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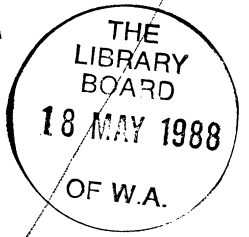
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PEOPLE, PRINT AND PAPER



The National Library's major Bicentennial exhibition 'People, Print and Paper: A Celebration of the Books of Australia 1788 - 1988' opened recently. Four hundred books have been chosen from the Library's 4 million strong collection with a few added gems (such as the first book published in Australia, *Standing Orders of 1802*) coming from the Mitchell Library and other collections. The exhibition's curator, Michael Richards, sees it as a celebration of the 'power, the beauty and the companionship of books'.

The Exhibition looks at the art of printing and publishing - the works of Louisa Lawson, Henry Lawson's mother, who started *The Dawn*, Australia's first women's magazine, and that of Percy Neville are on display. In the Arts Press section works by

Norman Lindsay, Margaret Preston, Frederick McCubbin and Donald Friend are featured as well as the magical fairy paintings of Ida Rentoul Outhwaite. The Exhibition also includes a section devoted to books by and about Australian Aborigines.

Production processes and new 'book' formats appear cheek by jowl with the inclusion of a working printing press and CD-ROM technology. Aspiring writers can take advantage of the 'Publishers' Wall' and listen to the advice of some of Australia's leading publishers while a special showcase allows for the public's favourite titles to be displayed on request.

'People, Print and Paper' is open from 9.00 to 4.45pm at the National Library and runs until the end of August. It is likely that the Exhibition will travel to other states.

land and of its exceptional flora and fauna and remarkable indigenous that dominate the collection brought together in this important Exhibition.

John Milton, whose words open the catalogue of the Exhibition, once declared that: 'A good book is the life blood of a master spirit - embalmed and treasured up to a life beyond life.'

This is a collection of the good books of some of the master spirits who have enlivened the soul of Australia during the last 200 years. What does it matter if we have the biggest flag pole in the world, but have no soul? What does it matter if we enjoy a high standard of material life but surround ourselves with a crass, imitative and derivative culture? Surely after 200 years we could boast of more than this.

Well, this Exhibition allows the observer - the jury of local and visiting examiners - to scrutinise the works of the master spirits of Australia. They are not all here. Necessarily, the medium being books, the great spirits of the Aboriginal people who preceded us are not fully represented. Nor are there here those private spirits of family and loved ones, unsung in history, but vital in the development of the inner being of every one of us. Nor are the notes of music captured or the daubs of paint, the drawing of great buildings or the flights of an advocate's fancy before an open mouthed and captive court. These words either perish or must be found elsewhere. Yet the sample is representative. It stretches back to the First Fleet. It takes us up to our own time. A thoughtful reflection upon the books collected here will evoke the proper response to the Bicentenary - a mixture of pride and shame; of disappointment and yet of hope.

Land of contrast

The Exhibition will demonstrate the many paradoxes of Australia. Paradoxes were inevitable in the very notion of founding a colony transplanted from the windswept islands to the north of Europe to the perimeter of a great desert land on the opposite side of the globe. As the catalogue points out, we have more records of the doings of the First Fleet and of the early explorers - many represented here - than we have an understanding of what actually motivated the sending out of those lonely vessels. Of course, the externalities are known. The loss of the American plantations. The overcrowded prisons. Cook's reports. The fears of French expansionism.

We also know that from the start we were second best - Australia being the second choice after West Africa was abandoned. I suppose some early Humphrey Appleby is really responsible for us being here tonight.

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BOOKS IN A LAND OF PARADOX

This is the title of the entertaining and informed speech given by The Hon Justice Michael Kirby, CMG* at the official opening of the Exhibition. This speech is reproduced below.

First Fleet - first books

The Chief Justice of New Zealand opened his recent judgement on the attempts to suppress the book *Spycatcher* by Peter Wright with the comment that it was 'probably the most litigated book in all of history'. That may be correct; although I suspect that the Bible may yet have a slight edge.

The Bible was probably the first book carried from the ships of the First Fleet when they anchored in Sydney Cove in January 1788. From reading the catalogue which accompanies this Exhibition, I get the impression that the Rev Richard Johnson - sent to his country by an organisation with the engaging name of the Eclectic Society - was rather like those annoying people who nowadays clamber aboard a jumbo jet struggling remorselessly on with the entirety of their worldly possessions.

Johnson was just such a man. He carried with him no less than 100 Bibles, 350 New Testaments, 500 Psalters, 100 Prayer Books and 200 Catechisms - all made available to him by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Amongst his most precious possessions were twelve copies of Bishop Thomas Wilson's *An Essay towards an Instruction for the Indians*. Sadly, guns and hangings all too soon quickly replaced words and books in the relationship between the newcomers and the indigenous inhabitants of the Great South Land.

Many of Johnson's books were lost when his church was burnt down in 1793. However, his King James Bible survived. I was present a

few weeks ago, in St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, on the 200th anniversary of the first Christian service, when that Bible was brought out and its familiar, comfortable words were read in a service of reconciliation and remembrance.

In his first sermon, happily recorded, Richard Johnson spoke to the entire assembled colony of the First Fleet. Even Mr Christopher Skase with his ever burgeoning network, could never hope to reach 100 percent of the literate population of the Australian continent, as Johnson did that day. Johnson's message was remarkable for such a time. 'I speak to you,' he said 'not as Anglicans; nor as Baptists. Not as Roman Catholics, nor Methodists. Not as Jews, nor as Gentiles. But as mortals; and yet immortals.'

It is one of the tragedies of Australia - recorded in the books that trace our history in this Exhibition - that Richard Johnson's unseasonable spirit of ecumenicism and reconciliatory harmonism faded away as his flock scurried from his sermon to their arduous tasks. Perhaps the sun was just too strong. Perhaps anger at the clearing of the bullock tracks fostered intemperance. Perhaps, as Sir Mark Oliphant once suggested, the genetic pool of the founding guards and convicts doomed us inescapably to a discouraging start. Whatever the reason, the history of Australia after the arrival and the first sermon was all too often the opposite of the message of love contained in the 350 New Testaments carried by the Reverend Richard.

And yet Johnson's assertion of immortality suggested, from the start, that even in trying, rustic and seemingly daunting circumstances, the new settlers (or some of them) lifted their sights from the necessities of worldliness to the world of the spirit. It is this world - of poetry, of history, of descriptions of the new