs mainly from photographs for scenery, and from imagination for shearer, Aborigines and digger, are as derivative as the text, yet quaintly romantic.

BOOTH, E.C. *Australia*. London, Virtue, 1873–76. 2 vols, illus, maps.

A descriptive history illustrated with lithographs after photographs, and paintings by John Skinner Prout and others. Some illustrations were created in London without the benefit of an Australian visit, others were painted many years earlier. The first large nineteenth-century travel book devoted to Australia. Republished in facsimile as *Australia in the 1870's* by Ure Smith in 1975 and by Summit Books in 1979.

CANNON, M. *Australia: a history in photographs*. Melbourne, Currey O'Neil Ross, 1983. 256 p, illus, maps.

A personal interpretation lacking any context of creation or use. This dismissive attitude to photography apart from subject matter mars a partisan interpretative history 'from below'. Picture research by Jane Fenton.

CANNON, M. *Australia in the Victorian age*. Melbourne, Currey O'Neil, 1982–83. 3 vols, illus.

Social histories, splendidly documented with a great range of contemporary stories, quotations and images focusing on individuals; interpreted and thematically related. First published 1971–75.

DENHOLM, D. *The colonial Australians*. Ringwood, Vic, Penguin, 1979. 202 p, illus, maps.

An eccentric history. The beguiling illustrations and attractive presentation only casually relate to the text, while the captioning and listing of illustrations are misleadingly inadequate.

FLOWER, C. *Clothes in Australia: a pictorial history, 1788–1980s*. Sydney, Kangaroo Press, 1984. 196 p, illus.

A history of costume in Australia, chronologically arranged by a visual historian. Class and status are revealed in male clothing, but the 'loud and vulgar style' of female dress is less obvious in contemporary illustration. First published in 1964 as *Duck and cabbage tree: a pictorial history of clothes in Australia, 1788–1914*.

FOX, F. AND SPENCE, P. *Australia*. London, A. & C. Black, 1910. 219 p, illus, map.

Australia is seen in 1910 as a nation of white, outdoor, loyal, rugged and independent people, overcoming the hardships of the land—an image exactly captured in Spence's 75 full-page watercolour paintings. Facsimile edition, Melbourne, Vantage, 1982.

GARRAN, A. ed, *The picturesque atlas of Australasia*. Sydney, Picturesque Atlas Publishing Co, 1886 (ie 1888). 3 vols, illus, maps.

Issued for Australia's centenary celebrations in 1888. The two volumes on Australia contained over 700 wood engravings after Julian and George Ashton and others. Belonging to the school of 'wonderful growth and prosperity', this was a major example of the genre. Facsimiles of first two volumes published as *Australia: the first hundred years* (Sydney, 1974).

HARRIS, J. *The bitter fight: a pictorial history of the Australian labor movement*. UQP, 1970. 310 p, illus, maps.

A wide range of illustrations around the labour movement from transported Chartists to the formation of the Communist party in Australia. Undisguised militant socialist approach by industrial worker author.

ILLUSTRATED history of Australia. Sydney, Hamlyn, 1974. 1518 p, illus, maps.

A gigantic compendium of anonymous history and unsourced illustrations. Never mind the appalling colour reproductions, the factual errors and the irritating subheadings of the 'Firm but just' school, but do feel the weight!

INGLIS, K.S. *The Australian colonists: an exploration of social history, 1788–1870*. MUP, 1974. 316 p, illus.

An early and successful attempt by a historian to integrate text and pictures. Although the latter now seem a somewhat conventional selection, this is still a model showing how images can add a new dimension to social history.

