

## Ealing Studios' Australian Adventure

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*In lecture form this paper was illustrated with video clips from Ealing films. These are noted below in boxes in the text.*

When I was asked to speak to the Arts Association, the occasion seemed a good opportunity to follow up the lecture given on Ealing Studios by Robert Winter in 2002.<sup>1</sup> As well as producing the comedies and other English films for which they are best known, Ealing Studios was one of a number of English and American companies who made films in Australia during the 1940s and 1950s, at a time when our own film industry was at a very low ebb. Since 2001 I have been studying a dozen of these films, with a particular emphasis on their reception in Australia, the United Kingdom and America, as part of an Australian Research Council project entitled 'The External Eye'. The project, which also includes a study of representations of Australia in nineteenth-century English fiction and drama being carried out by Dr Ian Henderson, is particularly concerned to examine the ways in which 'images of Australia' have been constructed from outside as well as inside the country.

My focus is on the first three of the five films Ealing Studios made in Australia. They had originally planned to make ten, but their ambitions were overtaken by a series of financial and political changes which impacted on the film industry in both Australia and England, as well as by the relative failure of all but the first of their films. The three films I will discuss are *The Overlanders* (1946), *Eureka Stockade* (1949) and *Bitter Springs* (1950). These

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were all made in black and white and, unlike most of the others I am looking at for the project, were original stories rather than adaptations of successful Australian novels or, as with *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, of a play. They also differ from the later films in mainly employing Australian actors—in particular, Chips Rafferty, who has a leading role in all three of them—though the script writers, directors and chief technicians and photographers were all British, and some British actors were also brought in for all but *The Overlanders*.

In 1944 the Australian government had approached the British Ministry of Information about the need to make Australia's contribution to the war effort better known, especially in Britain. In their turn, the Ministry of Information approached Michael Balcon of Ealing Studios. Balcon dispatched Scottish writer and director Harry Watt, already noted for his documentary story films based on real people and events, to Australia to search for a story. As Watt related on a number of occasions, he was given a pretty free rein to travel throughout the country, talking to people in all walks of life. In a piece first published in the *Penguin Film Review* in 1949, under the title 'You Start from Scratch in Australia', Watt noted:

We had no set plans, no ideas. We agreed I should take three months seeing the country. That, of course, just showed how little we knew about it. In five months I travelled 25,000 miles and had only investigated three states with any thoroughness. And during that five months I'd had five ideas and scrapped the lot.<sup>2</sup>

He goes on to comment on what was happening in the film industry in Australia at that time—only one feature was in production, Charles Chauvel's *The Rats of Tobruk*. As a result, Watt decided not to make another picture dealing directly with the war. Seeing some of the more than twenty features made for Cinesound by Ken Hall, the only other established film director then working in Australia, convinced Watt:

that studio facilities and equipment were so poor that indoor films were useless to attempt in Australia and that that had been the basic mistake of Australian film-makers. Their huge, exciting, hard

country had never been used by them at all. So I set out to find an almost 100 per cent exterior subject. And I found it in a Food Office!<sup>3</sup>

At the Ministry of Food, Watt learnt about the great cattle drive of 1942, when 100,000 head were taken across the country from Western Australia to Queensland, which was to be the subject of *The Overlanders*. He determined to make the film in the actual area of the drive, against advice that 'there was every type of country I needed within fifty miles of Sydney', because 'I was obsessed with putting on the screen the limitless spaces I'd seen in the Northern Territory'.<sup>4</sup>

When one first reads 'You Start from Scratch in Australia' it is easy to be offended by the assumptions apparent from the title alone. Likewise with an earlier comment by Watt: 'By creating a solid foundation for a film industry in a young country like Australia we can establish the cultural roots that transform a country into a nation.'<sup>5</sup> Didn't Watt know that Australia had one of the first feature film industries in the world? Didn't he know that a lot of the early silent films were not made in the studio but outdoors? The answer of course is no, because no one else really did at the time either. Many of the early silent features had been lost and the pioneering work of directors like Raymond Longford was forgotten. (Longford himself by the 1940s was making his living as a nightwatchman on the Sydney waterfront.) At one time it was also believed that there were no Australian plays before Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. Just as Australian theatre historians have been doing their best to combat this myth through extensive research over the past forty years, so film historians have worked hard to recover and restore many of our lost films. But while many of those dealt with life in the bush and included much outdoor shooting, they had all been made in fairly close proximity to either Sydney or Melbourne. Partly because of the great logistical difficulties which Watt goes on to describe in 'You Start from Scratch in Australia', no one had previously attempted to shoot a feature film in the Northern Territory. The real problem of course was one of finances. *The*

