

Reviews

Compiled by Peter Hobbins

Department of History, The University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia.
 Email: peter.hobbins@sydney.edu.au

Alexandra Roginski: *The Hanged Man and the Body Thief: Finding Lives in a Museum Mystery*. Monash University Publishing: Clayton, 2015. xiii + 124 pp., illus., ISBN: 9781922235664 (PB), \$19.95.

This book, the author's first, perfectly exemplifies the adage that 'small is beautiful'. At 124 pages, including bibliography and index, it is compact, compelling and affordable—it's not often one finds a scholarly book for under \$20 nowadays. I read it in a single sitting, on a plane between Canberra and Cairns.

Roginski's work as a research assistant at Museum Victoria underpins her narrative, which at the most basic level explains how one man's mortal remains became another's scientific trophy. Her 'driving goal' in writing it was 'to source enough information on the life and death of Jim Crow', the 'hanged man' of the title, 'to enable his return to country'. Chapter One, 'Reassembling', contextualises this specific project by discussing the recent history of repatriating remains and its restorative role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Chapter Two, 'A Life Found in Death', reconstructs Crow's background from the 'parsimonious documentation' available. It illuminates the relationship between local Aboriginal groups and settlers in Clarence Town, north-east of Maitland, New South Wales, from Crow's birth there in the 1830s to his execution for the rape of a white woman in 1860. Roginski's thoughtful account is honest about the limitations of archival records: did Crow rape Jane Delanthy as she claimed, did she consent to sex with him, or did she panic after misinterpreting an innocent request for food?

It's impossible to say with certainty. However, Roginski does find sufficient comparative evidence to conclude that 'the system was stacked against' Crow and that it is unlikely he would have been executed 'had he been white rather than Aboriginal'.

In Chapter Three, 'Scottish Head Case', the focus shifts to Archibald Sillars Hamilton, an itinerant Scottish-born phrenologist tried in 1860 for 'inciting another to exhume corpses'—including Crow's. In stark contrast to the man whose mortal remains he craved, Hamilton was acquitted after a mere 15 minutes' deliberation by the jury. Two years later, an account of one of his phrenological lectures in the Brisbane Courier specifically mentioned the use of Crow's skull as a lecture prop; evidently Hamilton had managed to get his hands on it in the interim, despite his initial failure to persuade the local sexton to do his dirty work. A concise discussion of phrenology's great popular success, and its obsession with race, bookends this sobering account of scientific grave-robbing. The final chapter, 'Mrs Hamilton Presents a Collection', documents Museum Victoria's acceptance of Hamilton's phrenological collection after his death at the request of his third wife, Agnes Hamilton-Grey, and traces subsequent uses of Crow's skull as an object of craniological and medical research.

Roginski cites repatriation expert Michael Pickering's suggestion that historians working with remains 'have a responsibility to document [their] stories' in order to counteract 'the institutional and professional objectification of life and death' over time, describing her monograph as 'a case study of this process'. While

I thoroughly support this approach, stories as detailed as that which Roginski has been able to reconstruct are, at least in my experience, the exception rather than the rule. All too often, the provenance researcher is confronted with a skull labelled simply 'Australian', with no accompanying documentation, no associated names, places or dates, and very limited avenues for identifying further information. The possibility of a National Resting Place for poorly provenanced remains has now been under discussion for over twenty years: recent consultations did at least result in the publication of a report in 2015, but in my view, the issue continues to receive insufficient attention and support.

That said, *The Hanged Man and the Body Thief* offers valuable insights into complexities and uncertainties common to much provenance research—confusion over place names and collectors' names, labelling errors, contradictory forensic and archival findings—as well as a sense of the fascination involved in locating clues to an identity long hidden. It is an important contribution not only to repatriation research, but to the fields of Australian history, history of science, and museum studies. I hope it will be widely read.

Hilary Howes
The Australian National University

Bradley Smith (ed.): *The Dingo Debate: Origins, Behaviour and Conservation*.
CSIRO Publishing: Clayton, 2015. 336 pp.,
ISBN: 9781486300297 (PB), \$39.95.

This collection sets out to comprehensively outline 'the behaviour, origin and history of the dingo', including human–dingo interactions in contemporary Australia. As animal psychologist Bradley Smith insists, dingoes are subject to 'controversy on virtually every aspect of their existence'. As both editor and major contributor, Smith wrote or co-authored more than half of the volume's chapters.

The Dingo Debate turns to historical material throughout, especially in the earlier sections. It approaches this material very much from the vantage point of contemporary science, more often finding value in past perspectives that conform to those being advanced by the authors. There is a tension in the science between seeing

the dingo as what it does, and trying to locate its truth 'internally', in its genome.

