Peace, Love & World War:

The Denmans

Empire and Australia 1910–1917

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CANBERRA **MUSEUM + GALLERY**

Director's Foreword

In June 1911, a British family of four commenced the long sea journey from England to Australia. The two children, six-year-old Thomas and four-year-old Judith, travelled with their chaperones via the Cape of Good Hope. Their parents Lord (Thomas) Denman and Lady (Gertrude) Denman took a different and more direct route. Accompanied by their own sizeable retinue, they embarked from Marseille and took the searingly hot journey through the Suez Canal and Red Sea.

Tom and Trudie landed in Melbourne in late July 1911 and were driven in an open-topped carriage from St Kilda Pier to Government House in the Domain. The children were still at sea.

One can only imagine the trepidation and excitement that this family felt during their 'split-in-two' journey across the world. After a spectacularly productive two years, an exhausted Trudie would return to Britain in 1913. Tom was back home, prior to completing his post, a year later in 1914.

Australia's fifth Governor-General and his wife had arrived at a critical time for the recently – federated Australia. National projects were underway in transport, industry, defence and trade and the country was also starting to develop its own cultural identity. Now emerging from its role as a British colony, it was looking outward to gain more independence on the world stage. But, alongside this growing wealth and optimism, looking back, we also see the irony of the country's crushing discrimination against Aboriginal Australians in this period. Recognition of this sad story, in the same frame as the happier one of the Denmans' contributions, was to come much later in the history of Australia and its capital.

The Denmans were far from being an aloof couple. They enjoyed great popular support while in Australia. Trudie contributed substantially to the success of Australian bush nursing and significantly to the National Council of Women. Lord Denman strongly supported the development of Australia's defence forces and would became a lifelong advocate for Australia on his return to Britain.

The fascinating exhibition that accompanies this catalogue, *Peace, Love and World War: The Denmans, 1911-1917, Empire and Australia,* explores both the Denmans' time in Australia and the period of their immediate return to Britain as it faced the prospect of world war.

But it is for their role in the official naming of Canberra that the Denmans have come to particular prominence in the Australian story. The official ceremony took place on Capital Hill on 12 March 1913 at the laying of the foundation stones of Canberra's commencement column.


SEATED (reading from left to right).—Lady Barttelot, His Excellency the Governor-General, Her Excellency Lady Denman, Miss Quirk.
reading from left to right.—Major Quilter (Military Secretary), Mr E. V. Vernon (Private Secretary), Captain Nutting, A.D.C., Captain Stewart-Richardson, A.D.C., Mr Vic
GROUP AT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HOUSE, PHOTOGRAPHED ON THE DAY OF THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S ARRIVAL. (Photo. by T.

1. INTRODUCTIONS AFTER LANDING ON THE ST. KILDA PIER. 2. PRESENTING A BOUQUET TO LADY DE' of St. Kilda). 4. LORD AND LADY DENMAN IN THEIR CARRIAGE. 5
THE NEW GOVERNOR-GENERAL: ARRIVAL IN MELBOU

Photographs of the arrival in Australia of the Denman Vice-Regal party, 31 July 1911, taken at St Kilda Pier and Government House for *Table Talk* magazine.
From the Lady Barttelot album, Collection of Lady Margot Burrell

One hundred years later, in 2013, a highlight of Canberra's centenary year was a toast to this earlier ceremony. It was preceded by reflections from cherished Aboriginal Elder Aunty Agnes Shea, from Prime Minister Julia Gillard, from ACT Chief Minister Katy Gallagher and from Governor-General Quentin Bryce. This conjunction of four of the nation's most influential women as they reflected on our centenary, contributed of course to a highly resonant event.

It not only celebrated the progress of Australian women over one hundred years, a story which Trudie herself would have greatly relished, but it also recognised the importance of Aboriginal Australians in our nation. On our centenary occasion, Aunty Agnes Shea asked those present to imagine the difference if, one hundred years ago, we had possessed the understanding we now have of the traditional owners of Australia, and of their connection to this ancient land.

Importantly the event also presented a powerful echo-through-time. As a part of that distant ceremony in 1913 Trudie had the role of reading aloud, for the first time and to great applause, the official name of the new capital. Her strong and elegant articulation of 'Canberra' was henceforth adopted as the official pronunciation. Governor General Bryce, on repeating the word 'Canberra' with equal resonance 100 years later, explained her understanding of the word as '...a hybrid... which connects both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sources'. She claimed it as 'a name rooted in traditions – of the land and of local communities'.

I encourage you to reflect on the idea of the 'hybrid' as you explore this wonderful exhibition, whether you visit it on site or online. We may come to share an important modern insight as we ask ourselves whether both national identity and personal identity are not both fundamentally hybrid at their core.

Though the Denmans' stay in Australia was but a short slice of a lifetime, their individual contribution shaped Australia's national identity as much as their individual experiences of Australia must have shaped them personally. Their influence contributed to the way in which the British people would view Australia in the following period.

Canberra Museum and Gallery would like to thank the many contributors to this exhibition for their generous support. Thanks are particularly due to our inimitable guest curator, Dr David Headon, and to CMAG's Assistant Director, Exhibitions and Collections, Mark Bayly. We also are very grateful to the many institutional and private lenders to the exhibition; to Her Excellency Menna Rawlings CMG, British High Commissioner to Australia, for her opening of the exhibition in Canberra; and to sponsors King O'Malley's, and Denman Prospect - a part of Capital Estate Developments. Without the encouragement and generosity of these many sponsors and collaborators, this splendid exhibition and catalogue would not have been possible.