*Overlanders* cost £110,000, making it then the most expensive feature ever shot in Australia. The only earlier feature which makes such an impressive use of the Australian landscape, I believe, is the silent classic *For the Term of His Natural Life*, filmed on location in Tasmania in 1927. Like *The Overlanders*, it was made by an imported director, the American Norman Dawn, and, like *The Overlanders* again, in its time *Term* was the most expensive film ever made in Australia, at a cost of £60,000.

Of the two Australian directors mentioned by Watt, Ken Hall got into film-making very much by accident. His first feature, *On Our Selection* (1932), was closely based on an earlier stage version of Steele Rudd's Dad and Dave stories and made in association with Bert Bailey who had been playing Dad on stage since 1912. So it includes very few location shots, something that was to be true of most of Hall's other features. The other director, Charles Chauvel, is now known for his location shooting but as far as his use of the Australian landscape goes this relates mainly to the two features he made after the release of *The Overlanders*: *Sons of Matthew* (1949), made in Queensland, and of course *Jedda* (1955), shot in colour in the Northern Territory. Apparently Chauvel chose the locations for *Jedda* long before he had settled on its story.<sup>6</sup> So one cannot help but conclude that the success of *The Overlanders* may have had a considerable influence on the films which Chauvel went on to make, the ones for which he is best known, along with the earlier *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940), shot in the sand hills near Kurnell, though dealing of course with events from World War I.

My initial annoyance at Harry Watt's claims to be a pioneer in the making of films in Australia has, then, had to be replaced by an acceptance that he was, indeed, the first to portray a significant part of our 'huge, exciting, hard' country on the screen. As Roslynn Haynes outlines in *Seeking the Centre: The Australian desert in literature, art and film* (1998), in 1915 Francis Birtles had filmed a documentary entitled *Into Australia's Unknown*, but no others had followed him into the outback. Indeed, it seems that for most Australians a visual consciousness of what is now called the

Outback as distinct from the Bush really only dates from the 1930s, when Hans Heysen's paintings of the Flinders Ranges began to become known, followed a little later by the works of Albert Namatjira.<sup>7</sup> The magazine *Walkabout*, which commenced publication in 1934, also carried photographs and stories about the more isolated parts of Australia. These developments, together with popular books like Ion Idriess's *Lasseters's Last Ride* (1931) and his many later titles, and Ernestine Hill's *The Australian Loneliness* (1937), began to establish the Outback as the 'real' Australia, replacing the pastoral images that had been more dominant in earlier literature, paintings and films.

Hence when *The Overlanders* appeared it not only provided a seemingly authentic representation of Australia to audiences in Britain and America who may not have seen any other Australian films—indeed, *The Overlanders* was the first film made in Australia to be released commercially in the USA—but was hailed in Australia itself as the first film to represent the 'real' Australia. It was an enormous success, breaking box office records throughout the country. And, according to the *News Chronicle* for 20 September 1948, *The Overlanders* made no less than £200,000 in the United Kingdom, a hundred per cent profit from this market alone. It also broke all box office records in New Zealand, and was the first Ealing Studios' feature to receive wide distribution in Europe. For those who may never have seen it, here are the opening minutes of the film.

*The Overlanders*, first 10 minutes

While setting up Chips Rafferty here as the archetypal Australian, it is interesting that Watt does not show the white Australian bushman as necessarily heroic: for example, the two drovers who initially go with the party leave when things start to get tough later. But the white women, the Aboriginal stockmen and even the comic English remittance man all prove to be made of the right stuff and help get the cattle through to Queensland.