The first section deals with description, genetics, evolution, habitat and behaviour. Peter Savolainen offers evidence from population genetics that locates the dingo's origins in East (rather than South) Asia. In surveying relationships between dingoes and indigenous people, Smith's approach depends upon mid-twentieth-century popular representations and positivist social science. However sympathetic, this framework tends to position Aboriginal people in an eternal ethnographic present, rather than seeing Indigenous groups as historical subjects capable of innovation without ceasing to count as Aboriginal—territory ably negotiated in the work of James Boyce, for instance. Aboriginal voices, furthermore, are absent from *The Dingo Debate*.

The middle chapters, authored by ecologists Rob Appleby, Damian Marrant and Chris Johnson, elaborate dingo interactions with other creatures. Here we find dingoes in conflict and concert with pastoralists, tourists, scientists, environmentalists, native prey, and both indigenous and introduced predators. Outlining contemporary methods of biological research, Chapter Seven introduces an unexpected historical element: records of bounties paid during periods of dingo control provide data for reconstructing population densities, habitats and ranges.

Smith then offers a series of appraisals encompassing dingo intelligence and psychology, their role as companion animals, behaviour in captivity and private sanctuaries, and a final chapter on future prospects. While the tone is practical and optimistic, generally the prognosis is poor, especially if you believe (as do several authors here) that interbreeding with *Canis familiaris* portends dingo extinction.

The Dingo Debate advances what philosopher Bruno Latour refers to as the 'work of purification': essentialising entities by moving them into the dichotomised categories of human or nonhuman, natural or cultural. The clearest example is advocacy of genetic purity testing, yet hybrids proliferate. Alongside dingo–dog interbreeding and predation relationships (dingo–rabbit, for example), hybrid socio-technical arrangements incorporate trapping, tagging and surveillance, plus sanctuaries, institutions and

companion animal relationships. Smith and Appleby outline something of what is at stake here: ‘perhaps the overarching dichotomy is whether dingoes should be killed or conserved’. When put so starkly perhaps it is not surprising the authors seek safe containment for these animals in the ‘natural’ category, as a predicate for sustainable conservation strategies.

In their concluding chapter, Smith and Appleby offer a ‘cultural’ perspective, informed by Hytten’s analysis of the dingo’s discursive ambiguity. Yet they are less circumspect about their own commitments to dualistic thinking in dingo science than about the reigning dichotomies in public discussions of dingoes. This approach amounts to sifting through the various regimes to determine what components remain wild, and thus redeemable, and what has been compromised by social or biological hybridities.

For historians, dingoes represent problematic historical actors, too. Their arrival on the Australian continent is, according to research reported in this volume, too recent to belong safely to the depths of deep time. Their relationships to people, including a likely dependence on humans for their very presence on the continent, creates a complex historical interrelationship with Aboriginal culture, which resists simple ecological pigeonholing. Neither securely native nor securely wild, dingo interbreeding with more recent canine arrivals leaves them historiographically elusive: are the ‘dingoes’ and ‘wild dogs’ on the margins of historical narratives in fact the same animals? Does this matter for determining their significance in Australian history?

This volume has numerous historiographic deficiencies, although these are also a feature of its own disciplinary hybridity and the fact that it does not set out to do dingo history, or even a history of dingology. The sheer density of information, from science and beyond, past and present, and the comprehensiveness of its survey of dingological disputes, nevertheless combine to make *The Dingo Debate* valuable as both a reference work and a meaningful series of interventions.

Adam Gall

Department of Environmental Studies
New York University, Sydney

Michael Veitch: *Southern Surveyor: Stories from Onboard Australia’s Ocean Research Vessel*. CSIRO Publishing: Clayton, 2015. 243 + xxiii pp., illus., ISBN: 9781486302642 (PB), \$35.00.

The 66 m stern-trawling fishing factory *Callisto* was built in England in 1971. This northern hemisphere vessel was renamed *Southern Surveyor* by later Norwegian owners, a moniker that proved strangely apt after its move to the southern hemisphere as a research vessel for CSIRO fisheries and the Marine National Facility. The Australian working history of *Southern Surveyor* is the subject of this book.

To write it, author and broadcaster Michael Veitch interviewed members of *Southern Surveyor*’s crew from 1988 to 2013, and scientists, engineers, technicians and managers during the ship’s time as our only blue-water research vessel. These very readable accounts illuminate how much we do not know about the oceans. Cumulatively, they show the ways in which the value of scientific research is often unforeseeable. Little at sea goes exactly as it should, and opportunistic or accidental discoveries are plentiful in the book’s accounts of research done aboard this vessel. This serendipity is echoed during the lengthy analyses later undertaken ashore. When possible, the path of *Southern Surveyor* followed unexplored lines to build up data incrementally. In a sense, this book documents what we might regard as ‘normal discoveries’ from surveying areas not previously explored—if it is possible to think of discoveries as ‘normal’.