Shane Breynard
Director, Canberra Museum and Gallery and ACT Historic Places

Lady Denman opens the 'small golden casket' revealing the name of Australia's capital city, 12 March 1913, Canberra's 'Great Christening'. Minister O'Malley made sure the casket, then presented to Lady Denman, could be used as a cigarette case. It was, for the rest of her life.
Digital reproduction from a photograph
Collection of John Stevenson
Photograph by David Paterson

The naming case presented to Lady Denman, 12 March 1913.
Collection of Lord Richard Denman and Sir Charles Burrell
Photograph by David Paterson

Introduction

Some years ago, renowned historian Manning Clark posed a question which has challenged a generation of cultural commentators ever since: why did such a progressive people in the nineteenth century – the aspirational, adventurous inhabitants of Australia's six expanding colonies – become so conservative in the twentieth century as citizens of a new Commonwealth? While the answers are complex, what we know for sure is that they are largely to be found embedded in the twenty-five years before the outbreak of the Great War. Researching the cultural and political currents of this volatile period from, say, the centenary year 1888 to 1914, one can better understand both the scale of the achievements that preceded it, and the terrible impact of the global conflagration that would follow.

The intrepid optimism so evident in the second half of the nineteenth century, from the discovery of gold in 1851 to Federation in 1901, was extinguished by war. An era elegantly described by Henry Lawson as 'those grand days when hopes were high' would be overwhelmed by death, grief and a pervasive trauma that exerted an impact on almost every family across the continent for decades.[i]

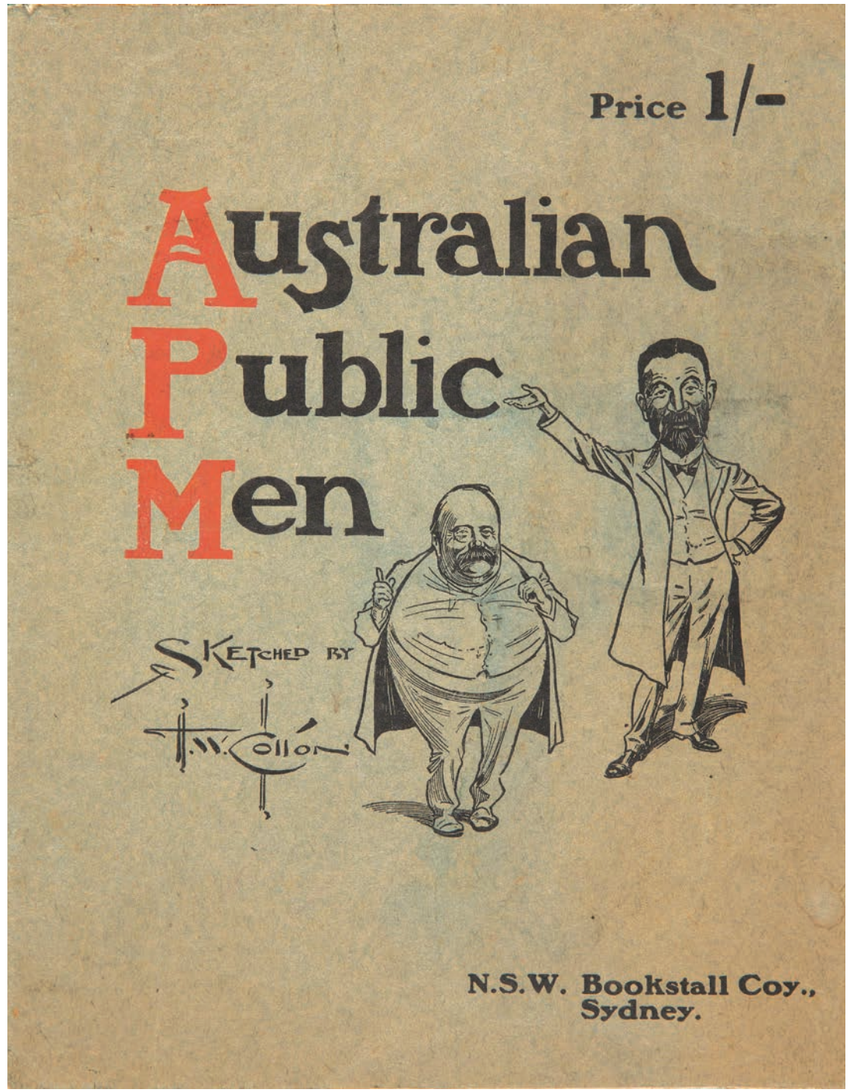
How did this happen? Why did our young nation, so distant from Europe, willingly, enthusiastically embrace the prospect of fighting in an Imperial war on the other side of the world? To answer these questions, this exhibition showcases an array of historical photographs, letters, certificates, petitions, addresses, artefacts and ephemera of the period, much of it on display for the first time. The prime focus of the exhibition is intentionally different, for the key years, 1910-17, are explored through the prism of Australia's fifth (at best marginalised, at worst ignored) Governor-General, Lord Thomas Denman, and his wife, the high-achieving Lady Gertrude Denman. Trudie Denman.

This power couple, who spent a bare three years in Australia, from July 1911 to May 1914, are familiar to Canberrans, for they were the rather ostentatiously dressed Vice-Regals doing the honours in the national capital's Foundation Stones and Naming ceremonies on 12 March 1913. The Denmans' unfolding story, here and on their return to a Europe about to be embroiled in the Great War, contains a number of revealing socio-cultural narratives. These narratives, the exhibition's core, provide many 'first-hand' insights into the rapidly evolving Australian nation at a formative time in its early history, helping to explain a marked shift in attitude that in the new century renewed the primacy of the Imperial connection and with it, for most Australians, the British monarchy itself.