As a result of the success of *The Overlanders*, in 1946 Ealing entered into an association with the Rank Organisation to invest £250,000 in Australian productions, proposing to make six films in the next two years. And, after the success of *The Overlanders*, Watt seems to have been given a fairly free choice over the subject of his next Australian film. Local film-makers had been thinking for some time about making features based on Rolf Boldrewood's bushranging classic *Robbery Under Arms* and on the historical events of the Eureka Stockade. (Both stories had been filmed more than once in the first rush of silent features made in Australia before World War I.) Both subjects would have appealed to Watt for their focus on a group of disparate male characters fighting against overwhelming odds. Before filming *The Overlanders*, he had made his name with dramatised documentaries celebrating the achievements of ordinary men in the face of adversity. Films showing the resistance of British airmen and soldiers against overwhelming odds, *Target for Tonight* (1941) and his first Ealing feature *Nine Men* (1943), had been highly successful. His last Australian film, *The Siege of Pinchgut* (1959), would feature a similar scenario.

As his memoir, *Don't Look at the Camera* (1974), makes clear, Watt had strong socialist and anti-royalist views, another reason why he would have been attracted to the story of Eureka Stockade and why his version is very much one which pictures the event as the birth of Australian democracy. While his memoir unfortunately ends before the time of his Australian films, in 'You Start from Scratch in Australia', Watt said that the Eureka Stockade appealed to him as an historical narrative which needed very little rewriting to transform it into a dramatic subject suitable for filming: 'We documentary people had never tackled history, and here was an important historical moment that fell so perfectly into film shape that there was no need to distort events or create false situations. It could be treated completely realistically.' (p.14)

In hindsight, this perhaps was one of the main reasons for the film's failure. While a number of earlier Australian novelists and playwrights had focussed on the events at Eureka, most had chosen

to weave them into fictional narratives. Marcus Clarke, perhaps most notoriously, had even used the name of one of the actual rebel leaders, Vern, as the pseudonym of one of his characters, Arthur Devine, in the original serial version of *His Natural Life*.<sup>8</sup> For Clarke, Eureka provided an ideal excuse for the reintroduction of a number of characters (or their descendants) associated with the murder that had originally set the novel's action in train. Although historical figures like Lalor and Carboni also appear under thin fictional disguises, Clarke was not at all interested in the political implications of the rebellion, let alone any national ones. Likewise, Henry Handel Richardson in the first volume of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930) uses the Eureka Stockade mainly as a way of revealing the significant character differences between Mahony, who holds himself aloof from the rebels, and his friend Purdy Smith, who becomes involved and is injured.

But Harry Watt's *Eureka Stockade*, like most of his earlier films, was to be a story documentary or dramatised realist film. Certain incidents were added or altered for effect, most obviously in having Peter Lalor's future wife, the school teacher Alicia Dunn, present in Ballarat, rather than living in Geelong, to provide the love interest that Watt clearly still saw as necessary. But all the characters in the film were historical figures, with a special focus on the male quartet of Lalor, Vern, Carboni and Kennedy, leaving little room for movement with respect to conventional sources of audience interest and sympathy. Publicity for the film was at pains to stress a concern for historical accuracy: the country had been scoured to find authentic weapons; costume makers had to learn how to make cabbage tree hats; male actors had been encouraged to grow beards— 'Harry Watt wanted real beards as much as possible'.<sup>9</sup> Yet one of the first things any viewer of the film notices—and certainly something stressed by nearly all the English reviewers—is the obviously fake beard being worn by Chips Rafferty as Lalor. And another thing any Australian viewer will notice is that the flag being flown at the Stockade is not the usual Eureka one but a version of the current Australian flag without the Union Jack or the large single star.