I started this review with doctoral student Kirrily Moore’s talk on octocorals, or ‘soft corals’, fresh in my mind. While speaking on ABC Radio National’s ‘Science Show’, she held an octocoral from the dark depth of a Tasmanian seamount. The specimen was taken during a CSIRO research voyage of *Southern Surveyor* south of Tasmania. Moore told host Robyn Williams that the taxonomy of these corals is so poor that 65 per cent of the species collected by the vessel could not be named.

Science is a long-term process requiring a long-term commitment. Like Moore, many of those interviewed for the book are working today on data or specimens gathered years or decades ago on the ship’s research voyages. ‘We’re still drawing on the data’, said marine geologist

Robin Beaman in 2015, citing ocean floor mapping he undertook on *Southern Surveyor* in 2007. 'It's like a library of ocean history, and a very detailed one at that'. 'They're the archives of the seafloor', Patrick De Deckker observed of marine sediments brought up during coring.

The ship worked 24 h a day. Details of its two daily shifts illustrate the intensity of work on board—for some scientists and crew, this could mean 17 to 20 h per day. Results of that work have included the discovery of shipwrecks, new seamounts and undersea volcanoes (80 in the past ten years), alongside a mass of detail on currents, ocean warming, marine debris and biomass of marine organisms.

Australia has the third-largest exclusive economic zone of any nation, 13.86 million square kilometres. Our climate and national productivity depend on what happens in the surrounding oceans. Yet we have only one dedicated blue-water research vessel—*Southern Surveyor*'s successor, the larger *Investigator*, which is funded to be at sea for only half of the year. Craig Johnson points out in his preface that Canada, a country of similar population size and coastline extent, has 16 blue-water research vessels of 40–98 m length.

Financing a ship is one thing: it costs \$50,000 a day to operate *Southern Surveyor*. It is another to fund the continuing preservation of data and specimens in order to make best use of them through the time-consuming process of further research. 'We have 900 m of sediment core stored here', says De Deckker in his university rooms. 'The business manager is not happy as they're taking up so much space. He wants me to get rid of them!'

Who would read this book? At one go, perhaps a small number—historians of science are not numerous. For anyone wanting to understand a working research ship, the interviews build up an evocative picture of the very different working environment provided by a research ship at sea. It will also appeal to those who worked on the vessel, especially as the book is 'a tribute to the ship and its people'. It is clear that, like the Antarctic supply ship *Nella Dan*, which was ignominiously scuttled at Macquarie Island in 1987, *Southern Surveyor* inspired a great deal of affection among those who sailed on her.

Excellent text boxes by Simon Torok present succinct explanations of subjects such as the

ship's organization, the East Australian Current, and ocean sequestration of carbon. With a short and lively chapter on each of the 36 interviewees, the book's format would seem ideal for website presentation.

Bernadette Hince
Australian National Dictionary Centre
Australian National University

Raden Dunbar: *The Secrets of the Anzacs: the Untold Story of Venereal Disease in the Australian Army, 1914–1919*. Scribe Publications: Melbourne, 2014. 274 + xi pp., illus., ISBN: 9781925106169 (PB), \$29.99.

Inspired by Peter Stanley's *Bad Characters: Sex, Crime, Mutiny, Murder and the Australian Imperial Force*, which sought to challenge stereotypes of the heroic Australian soldier, Raden Dunbar has married personal stories with a larger narrative to present an 'untold story' of venereal disease (VD) in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF).

Divided into three parts, this book first gives an account of the initial response to the problem in Egypt and the selection of infected soldiers to be returned to Australia. The second section tells the stories of five soldiers who contracted VD during the war, while the final part describes reactions to the problem in Australia.

This is a vast topic and Dunbar wisely limits the parameters of his study; however, the choice of those boundaries means that most of the history of VD in the AIF remains untold. In the first section of the book, Dunbar examines the initial outbreak of disease in Egypt at the end of 1914 and beginning of 1915. He discusses the first cautious attempts of the medical services to treat patients and prevent further infections. The text then traces the journey of the cases shipped back to Australia and interned in the Langwarrin camp on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula.

Dunbar does not exclude the Western Front from his study, yet the transmission, prevention and treatment of VD there is not discussed and *The Secrets of the Anzacs* therefore misses the processes in place to treat soldiers at regimental and corps level in France and England. Given that the majority of cases were contracted when soldiers were on leave in London and Paris, this is a surprising omission. As a result the work of Lieutenant Colonel George Raffan, the Principal

Advisor on Venereal Disease to the Director of Medical Services in the AIF and author of the Australian Army Medical Corps' innovative prevention and treatment program on the Western Front, is not mentioned. Consequently, this book could more accurately be described as the story of 'the *Wiltshire* boys'—named for the troopship they returned upon—and Langwarrin Camp, rather than the story of VD in the Australian Army.