The core narratives to be explored are:

- as necessary background, the significant social, cultural and political achievements in the Australian colonies before Federation;
- the continually shifting loyalties within a fledgling Australian democracy desperate to consolidate just what it espoused, valued and stood for, but also vulnerable to the full range of Imperial propaganda;
- the barely developed roles and responsibilities of the Governor-General, the King's representative, at such a precarious time in Empire history;
- the singular importance of the defence debate, in Britain and Australia, as the power and influence of the German empire increased, and war loomed;
- the engaging personalities of Thomas and Trudie Denman, whose lives and loves contain a few surprises; and,
- most importantly, the impact of the crucial years in question, 1910-17, on a cluster of important individuals in public life with whom the Denmans came in close contact during a tumultuous, war-torn era – including Australian Prime Ministers George Reid, Andrew Fisher, Joseph Cook and William Morris (Billy) Hughes; Labor Ministers George Pearce and King O'Malley; and that dutiful Empire servant and pre-eminent member of the British Empire League in Australia, (Sir) William McMillan.

The interactions between these notable individuals, their values and priorities, tell us a great deal about a period in Australian (and Imperial) history and cultural life that needs to be better understood. The Australian War Memorial's recent promotional assertions to be the national institution that tells *'the* Australian story' and represents the soul of the nation must be contested. Such lofty claims diminish many of the elusive truths of our past.



Prime Ministers, Alfred Deakin and George Reid, caricatured on the cover of Australian Public Men,
NSW Bookstall Co., c.1904
Collection of Kerrilyn O'Donnell, daughter of Eleanor O'Donnell, who was the grand-daughter of (Sir) William McMillan.
Photograph by David Paterson

George Lambert (1873-1930), *The Rt Hon Sir George Reid GCB GCMB KC*, 1913-14
Historic Memorials Collection, Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra, ACT

Background Stories

The starting point for this exhibition is the Denmans, Thomas and Gertrude, and the respective family backgrounds, influences, expectations and ambitions that in certain important ways shaped their response to, and life in Australia. For when they landed in Melbourne at the end of July 1911, with a large retinue and an assortment of home comforts, the Denmans were being assessed by a quizzical public from the time they stepped ashore at St Kilda Pier. Thomas was the fifth Australian Governor-General in only ten or so years, and many locals were beginning to feel slighted by the rapid turnover, the more so since his immediate predecessor, the reckless, lecherous Lord Dudley, was deemed the worst of the bunch. Each of the first four Governors-General, conservative Tories, exhibited varying degrees of pomposity. Thomas and Trudie Denman were different.

He was born in 1874, educated at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst (in the same class as Winston Churchill, commencing a personal rivalry that would continue well into the next century), and he became the third Baron Denman after the death of his great uncle in 1894. A Boer War veteran who was wounded in action and repatriated back to England, Denman had the title but little money, so when he tied the knot with Gertrude Mary Pearson in 1903, the newspapers described it as 'the marriage of the year'.[ii] This was probably because of Gertrude's family. Her father, Weetman Pearson, later Baron and then Viscount Cowdray, was one of the richest men in the world at that time because of the vast wealth he had accumulated, from virtually nothing, in the engineering and construction industry during the later part of the Victorian era.

When Thomas Denman was being considered for the Australian post by the Colonial Secretary, Lord Lewis Harcourt, the money he had married into did his chances no harm at all. Indeed, correspondence between the Colonial Secretary and the youngish aspirant confirms an understanding that Denman would bring fifteen thousand pounds per year to the job, with the prospect of calling on more money if required.[iii] Personal wealth was a desirable element in the CV of any overseas British representative of the time, and it had been that way since the early 1880s. For the Asquith Liberal government, in power in England from 1908-15, affluent Liberals were thin on the ground. Tom was something of an exception. Perhaps because of this, when he was announced as the next Australian Governor-General, expectations of him both in England and Australia were not high. Some even suspected he'd bought the post.

Trudie, born in 1884, was home-educated for long periods of time and somewhat solitary as a child, though she did have a stint at a finishing school in Dresden, Germany, as a sixteen-year-old. Her parents loved to travel by themselves; their talented daughter soaked up her father's superb library, with its full range of the classic British novels, travel books and tracts on philosophy, history and economics. She liked Herbert Spencer, and developed a strong social conscience that motivated her throughout her life.[iv]

Trudie's parents were entrenched Liberals, Weetman well-known as one of the Party's most generous donors, and Lady Annie Pearson enjoying a reputation as one of London's best-known hostesses of political soirees. Described by Trudie's biographer as 'a little woman of indomitable spirit and great force of character', mother Annie was a 'stalwart feminist'.[v] By her late teens, Trudie was herself a feminist and suffragist, and she felt comfortable in the atmosphere of political life. When Thomas Denman, a talented and attractive Liberal in the Tory-dominated House of Lords proposed marriage, Trudie initially refused him. However, outside pressures, including family pressures, and possibly growing mutual affection eventually won out. In Australia, in private, the marriage of eight years threatened to fall apart.

Balcombe Place (West Sussex), a Victorian-Tudor style home designed by Henry Clutton in 1856 and purchased by Sir Weetman Pearson for his daughter, Trudie.
The Denmans lived in Balcombe Place in the early years of their marriage. After the Great War, when they lived apart, it would become Trudie's country home, historically associated with her inspirational work for the Women's Institutes and Women's Land Army.
From the Lady Barttelot album, Collection of Lady Margot Burrell

The Denmans in Australia

During their sojourn in Australia, the Denmans in public life defied the nay-sayers, establishing a reputation for informality, good humour, generosity and an impressive work ethic, despite Thomas' well-documented hay fever and asthma. They liked the locals every bit as much as the locals liked them. They were both good sports, and very good at sport. In young, post-colonial Australia, these were attributes as attractive as they were admired. Tom played a handy game of golf and a very good game of Royal Tennis – and he could ride with the best of them, making a name for himself in 1890s England as a steeplechaser, one of the country's best and bravest. It was a skill that served him well in the heat of conflict in South Africa.

