

Introduction

Joanne Wilkes

Welcome to the new issue of *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*! This is the special issue on ‘Small Worlds’: it has emerged from the AVSA conference proposed for 2020 in Melbourne which had to be cancelled because of the pandemic.

‘Small Worlds’ has turned out to be a smallish issue, again mainly for reasons connected with the pandemic. But the contributions published are pleasing, and all point to people or events that represent a ‘small world’ with larger ramifications, as well as relating to Australasia. There are also reviews of texts worth noticing. Thanks again to Alison Bedford for taking care of the reviews, and to Carolyn Lake for the formatting and uploading.

The articles, published in alphabetical order of authors, cover fascinating ‘small worlds’ of Australasian nineteenth-century history. Helene Connor delves into the life of her ancestor John George Cooke (1819-1880), who left manuscript reminiscences now lodged in the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington. These include the period he spent in New Zealand from 1841 to 1850. Here he had a common-law marriage with Ngapei Ngatata, from a prominent local family, which produced a daughter and a son. A vain man, as well as a womaniser, Cooke was a particular kind of male settler, but his reminiscences are compelling, not least as those of a man attracted to Aotearoa New Zealand by the Wakefield movement.

A man notable for other reasons is the Aboriginal Australian sportsman discussed by Roy Hay. Poorne Yarriworri (Albert ‘Pompey’ Austin, 1844-1889), who played a match for Geelong, became the first Indigenous footballer from Victoria to compete at the highest level. Yarriworri was very versatile, competing in a range of other sports, and was also a skilled tracker. His short but eventful and sometimes difficult life demonstrates something of the vagaries of Aboriginal experience in the second half of the nineteenth century, where achievement in the white man’s world was possible, even if hampered by racism and discrimination. Sport has of course continued to be an arena for Indigenous success stories in Australia, although racism persists.

A practice which nineteenth-century Australia borrowed from Britain, but gave its own inflection, was the habit of showcasing local and international achievements of all kinds via International Exhibitions. Diana Noyce focuses on three of these: those held in Sydney in 1879 and in Melbourne in 1880-81 and 1888. Her special interest is in the role of food and drink. There was much on offer to visitors, and the article draws on a rich range of documents. One particular tension was between the felt need to showcase alcoholic beverages, especially wine from Australia’s increasing production thereof, and the very active temperance movement. In this context, the article also highlights the rise and fall of the cities’ ‘coffee palaces’, intended to attract adherents of temperance.

The reviews in this issue cover Queen Victoria and the women’s movement, and, for our literature specialists, multiple narrators in the Victorian novel, plus an essay collection on ‘play’ in children’s literature.

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