The second part of *The Secrets of the Anzacs* is devoted to telling the stories of five men sent back to Australia on the *Wiltshire*. In these chapters Dunbar places each man's medical history in the broader context of his war service and life both before and after the war. In doing so Dunbar examines the effect VD had beyond its immediate medical consequences. These stories include men changing their names to evade disciplinary action, encountering problems with the law, navigating relationships with their wives and the battle that a widow underwent attempting to claim a pension and a Gallipoli Medal through the Department of Repatriation. These stories provide a human face to a problem often discussed in abstract terms.

As a result, this book raises broader questions regarding the ethical writing of medical history. Dunbar notes that the army was reluctant to correct this war widow on the issue of her husband's military service record if that would reveal his history with VD. This then begs the question: should historians publish the medical histories of ex-servicemen without de-identifying the details? Dunbar is clearly sympathetic to the men whose stories he has told, and attempts to de-identify the sources could de-personalize the stories weakening one of the strengths of this book. I nevertheless have concerns about the use of individuals' medical histories in this way.

More troubling is the publication of a list in the bibliography of all venereal cases transported from Suez to Melbourne on the *Wiltshire* between August and September 1915. These cases are not discussed individually in the narrative. Publishing this list, including names and archive file details, effectively attaches the label 'VD' to each of these men whose medical histories would not otherwise be known. Whilst these service records are all digitised and available online, all of the men listed have died, and the stigma associated with sexually transmitted

diseases has lessened, the only reason their medical histories are available is because the men served in the armed forces. The implications of these practices on the ethical practice of writing wartime medical history are worthwhile issues for historians to reflect upon, not just with regard to the venereal contagions.

The Secrets of the Anzacs makes liberal use of the photograph collections of various archives, especially the Australian War Memorial, and it also includes numerous drawings by one of the men discussed in the book, Ernest Dunbar—the great uncle of the book's author. These images, combined with the stories told, evoke sympathy for men whose momentary decisions had long-lasting personal—and archival—consequences.

Alexia Moncrieff
Department of History
University of Adelaide

Pratik Chakrabarti: *Medicine and Empire, 1600–1960*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK, 2014. 246 + xxxiv pp., illus., ISBN: 9780230276369 (PB), UK£21.99.

Covering an ambitious timescale of 360 years, this short work is positioned as an introductory textbook for undergraduate students of history. Medical historian Pratik Chakrabarti seeks to interweave threads in the growth of imperialism and colonialism with the history of medicine, creating useful linkages. While the development of medicine in a colonial setting is its main premise, *Medicine and Empire* leans more towards outlining the voracious quest for empire and the impact of colonialism on indigenous populations. The definition of 'medicine' in this context is very broad, ranging from practices of caring for the sick, to therapeutics (drugs), psychiatry, public health, laboratory research and epidemiology.

Well researched and enlisting a wide range of both primary and secondary sources, Chakrabarti has arranged this work thematically, rather than geographically or temporally. While this structure has strengths in outlining areas of focus, the result was fragmentation of the text. Students in particular would appreciate a logical progression through the various stages in the development of colonial medicine within

each regional setting. A geographical arrangement would have assisted the 'flow' of the book, making it easier to grapple with the underlying concepts of colonial medicine. A deeper exploration of the impact and historical theory of colonialism, situated in different regions and time frames, could also have then been attempted.

Three main geographical areas are explored, broadly corresponding to the reach of the Spanish, Portuguese and British Empires. Although the territorial acquisitions of Germany and France are also briefly touched upon, British material predominates. Africa, South America and sub-continental India ('Asia') are extensively covered, focusing primarily on the equatorial regions or 'tropics'. As a result, the development of tropical medicine—with its emphasis on bacteriology, parasitology and germ theory—is a prime area of focus. It is disappointing, however, to find that the Australasian or broader Asian-Pacific region has been almost completely omitted.

During the height of Victorian imperial power in the nineteenth century, Australia was a well-established British colony, and New Zealand was the youngest of the colonies, having been placed under crown control in 1840. There is next to no discussion of colonial medicine in a wider Pacific context. Only one mention was made of Australia, in a paragraph in Chapter Nine on bacteriology. This paragraph related to government controls in the early to mid-twentieth century to keep 'foreign germs' out of the country, which was a thinly veiled measure to exclude Chinese immigrants and to preserve the prevailing 'white Australia' policy. There was no further exploration of this aspect of colonialism and its relationship to a wider context within Australasia.

