

2014

NSW PREMIER'S HISTORY AWARDS



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Judges' reports for shortlisted titles

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY PRIZE

***Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War*, Joan Beaumont (Allen & Unwin)**

This ambitiously successful history of Australia in the Great War constructs a series of dialogues between the home front and the Great War; between the significance of battles at the time they were fought and how they came to be remembered both by those who fought them and also by subsequent generations of Australians; and between the official account of the War as an exercise in nation-building and the reality of its terrible impact on those who experienced it, as well as on post war society as a whole.

Based on the official war records held in the National Archives and the Australian War Memorial as well as on the diaries, autobiographies and letters of AIF soldiers, this is a study not just in political and military but also social history, for it tells a compelling story of initial bravery at Gallipoli, wavering morale in 1916, and a courageous regrouping, reflected in the great AIF campaigns of 1917-18. Above all, it emphasizes the almost incomprehensible human cost of this war. Beaumont has woven a compelling story of triumph and tragedy

***The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills: Forgotten Narratives*, edited by Ian Clark and Fred Cahir (CSIRO Publishing)**

The essays in this volume draw not only on the historical records left by members of the Victorian Exploring Expedition of 1860-61 (Burke and Wills) and succeeding relief parties, but also anthropological, linguistic, visual and oral evidence, especially accounts of their encounters with the explorers recorded by Indigenous people. As a result of this extensive new research they provide a set of new and original perspectives relating not only to the Burke and Wills expedition, but more generally to the nineteenth century interactions between Europeans and Aborigines.

What makes these essays so collectively valuable is their complex portrayal of the relations between the European interlopers and the Indigenous peoples, which they demonstrate were characterised by violence, curiosity, shared needs and sometimes even compassion. In the end, the great achievement of this book is its demonstration that the story of Burke and Wills is immensely complicated, and does not fit easily into a straight forward foundation narrative of European exploration and occupation.

***The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka*, Clare Wright (Text Publishing)**

This elegantly written and carefully researched study of the roles of women on the nineteenth century goldfields in general and in the Eureka uprising in particular changes and enhances our understanding of the contribution of women to Australian history. And in the process it draws an important conclusion, that Eureka had a feminist as well as a masculinist context.

Wright recounts the hardships women encountered on their voyages to Australia, explores and explains their political views and activities, and demonstrates that far from simply acting as proponents of domesticity, women engaged in a wide range of entrepreneurial

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activities on the goldfields. And most importantly, in showing how they contributed to the Eureka uprising, Wright maps a goldfields culture in which women were not only present but also agents of social and political change.

GENERAL HISTORY PRIZE

Encountering the Pacific in the Age of Enlightenment, John Gascoigne (Cambridge University Press)

This is a book of breathtaking scope and erudition. Mapping the Pacific expansion of Europeans and their encounters with the peoples of the Pacific it covers the period from the first European explorations of the Pacific through to the early nineteenth century. It covers a wide range of topics covering exploration, wealth, knowledge, encounters and belief: it deals with relations between Europeans and a wide range of Pacific peoples; and it also deals comprehensively with the Pacific experiences of all major European countries.

What makes it possible for Gascoigne to develop a complex and original set of arguments about the transcultural relations between Europeans and the peoples of the Pacific is the fact that he has used a wide range of printed and manuscript materials located in libraries and archives across Europe. This has allowed him to explore how the differing religions, systems of governments and cultural values, which marked the European countries concerned, shaped their policies, attitudes towards and treatment of the peoples of the Pacific. This book not only changes our understanding of the history of the Pacific but of the history of Enlightenment Europe.

Antipodean America: Australasia and the Constitution of U.S. Literature, Paul Giles (Oxford University Press)

Covering more than two hundred years of Australian and United States literary and cultural history this study constitutes a huge cauldron of ideas about Australasian and more significantly about American literature. It is the persuasive argument of this book that Australian writing both in the colonial and post-Federation periods, exercised a significant influence on the writings of major American writers, extending from Benjamin Franklin to Henry Adams. It is a surprising but tenaciously and convincingly argued thesis.