Trudie was no shrinking violet either, refusing to be a mere decoration of her husband despite the frustrating formal constrictions placed on her as the Vice-Regal consort. One of the first women in Britain to obtain a car licence and a heavy smoker (dismaying many toffy Australian attendees of Vice-Regal functions), she was a capable rider, keen golfer and gifted tennis player. She also had a genuine love of the arts and sense of community service, both of which she could act upon in Australia. Her personal support benefited groups as diverse as the Try Society charity, the Burnside Presbyterian Homes, the Melbourne Women's Hospital, young women in public and Catholic schools, a number of orphanages, and even lost dogs in Melbourne, for which she established a shelter for the first time. She took a particular interest in extending the work of her predecessor, Lady Dudley, who began the Victorian Bush Nursing Association. This 'hands-on' work by Lady Denman (praised by the 52 women's organisations of the Victorian National Council of Women), took her to many country areas. She was a natural for this work outdoors. One regional paper, the *Ballarat Star*, suggested a few weeks before the Denmans left Australia that 'few Victorians know the recesses of their own State as well as Lady Denman', and 'no sojourner … has formed a fuller or better appreciation of the difficulties under which dwellers in the back-blocks … labour'.

Sir William Nicholson (1872-1949), *Lady Gertrude Denman*.
oil on canvas, c.1909
Collection of Lady Margot Burrell

FROM "DOWN UNDER"

More Interesting Photographs by Mr. P. F. Warner.

A TENNIS PARTY AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE, MELBOURNE

Our snapshot shows Lord and Lady Denman with a group of friends who recently took part in a tennis party given at Government House. Reading from left to right are: Back row—Sir Walter Barttelot, Lord Richard Nevill; standing—Lord and Lady Denman, Mr. Norman Brookes, the ex-champion, Mrs. Dunlop; seated—Miss Quirk, Captain Nutting, Mr. Vernon, and Mr. P. F. Warner

LADY DENMAN AND MR. NORMAN BROOKES

Playing tennis at the recent party given by Lord and Lady Denman at Government House, Melbourne

MRS. P. F. WARNER

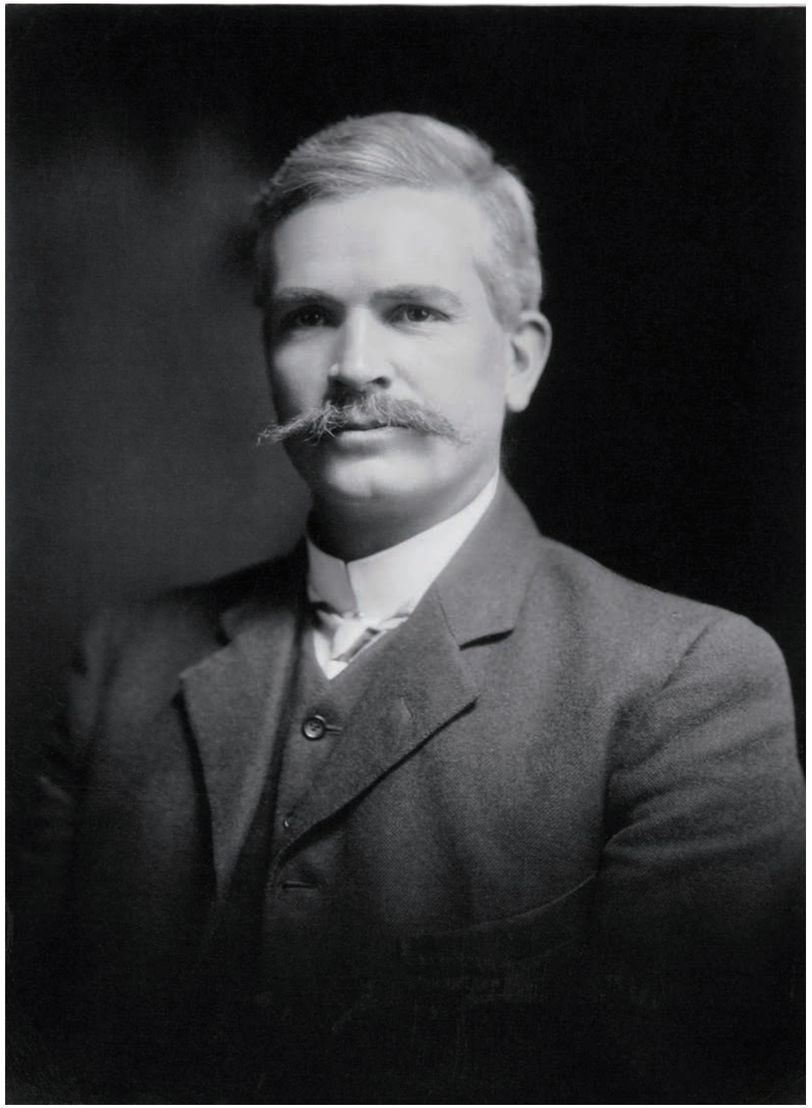
Who has been busy with her camera, chatting to Mr. Ransford on the stands at Melbourne

The above pictures were sent us by Mr. P. F. Warner, whose return to England with the ashes and whose restoration to health is a cause of sincere congratulation from everybody

25 d

The Denmans entertain another sporting group, including the dashing Norman Brookes, Australian tennis champion, and the rather rumpled Pelham 'Plum' Warner, the 'Grand Old Man' of English cricket at the time of the 1911-12 Ashes tour. Warner was later the Manager of the England team for the controversial 'Bodyline' series in 1932-3.
From the Lady Barttelot album, Collection of Lady Margot Burrell