Although missing a large part of the nineteenth-century British Empire, Chakrabarti's work nevertheless brings together key concepts in imperial history and colonialism, and its use of medicine as a tool to facilitate the quest for Empire. As an introductory textbook, it is a good overview of the development of medicine and its links to colonial history, and students will find it a useful resource.

Lea Doughty
University of Otago

Philip A. Clarke: *Discovering Aboriginal Plant Use: the Journeys of an Australian Anthropologist*. Rosenberg Publishing: NSW, 2014. 192 pp., illus., ISBN: 9781925078220 (HB), \$49.95.

Some years ago I had the pleasure of reviewing Philip A. Clarke's 2008 monograph *Aboriginal Plant Collectors: Botanists and Australian Aboriginal People in the Nineteenth Century*. I was delighted, therefore, to be offered a review copy of his most recent publication, *Discovering Aboriginal Plant Use: the Journeys of an Australian Anthropologist*.

The volumes are similar in format: A4, hard-cover, with numerous full-colour illustrations. There is also a small amount of overlap in content with regard to historical records of Aboriginal plant use. However, *Discovering Aboriginal Plant Use* is based primarily on Clarke's own experiences as an anthropologist with an abiding interest in ethnobotany. Employed at the South Australian Museum from 1982 to 2011 as a museum assistant, collection manager, curator, and finally head of anthropology, he travelled extensively within Australia in order to undertake fieldwork, contribute to family history research, help local museums develop displays, advise communities on managing cultural heritage, and discuss the repatriation of artefacts, archival collections and ancestral remains. Clarke draws on his field journals from these travels to illustrate changes and continuities in plant use in the Aboriginal communities visited, offering broader insights into their daily lives and spiritual beliefs in the process.

The book is divided into three parts, each devoted to a different region of Australia. Part One, 'South-eastern Australia' includes chapters on the Adelaide Plains, Lower Murray, South-east South Australia and South-western Victoria. Part Two, 'Arid Interiors', covers Eastern Central Australia and the Western and Northern Deserts. Part Three, 'Monsoonal Northern Regions', takes the reader across the dry monsoonal tropics (Kimberley and Cape York Peninsula, with a detour to Timor-Leste), to the Western Top End and Arnhem Land. The individual chapters outline Clarke's fieldwork in specific areas; each concludes with 'detailed accounts of two plants that make the region distinctive in terms of its Aboriginal ethnobotany'. In addition

to their scientific names, colloquial Australian English names and Aboriginal names are given for each plant discussed. Clarke's own photographs vividly illustrate his descriptions of plants, landscapes and people, though as a self-acknowledged spatial incompetent I confess I would have welcomed more maps.

Clarke takes his readers on a journey of discovery, describing the circumstances of his arrival in each fieldwork location, the appearance and character of the landscape, and his interactions with Aboriginal interlocutors. His conversational style is both informative and entertaining. Unique glimpses of daily life in the communities visited are paired with often humorous anecdotes illustrating the joys and frustrations of undertaking field research: having one's camp raided by feral donkeys, for example, or matching Aboriginal informants' knowledge and recollections with historical records to resolve the identity of particular plants. I was left with a deep respect for Aboriginal people's creative and dynamic use of Australian (and, in some cases, introduced) species for food, construction, medicine, sorcery, and spiritual guidance, and a renewed realisation of how little I really know this country I call home.

Hilary Howes

The Australian National University

Bryan Grieg Fry: *Venom Doc: the Edgiest, Darkest and Strangest Natural History Memoir Ever*. Hachette Australia: Sydney, 2015. 344 pp., illus., ISBN: 9780733634222 (PB), \$32.99.

When a scientific memoir reads like a rock star's autobiography, something unusual is going on. In toxinologist Bryan Fry's *Venom Doc*, there's as much to learn by stepping back from the book as there is in its sequence of narrative jolts.

American-born and raised free-range, Fry's adolescent snake-chasing echoes the apprenticeship of many a nascent naturalist, from medical scientist Frank Macfarlane Burnet to evolutionary biologist Rick Shine. Earning an undergraduate degree in molecular biology, Fry moved to Australia to complete his doctorate on the biochemistry of snake venoms at the University of Queensland. A self-confessed alpha male 'armed with the snake catcher's equivalent of being a 007

agent'—a National Parks and Wildlife Service licence—he insists upon catching and milking many of his lethal subjects. 'I copped my first snakebite two months after arrival', he adds.

The book is thereafter punctuated by a parade of further envenomations, described variously as excruciating, debilitating or hallucinogenic. Fry's expertise in psychoactive substances, from Dutch marijuana to Mexican psychedelic mushrooms, soon becomes abundantly evident.