There could be many explanations for Rafferty's false beard—a letter from Michael Balcon to Harry Watt suggests some uncertainty on Watt's part about whether this level of historical accuracy was really such a good idea:

In playing Chips Rafferty in a beard I think, in view of all the circumstances, you arrived at the right decision, but it does tend to detract from his romantic appeal. ... you said to me some time ago that Chips as a person seemed to be attractive to women. I am sure he was in *The Overlanders*, but I am not sure that in this particular characterisation he will have the same sort of appeal.<sup>10</sup>

Years later, introducing a British National Film Theatre screening of *Eureka Stockade*, Watt ruefully regretted not taking the advice of his associate producer Leslie Norman to cast instead the young Peter Finch, who had a small role in the film, when Rafferty was obviously not making a success of Lalor.<sup>11</sup> There was even a question as to whether his voice should be dubbed to give Lalor the correct Irish accent. Again, Balcon cautioned against this, saying that even if Chips himself agreed, 'the press and the public will detect what we have done and as a result there might be some suspicion about the authenticity of the film'.<sup>12</sup> So anyone unfamiliar with the Eureka story would never think from Watt's film that Lalor was supposed to be Irish. In the publicity he is referred to as Irish-Australian, but in a scene at the beginning of the film he gives his nationality as British. Things were, of course, to be very different in the 1984 TV miniseries starring Bryan Brown and made at the height of Australian cinema nationalism, where the Eureka Stockade is very much a rebellion, and one which emphasises the fight of the colonised against the rulers of empire.

For obvious reasons this was not the focus of Watt's film, which was framed in the more general terms of class and democracy, of old privilege needing to give way to new demands for equality. As the opening scenes show, however, the Eureka Stockade was represented by Watt as the major event in Australia's progress towards nationhood. In this context, of course, it is very convenient that Rafferty does not have an Irish accent. And the

presence of an historically inaccurate Southern Cross flag allows the film to end with a shot of the current Australian flag, making an easy visual reinforcement of the claims for the national neutrality of the events that have been depicted.

*Eureka Stockade*: first 10 minutes

On the film's release in London, local critics were united in viewing it as a failure, sometimes also revealing some strange ideas about Australian history. None appears to have seen it as an anti-British film; indeed, the reviewer writing in the *Daily Telegraph* for 21 January 1949 rather managed the reverse:

... Harry Watt has tried to hold the balance fairly and lay the blame for the bloodshed equally on stiff-necked officials and emotional diggers, some of them foreigners pained to find that an attempt to get up a republic by force of arms was as forcibly suppressed. The fact that the rebels who killed five soldiers were acquitted by a British court and that their leader ... soon became a member of the Victorian Parliament, is an eloquent comment on current notions of British imperialism.

The problems with the film are best summed up by Dilys Powell, one of the leading critics of the time, in a review in the *Sunday Times* for 30 January 1949:

Fidelity to historical character has meant that there is no concentration of sympathy on any single figure or group of figures; the film is so fair that the onlooker hardly cares who bashes in whose head. ... to interest a film audience in the truth of history one needs, I fancy, a greater selectiveness and a less evenly distributed emphasis than are offered in *Eureka Stockade*. ... what a film surely should give us is not the truth so much as the spirit of the truth; we ask, not to be told, but to be convinced.

But this could probably have only been done by making a much more anti-British film than would have been possible given its funding and intended audience.

One interesting feature of Watt's *Eureka Stockade*, perhaps a

positive result of his attempted stress on accuracy, is his concern to include the fact that one of the persons who stood trial for their involvement in the Stockade was an African-American, John Joseph, something rarely noted in earlier and later works dealing with the event. Watt reinforces this by having Joseph singing a Negro spiritual while the men in the Stockade wait out the night before the attack. With perhaps less historical accuracy, he also includes Aboriginal children among those being taught by Lalor's sweetheart, Alicia Dunn, at Ballarat.

If making *The Overlanders* had been hard, pioneering work, this was nothing to the difficulties Watt experienced in making *Eureka Stockade*. Firstly, the sudden imposition by the British Government of a 75 per cent custom duty on imported films led to a delay of ten weeks while more actors and crew were brought from Britain to qualify it for exemption as a British film made on location. When filming eventually started, the weather broke, with further delays caused by torrential rain; a number of the imported actors were less than cooperative; and so on. *Eureka Stockade* ended up costing almost twice as much as *The Overlanders*, £200,000 of the £250,000 Ealing had originally budgeted for six films, money it never managed to recoup at the box office. All of this left Watt exhausted and with no further desire to go on pioneering in Australia. He left for Africa, where he was to make *Where No Vultures Fly* (1951). So the third Ealing Australia feature, *Bitter Springs*, in many ways now the most interesting of them, even if again not financially successful, was instead directed by Ralph Smart, who had worked as Watt's associate producer on *The Overlanders*, as well as assisting with the scripts for both that film and *Eureka Stockade*. Using many of the cast and crew from *The Overlanders*, he had also made a successful children's film, *Bush Christmas* (1947), for the Rank Organisation.