The first outdoor entertainment hosted by the Denmans at Government House, Sydney, on a 'peerless' Spring day, October 1911. Perhaps conscious of Lady Denman's penchant for a good hat, Sydney's socialites respond to the challenge.
From the Lady Barttelot album, Collection of Lady Margot Burrell



Andrew Fisher, photographed in 1908, the year he became Australia's Prime Minister for the first time.
Digital reproduction from a photograph
Pictures Collection, National Library of Australia

The arts were a passion for the Denmans. Within months of arrival, the couple had ensconced themselves as regular theatre-goers, delighting in Melba's first ever appearance in grand opera in Melbourne, befriending the renowned diva and taking in the acclaimed 'Melba season' at Her Majesty's Theatre of works such as 'Faust', 'La Boheme', 'Carmen' and 'La Tosca'. They were also highly visible guests at concerts of the Royal Victorian Liedertafel at the Town Hall and plays at the Theatre Royal and Criterion. The last major fund-raiser for which Lady Denman was the principal organiser involved an exhibition of privately owned antiques that she hosted at Government House to raise funds for a Memorial Shakespeare Theatre in Melbourne on the tercentenary (in 1916) of the bard's death. It was hoped that the facility would 'make provision for the literary, learned and artistic societies' in Melbourne, and be the home base for the Repertory Theatre.

To complete the appealing Vice-Regal cultural package, one Melbourne newspaper noted that the Denmans were 'devout worshippers of the horse', a shared preoccupation that endeared them to the locals.[vi] While in Australia, they owned horses, bred horses, rode horses, bet on horses, hunted on horses, awarded famous trophies to horses and their owners, and attended as many race meetings as decorum would allow.

Labour of Love

Just before he left to take up the Australian position, Lord Thomas Denman attended a farewell luncheon in London hosted by the first Australian High Commissioner, the incomparable George Reid. At the gathering, Denman met a number of Australian politicians including the Prime Minister, the Labor Party's Andrew Fisher, a sensitive and impressive individual who, growing up in Scotland, spent some of his childhood years working in the coalmines. The contrast between the Denmans' privileged backgrounds and that of Fisher (and several of his Ministers) could hardly have been sharper. Yet a warm friendship grew, later personal correspondence confirming the admiration and deep respect that each developed for the other. On Denman's return to England, he wrote a letter to *The Times* in which he referred in glowing terms to Prime Minister Fisher, 'formerly an Ayshire miner', stating that in Australia under Labor, 'democracy has probably advanced further than in any other country'. Trudie shared her husband's unlikely affinity for Fisher's men. 'The people I like best', she would write, 'are the Labor people. They are very simple and nice'. For his part, Fisher stated that Denman was, quite simply, 'the best Governor-General [Australia] has ever had'.[vii]

Tom Roberts, *The Opening of the First Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia by H.R.H The Duke Of Cornwall and York, 9 May 1901*, photogravure etching signed by the artist.
Collection of Peter Barclay OAM
Photograph by David Paterson

Fin De Siecle Australia

Pre-departure, Thomas Denman was nervous about the prospect of successfully meeting the challenges of the task ahead of him, easily the most demanding he had ever faced. He was not a good speaker or natural mixer, and he disliked the job's social requirement to work the room when necessary. We'll never know for sure, but this reticence, this acute awareness of his own personal limitations, almost certainly intensified Denman's homework on the new nation he and his wife were about to venture to.

And what did his reading reveal about Australia's history? What would he have discovered about this country which had, barely a century earlier, started the European chapter of its story as a gulag, Britain's distant experimental prison? Perhaps most intriguingly, Denman must have pondered how this unfolding national drama in the Antipodes might ultimately intersect with his own personal life trajectory.

The suffering and squalor of the first decades of convict settlement in Australia would have provided Denman with a meaningful yardstick against which to assess the well-documented progress of the second half of the nineteenth century. The liberating impact of gold in the 1850s, especially in Victoria, created a prolonged, bullish economic climate during which all six colonies basked in the glow of what has been termed 'the long boom'.[viii] Australia's population increase at one point outpaced the United States, and the economic growth of the colonies per capita even exceeded that of the European powerhouses, Great Britain and Germany.

The 'go-ahead' 1850s also established a stable social platform for a number of political and cultural firsts. During the latter part of the decade, as the convict Transportation System finally began to wind down, five of the six colonies ratified some form of self-governing constitution. Remarkably, world-leading initiatives such as the secret ballot and the eight-hour day were conceived of and trialled in the Australian colonies at this time. Outspoken republican publicist, Rev John Dunmore Lang, delivered his 'Coming Event' lectures in 1850, and published his monumental treatise, *Freedom and Independence for the Golden Lands of Australia*, in 1852.[ix] Lang and his young Irish-Australian colleague, Daniel Henry Deniehy, engaged in a vigorous discussion of the 'coming' Australia republic and the relative merits of a future federation. The community's appetite for better, and more equitable educational opportunities grew rapidly, while professionals in the law, medicine, architecture and finance found themselves in demand.