What unfolds, nevertheless, is the rapid development of his career. Intellectually, Fry diversified into sea-snakes and other poisonous marine creatures, including deep-sea fish and polar octopuses. His most profound contributions to biology, however, lay in establishing that various varanids are venomous. Encompassing goannas and a diversity of monitor lizards, Fry's research incorporated field biology, biochemistry, molecular biology or 'venome' studies, and even magnetic resonance imaging of decapitated Komodo dragon heads. In 2006, *Nature* published his team's work linking the evolution of venom in lizards and snakes. Global scientific recognition for these endeavours has encompassed a series of local and international post-doctoral and project grants, including a coveted Future Fellowship from the Australian Research Council (ARC).

Readers seeking droll advice on achieving scientific advancement, in the vein of Peter Doherty's *How to Win the Nobel Prize*, will be disappointed. Fry's book likewise lacks the overt pedagogical value of American physicist Richard Feynman's thoughtful oeuvre, although they share a similarly sardonic and self-reflexive tone. In fact, *Venom Doc* most reminded me of *Thirteen Tonne Theory*, the wry autobiography of Australian rock musician Mark Seymour. In short, the message lies in the journey.

Treading a fine line between adrenaline and ambition, populism and politics, Fry's career speaks volumes about the modern demand for 'approachable' science. His role in creating the YouTube phenomenon 'Monster Bug Wars' is as important to his trajectory as appearing on-stage with 'Ollie' the olive python adorning his shoulders, whilst receiving his ARC Queen Elizabeth II Fellowship. Participating in BBC documentaries likely aided Fry's receipt of Australian Antarctic Division funding even if—as the buff author quips beneath a photo of one

such safari—it ‘was of course scientifically necessary for me to be shirtless on camera’. If this machismo-driven variant of heroic individualism sits uneasily with the incremental teamwork approach that typifies so much contemporary bioscience, it clearly retains a powerful cultural and political appeal.

Doubtless many readers—like myself—will soon wonder what they have let themselves in for. This is a trade book written for a wide audience, only rarely delving into the complexity of modern bioscience and the labyrinthine administration of universities, funding bodies and transnational field expeditions. The author’s personal proclivities, and occasionally unpalatable terminological choices (‘functional in that ten-dollar hooker sort of way’), do not align with narrative norms in scientific memoirs. Yet there is much to learn from *Venom Doc*, particularly if one is willing to read between the punchlines. I came away from this memoir both entertained and educated, if not yet ready to emulate the author’s enthusiasms.

Peter Hobbins
Department of History
University of Sydney

Anita Hansen and Margaret Davies (eds.):

The Library at the End of the World: Natural Science and its Illustrators. Royal Society of Tasmania: Hobart, 2014. 234 + iv p., illus., ISBN: 9780991516208 (PB), \$50.00.

The Royal Society of Tasmania, founded in 1843, was not the first scientific society founded in Australia, but it is the oldest still surviving. In its early years the Society established a museum, a botanic garden and, in the manner of such organizations, a substantial library. The present volume is not a history or celebration of the Royal Society of Tasmania, but of its library.

This is not the only book produced in recent years that showcases the literary treasures in the collection of its parent body: in 2013 Museum Victoria also produced such a work. In publishing these volumes both the Royal Society of Tasmania and Museum Victoria have emphasized how works that formed the core of their respective libraries can illuminate the story of

the European discovery of the native flora and fauna of Australia.

The Rare Books Collection of the Royal Society of Tasmania is now housed in the Morris Miller Library of the University of Tasmania. It is from these originals that illustrations were chosen for inclusion in this publication. The books themselves are not unique to this collection, and there are few surprises among those selected for inclusion in this volume. Plates from works by John Gould, Louisa Anne Meredith, Johannes Keulemans, Helena and Harriet Scott and Robert Fitzgerald are all here. So too are the publications that resulted from the visit of HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror* to Tasmania during the 1839–43 voyage. It was a pleasure to see plates reproduced from Frederick McCoy’s *Prodromus of the Zoology of Victoria*, the lithographs from which—printed by the Victorian Government Printing Office—are of world-class standard.

Illustrations reproduced have been carefully selected to highlight the work of an individual artist or to show the collaboration between scientist and artist in their scientific endeavour. In several cases these illustrations accompanied the first published description of the animal or plant depicted. The frequency with which work by individual artists appears in this book is testimony to their importance in the history of Australian natural history and to the skill of the creator. For some of the early illustrations, comments about the probable state of the specimen from which the drawing was made (misshapen and lacking colour, or even missing digits) are offered to explain why some animals don’t appear as they actually are.