The great strengths of this book are, first, that in covering such a large period of literary endeavour its arguments are always underpinned by a huge weight of evidence, a clear demonstration of the author's command of the subject. And, second, in demonstrating that American literature can be classified as international rather than national in terms of form and influence, Giles has laid bare the once unchallengeable belief in American cultural exceptionalism.

Lamaze: An International History, Paula Michaels (Oxford University Press)

This exceptionally fine book traces the emergence of psychoprophylactic approaches to childbirth in the Soviet Union and their translation to France under the sponsorship of the obstetrician Frederic Lamaze. Michaels then traces the ideological laundering of Soviet methods in the United States, where 'Lamaze' became a byword for progressive or 'natural'

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approaches to birth. Michaels tells this story within a richly woven context, which encompasses the Cold War, the 1950s culture of consensus, the 1960s culture of conflict, and changing role of women and the family in a post-War world.

This is a wonderful example of imaginative research, of a scholar noticing an historical problem, a post-War contradiction, and producing a powerful piece of global history based on wide research in archives in Russia, the Ukraine, France, the United Kingdom and the United States. In producing a complex and persuasive argument that explains Lamaze's international appeal she has connected not only the histories of countries but of science, medicine, popular culture and political ideology.

NSW COMMUNITY & REGIONAL HISTORY PRIZE

The Wallpapered Manse: The Rescue of an Endangered House, Peter Freeman (The Watermark Press)

Beautifully presented and written, this is a very compelling and original story of the conservation of a heritage site set in the broader context of its local history. At the core, Peter Freeman tells the story of a community through the layers of a wallpapered house, which is both innovative and engaging. Freeman brings the story of the manse and the local district to life through the interweaving of place and community. The book is unusual in the sense that it is both a history and a heritage conservation study in one.

Carefully researched, the history of the house is gradually revealed with almost forensic fervour yet does not daunt the reader with unnecessary and boring detail. This book is an interesting example of what can happen when conservation architecture and history is united – a combination that is all too uncommon.

Coast: A History of the New South Wales Edge, Ian Hoskins (NewSouth)

Coast is a beautifully presented and engagingly written book that should appeal to a wide reading public. Tracing the history of human relations with the NSW coastline from Aboriginal archaeological sites to European settlement and impact, a range of visual material is reproduced from early paintings and maps to written sources. This book makes an important addition to an expanding genre focusing on the edges of Australia.

Based on sound research, eclectic aspects of the coastline's history are explored, including the impact of colonisation, industry, war – and the very Australian theme of the summer beach holiday. Contemporary conservation issues are raised such as the impact of sand-mining and marine parks. The book provides an interesting perspective when so much Australian history has focussed on the Australian interior.

Sydney Mechanic School of Arts: A History, Garry Wotherspoon (Sydney Mechanic School of Arts)

This book is a surprisingly engaging microcosm of Sydney's history from 1833 through the lens of the Sydney Mechanics' School of Art, mainly drawn from its archives. Wotherspoon provides a thorough overview of an institution that was influential at various stages, and a history that is timely and needed. In piecing together this history, Wotherspoon delves into

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a broad range of primary material archives and the result is a well-illustrated book demonstrating a deft use of original records.

An unusual lens through which the changing social and political history of Sydney may be viewed, Wotherspoon makes a topic with relatively limited appeal highly illuminating for a broad readership. The author captures the social and intellectual ideas of the time that formed the basis for the establishment of the School of Arts - of the transformative power of education and its 'civilising power' in the former penal colony.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S HISTORY PRIZE

***The Road to Gundagai*, Jackie French (HarperCollins Publishers)**

The Road to Gundagai is an exceptionally well-realized historical novel for young people. The third installment in the "Waltz for Matilda" series, the book is set in Victoria and New South Wales during the Great Depression and follows the adventures of a travelling circus and a murder mystery. With engaging detail, French brings to life the experiences of a remarkable range of characters as they all face and endure the challenges of the period — notably issues relating to the social and economic consequences of the Depression and, notably, the legal status and social position of children.

The product of deep research, which she shares with her reader, the work transcends simple fiction because its historical sensibility is so pronounced and engaging. The past is not simply a backdrop. History is used by French to drive the book's narrative arc. A work that both entertains and informs — it is a fine achievement.