*Bitter Springs* was filmed in the Flinders Ranges, which was to become a popular spot for visiting and local film-makers, having spectacular scenery but fewer logistical problems than the Northern Territory. South Australia's then Premier, Thomas

Playford, had apparently lobbied Ealing's executives to come to the state, sending film of possible location sites to London.

If *The Overlanders* was the first feature film to be made in the Northern Territory, and so the first to really display the landscape of outback Australia to both local and world audiences, then *Bitter Springs* was the first feature film to attempt to represent the consequences of Australian pioneering for Indigenous Australians. Again, of course, writers had been doing this for years: as early as 1831 a poem about Aboriginals published in the *Sydney Gazette* concluded:

We owe them all that we possess—  
The forest, plain, the glen, the hill,  
Were theirs; to slight is to oppress.<sup>13</sup>

And in his epic novel *Capricornia* (1938), Xavier Herbert left readers in no doubt about the effect on Indigenous Australians of 'The Coming of the Dingoes', the title of his first chapter. But in earlier Australian films, Aboriginal characters, where they appear at all, usually fill the role of helpful and sometimes comic servants, as they had in nineteenth-century Australian stage melodramas. When they are seen in more hostile roles, as in Charles Chauvel's 1935 prize-winning *Heritage*, there is no attempt to explain why they might be attacking the pioneers' hut. Indeed, Chauvel's Aborigines look very much like Red Indians from an American Western, and the attack itself seems included merely as a way of killing off the woman whom the hero loves but has not married.

Watt, while still making his Aboriginal stockmen subservient to the white boss, had at least included a scene in *The Overlanders* where reference is made to their loss of their country as well as scenes where their skills as riders and stock handlers are well displayed. In *Bitter Springs*, the conflict over land is the main focus of the film. The problem this creates for the film makers is that, according to both the facts of Australian history and the generic logic of the Western movie, the native people have to be the losers and the white people the winners, though for much of the film it looks as if this will not be the case. *Bitter Springs* ends

quite abruptly, the haste demonstrating the difficulty of finding a more appropriate conclusion to the story. Before showing the final moments of the film, I need to set them in a little more context. The initial grouping of pioneers is very similar to the ensemble found in *The Overlanders*. Chips Rafferty is again the leading male, though this time playing the father of the King family rather than a lone stockman. Again there are two children, this time an older son and a daughter, and an Aboriginal stockman. Again, there are two outsider figures—a Scottish carpenter, played by Gordon Jackson who had also starred in *Eureka Stockade*, and who provides the love interest for the daughter as the Scottish sailor had in *The Overlanders*, and a comical English conman, who this time has a child, to still provide some of that additional audience appeal. The decision to cast Tommy Trinder, the well-known English comic actor, in this role was later acknowledged as a mistake. It is an indication of what was to happen increasingly in the future; as more money was invested in Australian features, there was more pressure to cast well-known British and American actors, often with a resulting loss in the authenticity which had been one of the major reasons for the success of *The Overlanders*. By the time Harry Watt returned to Australia to make Ealing's last feature, *The Siege of Pinchgut*, the Studio's increasing financial pressures led to the casting of an American actor in the leading role—Aldo Ray—who made no attempt it seems to try to use an Australian accent.

In *Bitter Springs* the pioneers take over the one waterhole in the area—the Bitter Springs of the title—driving away the Indigenous inhabitants who had formerly relied on it. They are unable to move onto land near another water hole because it is all occupied by other tribal groups but do come up with an ingenious strategy—to hide near the waterhole and prevent the pioneers from getting access to the water. The strategy seems to be working, as you will see from the opening scenes here. The son trying to get water is the well-known actor Bud Tingwell in one of the earliest of his many roles, and one of the few occasions where he is playing a villain.