The Library at the End of the World is arranged in broad sections, with vascular plants and lichens followed by crustaceans, insects and other classes of animals. Each section is introduced by a scientist whose specialty is that group, describing the course of its formal discovery in Australia and placing the selected illustrations within that history. This is followed by short paragraphs on the work of each of the 36 artists represented. In some cases an artist appears where they might not be expected. Louisa Anne Meredith is as well known for her illustrations of plants and of animals. Yet while several of her plates are included with the botany section, we do not learn of her work until the amphibians where

her radiant *Rana aurea* in conference among the lily pads is reproduced.

While orchids earn their own section, several groups are noticeable for their absence: algae, fungi and from the marine world, molluscs and cephalopods. This absence probably says as much about the discovery and description of Australian biota in these groups as it does about the contents of the Society's Rare Books Collection. There is a comprehensive bibliography, which lists not only the works referred to in the text, but also books and articles providing further information. This compilation includes biographies of some of the key players, papers by scientists that offer an expansion of some of the science discussed in the book (for instance, the Rush family Restionaceae is now recognized as being a Gondwanan family) and relevant websites. The bibliography is arranged in the same order as the sections of the book, with the result that details are repeated in several sections. Also included is a 'List of figures' in which the captions—without any explanatory notes—are repeated.

This is a handsomely produced volume and the plates are beautifully reproduced. There is little here that is new, and it does not pretend to be a comprehensive view of the history of colonial discovery of Australian plants and animals. It does, however, present some temptations to explore this fascinating world further.

Helen M. Cohn
eScholarship Research Centre
University of Melbourne

Richard Larkins: *New Tricks: Reflections on a Life in Medicine and Tertiary Education*.
Monash University Publishing: Clayton,
2015. 264 + viii pp., illus., ISBN:
9781922235435 (PB), \$39.95.

It is a reality of educational history that we rely on the memoirs of leaders for much of our understanding of behind-the-scenes debates in what may seem—to the historian faced with an archive of university minutes—faceless institutions. The tradition of such autobiographies in Australia kicked off in the 1960s when controversial Vice-Chancellor A. P. Rowe of the University of Adelaide published *If the Gown Fits*. While not every Vice-Chancellor since then

has released a memoir, we have enough of them to detect a pattern. The author's formative years are sketched, their early career and intellectual influences are acknowledged, then they re-fight several key battles of their Vice-Chancellorship—this time with the satisfying authority of a sole reporter.

Richard Larkins' recent contribution to this genre fits the type impeccably. Despite this template, *New Tricks* offers useful material in the history of medical education, higher education and Monash University.

Larkins' own training in Medicine at the University of Melbourne in the 1950s gives a glimpse of medical education in the period, including tantalizing titbits on the lecturing habits of the era, with some famous names outed as terrible teachers.

Later, when he describes re-thinking the traditional curriculum, it becomes evident that medical education has been prepared, more than any other discipline that I can think of, to embrace pedagogical and technological innovation. Despite considerable consternation amongst staff, who had been teaching their disciplines for years, Problem Based Learning (PBL) was implemented. Its impact was softened as Larkins—rightly, I think—encountered its limitations, as well as its strengths. Many must have felt that they were discarding longstanding and sacred teaching practices, but Larkins demonstrates how medicine has been uniquely prepared to carefully think through what its practitioners do and find better ways to teach that skill-set, rather than merely reproducing conventional disciplinary teaching and learning habits.

In the process, Larkins reveals—somewhat inadvertently, I suspect—many of the social norms and hierarchies within and between medical practice, research and education over the second half of the twentieth century. If a word cloud were to be created for this book, 'prestigious' would earn a dominant place. For historians of the medical profession reading 'against the grain', this will be gold.

Medicine's preoccupation with prestige is unfortunately also reflected in some of Larkins' anecdotes. The book shows that he has been a good leader whose work has, among other things, sought real change in the health and welfare of Aboriginal people. Perhaps as importantly,

he also campaigned for alternative methods of community engagement when medical institutions interact with Indigenous groups.

The author, nevertheless, sometimes assumes the reader's sympathy in ways that I found stretched my capacity to offer it. Larkins' integrity in flying economy rather than business class was ill-rewarded, we are told, by his misfortune in sitting beside an obese, chatty woman. When Larkins and his wife Caroline accidentally spent the night in a homeless men's shelter, the reader is expected to feel sorriest for their discomfort, rather than for those who require such a refuge. Larkins describes undertaking 'exciting research' and its rewards as his career progressed, but not the sick or needy beneficiaries of this work—other than himself.