KING, J.L. *Stop laughing, this is serious! A social history of*

- Australia in cartoons* (rev edn). Sydney, Cassell, 1980. 223 p, illus.
- A compendium of interesting images which does not develop into either a history of cartooning or a social history. The (inadequately cited) prints are entertaining and well selected. First published in 1978.
- LINDESAY, V. *The inked-in image: a social and historical survey of Australian comic art*. Melbourne, Hutchinson, 1979. 336 p, illus.
- A collection of cartoons (mainly comic) from 1855 to 1979, exemplify our popular mythology. Good-humoured and uncritical. First published in 1970.
- LOOBY, K.R. *Black and white history of Australia*. Sydney, Macleay Museum, University of Sydney, 1979. 76 p, illus.
- Looby's bitter, sad or enigmatic white history is more powerful and historical than his more romantic and mythical complementary black story. Pictures only, plus an introduction and a biography of the artist. First published in 1976.
- LYCETT, J. *Views in Australia: or New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land delineated, in fifty views, with descriptive letter press*. London, J. Souter, 1824. 152 p, illus, maps.
- Forty-eight aquatints and two maps, originally issued in parts and here collected into a volume, illustrate the benign results of English civilisation on a picturesquely barbaric landscape. Reality is manipulated by a forger to produce art disguised as fact. Facsimile edition, Nelson, 1977.
- McQUEEN, H. *Social sketches of Australia, 1888-1975*. Ringwood, Vic, Penguin, 1977. 255 p, illus.
- An unorthodox and entertaining volume. Because of inadequate referencing, lacks any traceable contemporary context, being an idiosyncratic vision of Australian society.
- MAHOOD, M.H. *The loaded line: Australian political caricature, 1788-1901*. MUP, 1973. 306 p, illus.
- A definitive work and a model reading of images, their makers, and their social, political and artistic context.
- MOORE, D. AND HALL, R. *Australia, image of a nation 1850-1950*. Sydney, Collins, 1983. 335 p, illus.
- A striking collection of photographs emphasising people in society, selected by the photographer David Moore with attention to formal quality, photographers and dates. Text by the poet Rodney Hall.
- MORRIS, E.E. ed, *Cassell's picturesque Australasia*. London, Cassell, 1887-89. 4 vols, illus, maps.
- Contains numerous steel engravings by English illustrators. A mass-produced imitation of the *Picturesque atlas of Australia* (1888). An abridged Australian section was issued as *Australia's first century* (Sydney, 1978).
- MOUROT, S. *This was Sydney! A pictorial history from 1788 to the present time*. Sydney, Ure Smith, 1969. 155 p, illus.
- The best of the Sydney illustrated books, by the then Mitchell librarian. Images and text informative, reliable and of lasting value.
- O'KEEFE, D. *Australian album: the way we were: Australia in photographs, 1860-1920*. Sydney, Daniel O'Keefe, 1982. 224 p, illus.
- Attractive but skin-deep history with an extensive selection of splendid images from unexplored and well-known collections. The photographs are inadequately referenced while ignorant annotations attempt to explain the obvious.
- PAYNTING, H.H. AND GRANT, M. eds, *Victoria illustrated: 1834-1984*. Melbourne, James Flood Charity Trust in conjunction with the Royal Historical Society of Vic and Melbourne Camera Club, 1984. 528 p, illus.
- The luxury end of the illustrated history market. Splendidly reproduced photographs and just enough research for an introductory identification, with bland or whimsical surface description. The usual absence of photographers' names and dates. Content evanescent.
- PEARL, C. ed, *Australia's yesterdays: a look at our recent past*. Sydney, Reader's Digest Services, 1974. 360 p, illus.
- A popular history of Australia since Federation, emphasising primary sources in a well-balanced, integrated assemblage of varied and original images and text (all identified, although not precisely).
- PEARL, C. AND PEARL, I. *Our yesterdays: Australian life since 1853 in photographs*. A & R, 1954. 164 p, illus.
- A lively selection favouring images and stories of entertaining individuals by an erudite social historian. An early example and still one of the best.
- PETTY, B. *Petty's Australia: and how it works*. Ringwood, Vic, Penguin, 1976. 110 p, illus.
- A brilliant collection of cartoons whose complex meanings are conveyed with great humour and economy of word and line. Originally published as *Australia fair* (Melbourne, Cheshire, 1976).
- REECE, R.H.W. AND PASCOE, R. *A place of consequence: a pictorial history of Fremantle*. Fremantle, WA, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1983. 159 p, illus, maps.
- An exemplary use of illustrations, pioneering research into local photographers and their social historical context. This is a great improvement on the standard undigested local history picture book.
- RIENITS, R. AND RIENITS, T. *A pictorial history of Australia*. London, Hamlyn, 1969. 317 p, illus, maps.
- Cheap, predictable history for the popular audience. The extensive mixture of all types of contemporary illustrations is too frequently rendered meaningless by being unacknowledged, undated and unsourced.
- RITCHIE, J. *Australia as once we were*. Melbourne, Heinemann, 1975. 279 p, illus.
- A brave effort which achieves an exuberant, original and unified tone in its syncopated combination of images and text. Illustrations are carelessly investigated and frequently anachronistic.
- STANNAGE, C.T. *The people of Perth: a social history of Western Australia's capital city*. Perth, Carroll's for Perth City Council, 1979. 364 p, illus, maps.
- A municipal history which gives an aggressive picture of people 'from below', treats the images with care and altogether achieves a successful new genre, ignoring the time hallowed formula of 'Our glorious town'.
- STONE, D.I. ed, *Gold diggers and diggings: a photographic study of gold in Australia, 1854-1920*. Melbourne, Lansdowne, 1974. 208 p, illus, maps.
- An excellent collection of black and white contemporary photographs by a very knowledgeable author. Sources—acknowledged fully—are exhaustive and images varied. Introduction by Geoffrey Blainey.
- WARD, R.B. *The Australian legend* (new illus edn). OUP, 1978. 336 p, illus.
- The illustrated version of an influential history first published in 1958 which now gains adequate, but uninspired, pictures emphasising the 'bushman' of 'the Australian mystique' advanced in the text. Illustrations organised by Alison Forbes.
- YOUNGER, R.M. *Australia! Australia! A pictorial history*. Adelaide, Rigby, 1975-77. 2 vols, illus.
- The somewhat simplistic text, loose dating and inadequate acknowledgments suggest that this book is aimed at a school market. The material is comprehensive and well chosen for this purpose.