***Yoko's Diary*, Edited by Paul Ham, translated by Debbie Edwards (HarperCollins Publishers)**

Yoko's Diary is the powerfully moving diary of a Japanese school girl who was caught up in one of modern history's most horrific events — the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in August 1945. Yoko Moriwaki started her diary in April 1945 documenting her life and the struggles of her community to support the war effort. Like many Japanese, however, Yoko believed the state propaganda that suggested victory was near; a mindset that made the events of 6 August 1945 all the more horrific. The diary provides engaging insights into Yoko's personality and her daily routine in the midst of war and devastation.

Yoko's words resonate thanks to Edwards' sensitive and poetic translation and the contextual notes provided by Ham that lock the story into the wider events of the period, making for a new and powerful insight into the events of nearly 70 years ago. One cannot help but be moved by *Yoko's Diary*.

***Australians All*, Nadia Wheatley, illustrated by Ken Searle (Allen & Unwin)**

Australians All is an outstanding history of Australia that captures the experiences of young people on this continent from the Ice Age to the Apology. Wheatley entwines her narrative with 80 judiciously chosen biographical snapshots that bring new insights to major events and themes in Australia history.

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This lavishly and thoughtfully illustrated work engages and enthralls the reader with both its temporal grasp and its topic breadth. On one page the reader can be contemplating family life at Lake Mungo over 20 000 years ago and on another the life story of a young Afghani girl her experience of escape to and re-settlement in Australia. With such a large sweep and a commitment to contextualise the individual stories against both national and international developments Wheatley could be forgiven if there was a gap here or there in the calibre of the research and its presentation. The reader need have no such concerns. Willing to be both playful and confronting, depending on the content being presented, *Australians All* is a pleasure to read from cover to cover.

MULTIMEDIA HISTORY PRIZE

Public Intimacies: The 1974 Royal Commission on Human Relationships, Michelle Arrow, Catherine Freyne and Timothy Nicastrì (ABC Radio National Hindsight)

This insightful radio production revisits a seminal but often overlooked moment in recent Australian history – the events around the 1974 Royal Commission into Human Relationships. The 1970s is well known as a period of social and political change in Australian society. Growing calls for Women's liberation and gay rights were becoming increasingly accepted. However the political will to implement laws that reflected this – particularly those around abortion – was another question.

The Whitlam government's creation of a Royal Commission on Human Relationships was designed to chart a way through this. In a fascinating journey through a period of social transformation in Australia, *Public intimacies* outlines the successes and failures of the commission through a rich store of archival material and interviews with the key players. It brings to life the political debates behind women's and gay rights, as well as some of the weird and wonderful public responses.

Persons of Interest – Gary Foley (Ep 3), Haydn Keenan (Smart Street Films)

The series *Persons of Interest* is a significant documentary based on the opening of once strictly secret ASIO files to public scrutiny. Episode Three looks at the files of Aboriginal activist Gary Foley. While ASIO's sometimes rather bumbling personal scrutiny of Foley's activities in the late 1960s and 1970s is fascinating, the episode establishes the broader context of the political debate around race relations in Australia at the time and situates Foley and other Indigenous activists within this increasingly fraught climate.

Persons of Interest uses the historical record of ASIO files to good effect – showing how the agency's films, photographs and written files can offer new insights and information for historians seeking to understand Australia's response to the Cold War and rapid social change in the 1960s and 70s. This is combined with interviews with participants, experts and former ASIO personnel. The result is powerful and compelling viewing.

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***The Reef* (www.the-reef.com.au), Iain McCalman (Penguin Group Australia/Spring in Alaska)**

Academic historians often bemoan that their work cannot compete with popular history. Not so Iain McCalman, who sets out to establish an accessible platform for exploring the stories behind his book *The Reef* by creating a website populated with video, images and other extended content.

The model of The Reef website is an exemplary one that intertwines stories and website navigation with a sense of journey and encounter. It cleverly moves us away from a colonial concept of 'discovery' to a more nuanced sense of encountering the peoples and environments of such an iconic place that is in many ways not that well known at all. And it does this with history and story that scrapes back the layers of imaginary idyll that the Great Barrier Reef has accrued over years of literary and visual representation. It also entwines these histories of people and place with the environmental story of the region in a refreshing and accessible website.