*Bitter Springs*: final 10 minutes

This is a hasty and a most unsatisfactory ending. The stockman Blackjack, who has earlier left the Kings in disgust and gone to live with the displaced tribe, is persuaded by Trinder, who is captured along with his son, to help him escape and then go in search of the troopers. And of course in true American Western style the cavalry arrives just in the nick of time, followed by a very tokenistic reconciliation in keeping with the assimilationist rhetoric of the 1950s. It seems that there were changes to the ending as first written and filmed. In his recently released autobiography, Tingwell attributes the changes to Ealing Studios' executives in England, who were unhappy with the darker ending of the film as originally made, which it seems involved the massacre of the Aborigines.<sup>14</sup> This certainly would have made *Bitter Springs* much more historically accurate but one can see why a film originally billed as a comedy because of the casting of Trinder could not possibly have ended in this way.

As with *Eureka Stockade*, shooting on *Bitter Springs* was considerably delayed through bad weather. There was an additional scandal relating to the Aboriginal actors involved, which showed that the partnership suggested so perfunctorily at the end of the film was very far from being achieved in reality in the 1950s. As the *Film Weekly* reported on 26 May 1949, p.5, under the heading 'Bitter Press Breaks as "Springs" Starts':

Allegations that serious neglect marked the transport of 115 native extras from Ooldea to Quorn have made the aborigines front-page news in S.A. for several days

When the aborigines, ranging from babes in arms to old men, reached Quorn at 11pm on Tuesday, Mr H Green, missionary-in-charge of the party, was told that their camp at Warren Gorge, 14 miles out, was not ready.

With heavy rain falling the natives were herded into Quorn Oval refreshment room, a draughty wood and iron structure measuring 30ft. by 50ft., until the following day. Most slept with

only a blanket or groundsheet to soften the hardness of the bitumen floor.

Mr Green and the other missionaries were worried about the aborigines' health, because they are particularly susceptible to pneumonia.

Arrangements by the Commonwealth Railways to move the natives on the Ooldea-Pt. Augusta stage of the journey were disgraceful, Green said.

Two closed vans and an obsolete dog-box type carriage, instead of 2nd class carriages, were used. Nearly £300 in second class fares had been paid, he claimed.

Production manager (John Rix) said Ealing's arrangements, when engaging the natives, were for the responsible government departments to make all arrangements for transportation, reception and supervision.

Ealing had nothing to do with the aborigines until they were wanted for particular scenes.

As this makes clear, all the arrangements were being made by white people—so much for the partnership depicted at the end of the film! Apparently the Aborigines were also not paid anything and were subsequently found begging on the main railway line across the Nullarbor.

These scandals and complaints seem, however, to have been forgotten by the time of the film's world premiere in Adelaide, a very glittering affair attended by the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, as well as cricket legend Sir Donald Bradman. A brief comment by Mary Armitage in *Film Weekly's* issue for 29 June 1950, which reported the world premiere at length, is interesting in suggesting that criticisms of the film were already apparent. It was headed 'Opinion: "Bitter Springs" is OK' and included the revealing paragraph:

You may see 'Bitter Springs' as a cowboys 'n'Injuns yarn, done in the Australian idiom, with sheep-farmers battling against blacks and ending up with a rather vague bit of 'black-brother' humanitarianism. Or you may see it as the best bit of Australiana ever put into a feature film, and a sincere and intelligent piece of production. That's the way I saw it. (p.17)

While subsequent issues of this trade periodical promoted the film's success in Adelaide, Sydney and London, with predictions that it would outgross *The Overlanders*, the truth was revealed in a much longer and more sober review in *Film Weekly* for 26 October 1950, p.16, just before the film was generally released in Australia. The writer does not hesitate to spell out the problems with the film, even if mistakenly referring to the pioneer family as the Raffertys rather than the Kings:

Despite various limitations, this is a good entertainment show—interesting and humorous, though dramatically weak—and will pull well as a weekend A in most situations. ...

Scenery and shots of aboriginals and animals are most impressive. In fact the aborigine sequences are by far the best in the film. Acting, characterisation, plot, dialogue, and at times the directing are weak, however.