The sheer scale of economic activity encouraged broader community enterprise, particularly during the 1870s and '80s. There was a cultural blossoming, an awakening. Nowhere was this better exemplified than in the Australian colonies' excited participation

in an era of international trade and cultural exhibitions, which began with Prince Albert's sponsorship of London's Great Exhibition in 1851 (boasting Joseph Paxton's stunning Crystal Palace). Over the next fifty years, despite countless exhibitions across the globe endeavouring to emulate the Great Exhibition and advertising themselves boldly as 'international', in point of fact only seventeen had legitimate credentials to this claim. No less than four of those took place in the Australian colonies: in Sydney (1879), Melbourne (1880), Adelaide (1887) and back in 'Marvellous Melbourne' in 1888. The cumulative effect of such cultural extravaganzas in a country with a recent, dark past was electrifying. As Peter Proudfoot sums up in his *Colonial City Global City—Sydney's International Exhibition* 1879 (2000):

> *No wonder [that the 1879 Sydney and 1880 Melbourne exhibitions] together mark the beginning of a technological revolution in Australia: a significant shift away from the country's traditional dependence on primary production and British technology, and a radical change in the Australian world-view.*[x]

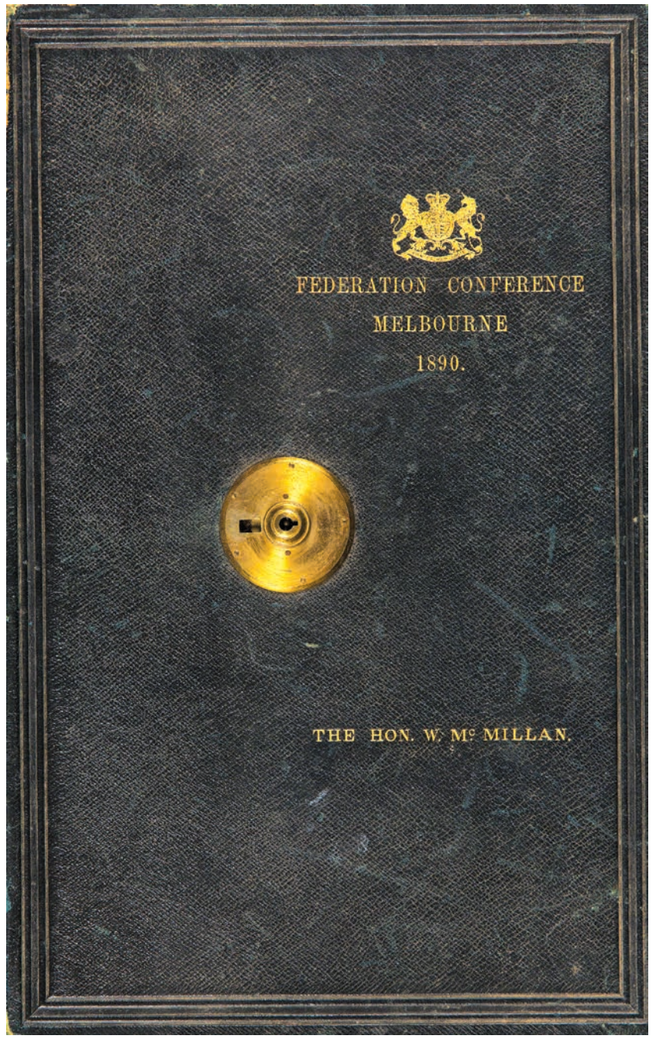
This 'radical change' was effectively flagged earlier in the 1870s decade when the last remnants of the convict 'stain' were contested by local writers, including Marcus Clarke, author of the international best-seller, *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874). Defensiveness gave way to a certain larrikin confidence bordering on brashness, maybe arrogance—something that a number of foreign visitors, especially English visitors, observed with alarm.

Sport provided some of the ideal venues to express this rush of confidence, especially cricket. For most of the nineteenth century, English writers had suggested that cricket was something far more than merely a game (Waterloo was won on the fields of Eton, etc etc), it was a gauge of national character. So heavy defeats by English elevens of colonial eighteens and twenty-two's were the norm until the mid-1870s. This was as everyone, Briton and colonial alike, expected it should be. But what happens when those same giants of the British Empire, England's cricketing warriors, get beaten in Australia, eleven on eleven, as happened first in 1877 (now regarded as the first Test match) to be followed by even more emphatic victories in 1878, and then on the hallowed turf of The Oval in 1882.[xi] What happens is a change of attitude, a radical change. One exuberant *Age* journalist declared that 'Young Australia … is a very Hercules'.[xii]

There was more. With the arrival in international cricket of the Australian Victor Trumper, who toured England for the first time in 1899, the art of batting, hitherto associated with the dour Englishman, W G Grace, was transformed. Trumper reconstituted batting as an expression of joy, noted with breathless passion by the wife of an English cricket captain: 'Victor Trumper … has the exactness, rhythm, and fit of the ocean-going ship's piston rod … He is a poet of cricket; he has a poet's extra sense, touch and feeling'.[xiii] A very Hercules.

Victor Trumper, 1905, by George Beldam (1868-1937), digital reproduction from photogravure (purchased with funds provided by L Gordon Darling), National Portrait Gallery.

The role of the Federation 'fathers' must also be accorded its due. Despite the onset of a devastating economic depression in the colonies beginning in the late 1880s and lasting well into the 1890s, made worse by a prolonged drought and industrial unrest, Australia's aspirational middle-class professionals did their bit as well. Edmund Barton and Alfred Deakin, the first and second Prime Ministers of the future Commonwealth, together with the prodigiously talented delegations of all six colonies, pursued the path to nationhood with a mixture of historical literacy, diplomacy, dedication and zeal. A succession of major Conferences and Conventions during the decade, beginning in Melbourne in 1890, displayed a political maturity that was acknowledged internationally—an impression confirmed by progressive social welfare legislation that resulted in young Australia being heaped with praise as the world's 'social laboratory'.