These are perhaps petty grievances in a genre where the reader is required to be on the author's side. But I could not help but wonder about the culture of the profession as it was presented in this book, where the homeless, the poor, the overweight and often the sick remain greyed out in the background, emerging only when they interfere with the profession's brightly painted, prestigious world.

Despite these glitches, Larkins' account covers important ground in the recent history of medical and higher education. The need for medical leaders to stand up to the tobacco industry, the problems as universities developed commercial values, the challenge of ensuring that higher education has a purpose, not just a profit, are well told in the second half of the book. There are indeed useful lessons in there for the present, as well as the future: making sure that our institutions embody real value has been key to Larkins' most important contribution to Monash university, and to the culture of medical and university leadership in Australia.

Hannah Forsyth
Australian Catholic University, Sydney

Hannah Forsyth: *A History of the Modern Australian University*. New South Publishing: Sydney, 2014. 279 + viii pp., ISBN: 9781742234120 (PB), \$34.99.

In late 2015, the new Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, called for an 'ideas boom' to supersede Australia's rapidly fading resources

boom. Our universities, he said, were to become drivers of innovation. No doubt for some this will sound like the latest instalment in a familiar slide away from a traditional idea of the university as the defender of national culture. Hannah Forsyth, author of the defiantly upbeat *A History of the Modern Australian University*, would see it differently. Her book insists that there never has been a single idea of the university and that Australia's universities have been 'markedly practical' from their inception.

In this highly readable history, Forsyth traces the range of functions that Australian universities have played, often simultaneously—as trainers of professionals, builders of the nation, agents of colonialism and of foreign policy, sites of military research, producers of citizens, safe-guarders of democracy, preservers of culture, and—most recently—as knowledge factories central to the national economy.

This repudiation of the clichéd belief in a single historical 'idea of the university' is just one of many correctives that thread through this history (or perhaps, one suspects, even *motivate* it). Another idea Forsyth is keen to dispel is that there was once a golden age in which governments gave universities money to spend as they pleased: 'It never happened', she says bluntly. She is likewise critical of the perception that academics are powerless, taking issue with the way that the tertiary sector is often painted as being acted upon by external forces. This, she claims, both underestimates the capacity and wiliness of academics themselves (whom she describes as 'clever people making what [are] sometimes self-serving choices') and oversimplifies the multitude of forces that shape the higher education landscape.

Forsyth's history—which is, she insists, neither a jeremiad nor a celebration—condenses over one hundred years into a work that is at once scholarly and accessible. Beginning with a quick treatment of nineteenth-century educational institutions, it moves rapidly to its real focus—the period from World War II on. The historical narrative is organized quasi-thematically: Chapter Three, on the 1950s, is about universities' relationship to the nation; Chapter Four, on the 1960s and 1970s, focuses on student radicalism. This approach works well to highlight key issues and arguments, but occasionally obscures the historical narrative (e.g. in Chapter Three).

Several observations recur: the tendency of universities to protect and reinforce their own power; their role in developing and sustaining Australia's military capacities; their links with professions and with industry; the perennial tensions between universities and governments; and the link between knowledge and nation-building.

The book strenuously refuses to romanticize either universities or academics, who are consistently presented as fallible but resourceful. Forsyth thus refutes the idea of a golden age of Australian universities, noting that if such an age did exist it was in any case built on a gift economy that enabled nepotism, corruption and elitism. Audit culture, rather than being presented as an unreasonable and burdensome result of neoliberal ideologies, figures more as an attempt to call this gift economy to account—albeit an attempt that has now wrought its own damage.

It's a convincing set of arguments, mounted via a historical narrative that is drawn with admirable command and clarity and unostentatiously underpinned by an impressive web of primary and secondary research. Forsyth's historical method results in revealing continuities where others might find gaps, noting thresholds like the first time an Australian university advertised for students (the University of Sydney, in 1980), and in the occasional pure nugget, like

the University of New England students doing an exam in Classical Marxism who drew their chairs together to complete it collectively, 'in the true spirit of Marxism', while the university called the police.

All this is put together with a vividness and panache that make the book a pleasure to read. Forsyth has a particular gift for concrete examples and colourful metaphor: 'Even running away to join the circus could now take a university degree: Swinburne University of Technology offers a Bachelor of Circus Arts'.

This, then, is a knowledgeable, readable and fair book—perhaps, for some readers even infuriatingly fair! By the end Forsyth had convinced me that Australia's universities are in pretty good shape. As someone who has studied academic *labour* more than the university as an institution, I remain to be convinced that academics themselves are in equally good shape. If Forsyth's optimistic picture of universities and the disquieting scholarly literature on academic labour are both to be believed, then it may be that the healthy state of Australian universities has been bought at the price of the health of those who work in them.

Ruth Barcan
Department of Gender and Cultural Studies
University of Sydney