... where the show falls down most heavily is in the basic idea of the story and the point of view from which it is told. Heroes of the film are the Raffertys. They are on the screen most of the time, and the thing is told from where they stand. You see their hopes and desires, their privations.

But your sympathies are with the blacks, and you feel they have been treated shamefully not only by the Raffertys, but by the director. At any time in the story they could have killed off the Raffertys, and they meant to do it.

But because of false plot development they aren't allowed to. They are made to look pathetically ineffectual—simply for the sake of letting everything end happily for the Raffertys—these characters who haven't got our sympathies anyway. ...

In an astonishingly naïve end sequence—just a few words and a couple of shots—we're told the blacks cooperate with the whites in the end, do the shearing, share the advantages of civilisation.

The commercial failures of *Eureka Stockade* and *Bitter Springs*, combined with the election of the Menzies Liberal-Country Party Government in 1949, and the subsequent withdrawal of government support for Ealing Studios' Australian venture, meant that Ealing's earlier grand plans for a continuous supply of films made in Australia came to nothing. Leslie Norman made

*The Shiralee* starring Peter Finch in 1957, and in 1959, as mentioned earlier, Harry Watt returned to Australia to make *The Siege of Pinchgut*, a thriller set on Sydney Harbour, concerning an escaped convict who takes over Fort Denison and threatens to use its guns to blow up a boat filled with explosives. Watt wanted to make this film with unknown actors, as he had done with *The Overlanders*, but Ealing was now dependent for financial support on Associated British Picture Corporation, who insisted on a big name, preferably American. Miscasting, further bad luck and bad weather, combined with ABPC's decision during shooting to end their association with Ealing, all contributed to *The Siege of Pinchgut* being another commercial and artistic failure. It was Ealing's last film and Harry Watt's last adult feature. The adventure that had begun so promisingly some fifteen years earlier with *The Overlanders* was at an end. But its influence was to be felt for many years as Australian and overseas directors increasingly focused their lenses on the 'huge, exciting, hard country'. John Heyer, who had worked as Watt's second unit director on *The Overlanders*, went on to achieve recognition as the father of Australian documentary film, especially for his 1954 classic *Back of Beyond*. And in 1959 Fred Zinnemann was in Australia filming *The Sundowners*, based on a Jon Cleary novel published in 1952 and perhaps influenced by *The Overlanders*, though with a focus on droving sheep rather than cattle. One of those involved in *The Sundowners* was a young cameraman called Nicholas Roeg, who was later to return to Australia to make *Walkabout* (1971). This was the first film to feature Gulpilil, an actor now as much an icon of contemporary Australian film as Chips Rafferty was for those of the 1940s.

#### Notes

- 1 See Robert Winter, 'Ealing Studios and the Ealing Comedies: the Tip of the Iceberg', *Arts* 24 (2002): 115–27.
- 2 Harry Watt, 'You Start from Scratch in Australia', reprinted in Tom O'Regan and Albert Moran, eds, *An Australian Film Reader*, Sydney, 1985, p.88.

- 3 Watt, 'You Start from Scratch', p. 88.
- 4 Watt, 'You Start from Scratch', p. 90.
- 5 Harry Watt, 'The Overlanders', *Picture Post*, May 1946.
- 6 See Stuart Cunningham, *Featuring Australia: The Cinema of Charles Chauvel*, Sydney, 1991, p.157.
- 7 Roslynn Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian desert in literature, art and film*, Cambridge, 1998, pp.153–54.
- 8 Serialised in the *Australian Journal* from 1870–1872; reprinted by Penguin Classics in 1970.
- 9 Ealing Studios publicity material, 'Eureka Stockade—The Story behind the Film', p.3, British Film Institute Library.
- 10 Michael Balcon to Harry Watt, letter of 30 June 1948, now in the collection of the British Film Institute Library.
- 11 Harry Watt, National Film Theatre program notes for *Eureka Stockade*.
- 12 Balcon to Watt, 30 June 1948.
- 13 Hugo, 'The Gin', *Sydney Gazette*, 16 July 1831, p.4.
- 14 Charles 'Bud' Tingwell with Peter Wilmoth, *Bud: A Life*, Sydney, 2004, p.64.