Folder given to William McMillan, delegate to the National Australasian Convention, Sydney, 1890. Collection of Kerrilyn O'Donnell
Photograph by David Paterson

The Imperial Project

When the Commonwealth began in 1901 there was so much of which the Australian colonies could be proud. And yet, as all these advances were gaining momentum—in politics and government, technology, science, sport, art and literature—the nation in prospect in the late nineteenth century was being subjected to external pressures and influences that tainted some of its best instincts. For if Federation was to be the remote southern continent's boast at the start of a new century, then Australia's participation in the Boer War (Britain's unseemly fight with the Boers of South Africa) was surely the infant nation's first grave mistake. The timing of the Boer War, 1899-1902, proved to be a disaster. Noble sentiments, world-leading achievements, got lost as the Imperial project took hold amidst an intoxicating flurry of colonial knighthoods, royal baubles, military awards, marching soldiers, new uniforms, brass buttons and bands. The 'war to end all wars' got closer.

In his recent book, *Unnecessary Wars* (2016), Henry Reynolds points out that 'Britain was fighting somewhere in the world almost every year during the second half of the 19th century'.[xiv] This was routine Empire business; however, wars are expensive and participants die. When in government in England, both the Tories and Liberals contemplated the options available to the British Empire as it expanded its reach across the globe. While the natural resources of the colonies had helped to stoke the economic fires of the 'Mother' country, Britain's foreign policy-makers turned to the obvious, untapped resource available to them. The human resource, young colonial men—aka 'Soldiers of the Queen', as a popular 1899 song trumpeted.[xv]

As early as 1870, Britain had recognised that it could not effectively defend all its Empire outposts and, shortly afterwards, Conservative Party Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli attacked his Liberal opponents for being soft on Empire ambition. These were ominous signs. The stage was set for a scheme of Empire consolidation, starting symbolically with the founding of the Imperial Federation (later British Empire) League, branches of which were established in Canada and, in mid-1885, in Australia. The League's members, mostly drawn from an anglophile middle class, stridently pursued an agenda that identified patriotism specifically as patriotism to Empire.

The League's advocacy in Australia of an Empire federation of countries under the purview of the British parliament, and its uncompromising opposition to any expressions of nationalist sentiment, would eventually falter. But the central messages of loyalty lingered, including the fresh currency injected into the term 'Australian Briton'. It would take the Australian nation at least two generations to pick its way through the contradictions inherent in the term. Few citizens in *fin de siecle* Australia were prepared to acknowledge, much less interrogate these crippling contradictions.

This was due in part to the success of the layers of Imperial propaganda that prevailed in Britain's Empire colonies around an alluring mix of old and new monarchs, gala events, cultural initiatives, patriotic songs and publications, including:

- the royal visits of 1867, 1881, and triumphantly, the Australian visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York in 1901;

- accession to the throne of Edward VII following Queen Victoria's death in January 1901, and then George V, who succeeded his wayward father in 1911;

- the steady stream of Colonial (later renamed 'Imperial') Conferences in 1887, 1897, 1902, 1907 and 1911, cleverly orchestrated by the British Government of the day;

- the establishment of Empire Day, celebrated first in Australia in May 1905, before it was recognised in England;

- the plethora of 'Boys' Own' adventure stories circulating throughout the Empire that placed England's battle heroes on a heroic pedestal, including the most popular (international) publication of them all, *Deeds That Won the Empire* (1897), written by W H Fitchett, Principal of the Methodist Ladies College, Melbourne[xvi];

- the colonial Honours list that recognised and rewarded service to Empire;

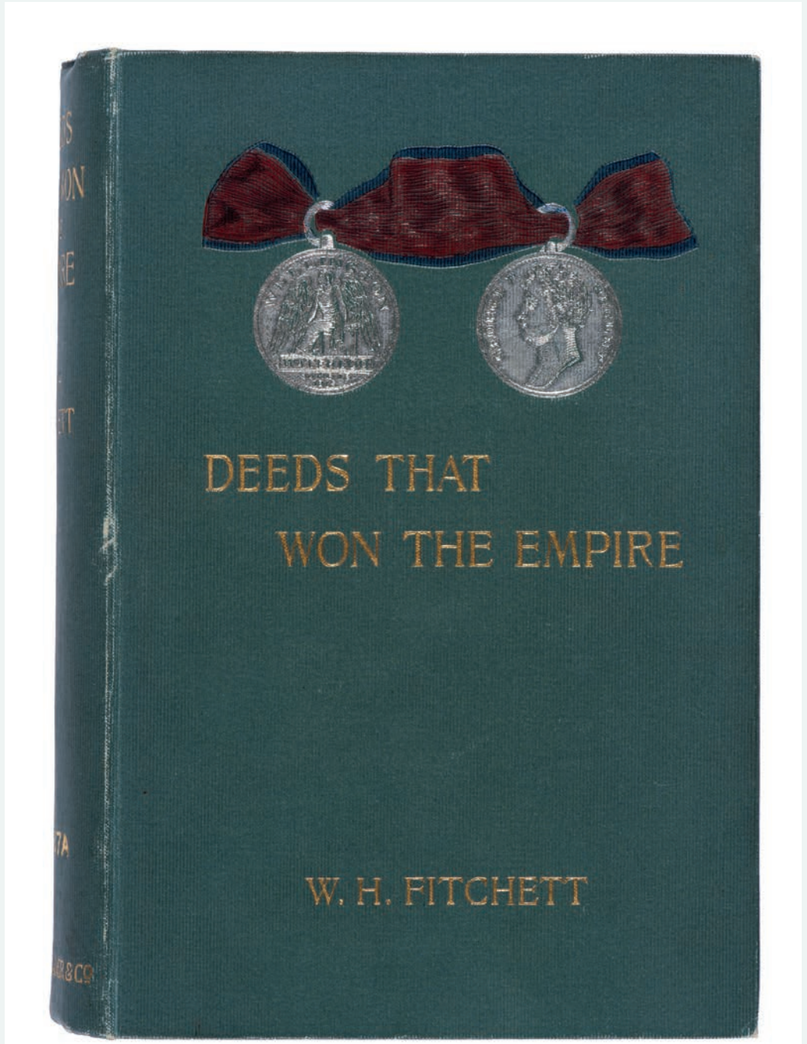
- the military Honours list;

- the activities of the early Governors-General, whose primary role was to safeguard Imperial interests, at the exclusion of the country of residence when necessary; and,

- the baleful community presence of those often outspoken individuals dismissed by the *Catholic Press* newspaper as 'Yellow Plush' patriots, mostly well-to-do Australians (and British expatriates) whose unquestioning first loyalty was to the Crown, Empire and the Imperial project.[xvii]

The Boer War supplied a powerful focus for Empire propaganda, under the watchful eye of the Colonial Secretary (1895-1903) of the period, Joseph Chamberlain. He identified and exploited the contemporary appeal that notions of race, race solidarity and kinship had attained across the Empire, particularly in outpost Australia where fear of the Asian menace – first China, and then Japan – had taken hold. The 'archetypal Imperialist', as historian Richard White has called him, Chamberlain understood the power of words to mould hearts and minds:

Bertram Mackennal (1861-1931), *George V, 'Rex Imperator'*, bronze (undated).
Museum of Australian Democracy, Canberra
The statue is a second casting of one originally commissioned for New Delhi.

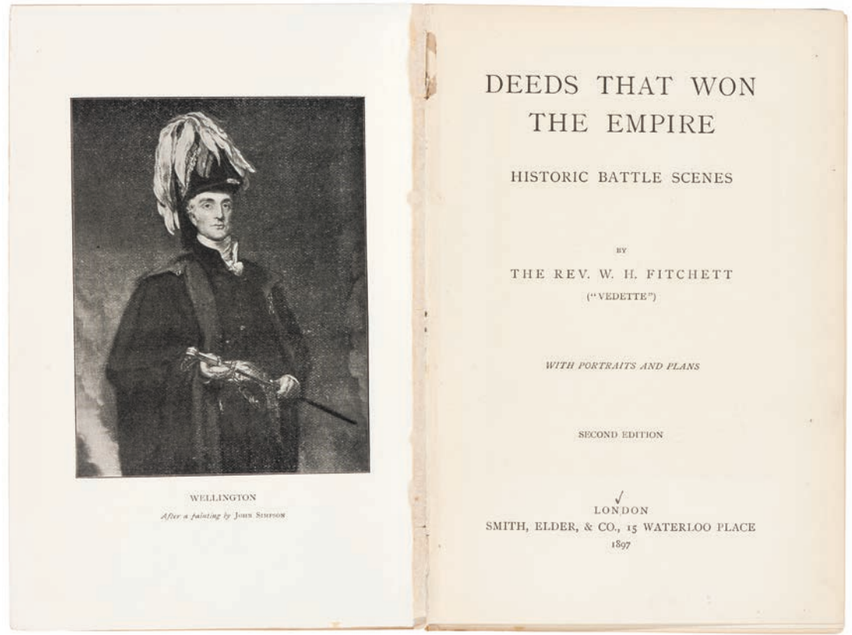


Cover of W H Fitchett's *Deeds That Won The Empire* (1897).

> *I believe in this race, the greatest governing race the world has ever seen; in this Anglo-Saxon race, so proud, so tenacious, self-confident and determined, this race which neither climate nor change can degenerate, which will infallibly be the predominant force of future history and universal civilisation.*[xviii]

Australians, dismissed as the convict refuse of Britain within living memory of the Federation generation, responded gratefully to being included in this statement of race superiority, and were excited by the first flattering English comments on Australian fighting ability. At the end of the Boer War, Chamberlain voiced an Imperial clarion call that found its way onto sets of china that went on sale throughout the Empire. Every piece of every set had the Colonial Secretary's words emblazoned across it: *May the Union Between the Colonies and the Mother-Land Now Cemented by Their Blood Be For Ever Maintained.*

The Imperial Project had been re-cast with religious overtones as a race bond forged in blood.



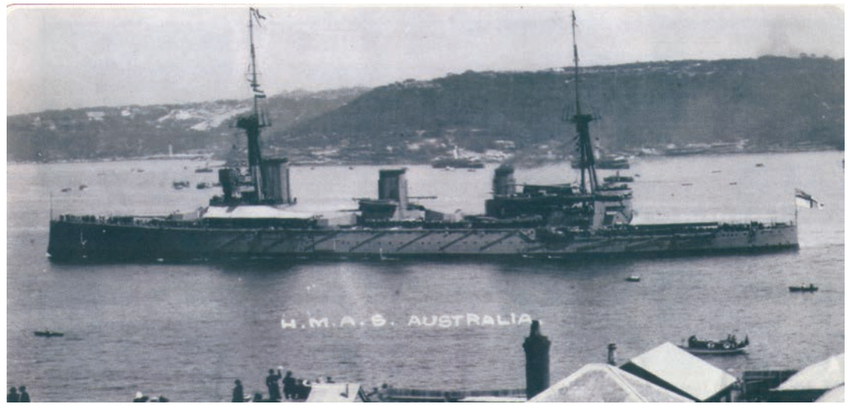
Front page of W H Fitchett's *Deeds That Won The Empire* (1897).

William Dargie (1912-2003), *The Rt Hon Sir George Foster Pearce KCVO*, 1941.
Historic Memorials Collection, Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra, ACT
Pearce was Minister for Defence in the second Fisher Labor Government (1910-13).

Gathering Clouds

Despite a number of ground-breaking, social welfare initiatives in the first decade of Australian nationhood, in the years after the Boer War and with Germany on the move in Europe and the Pacific, the issue of defence dominated. Changes in the geo-political thinking of Federal Labor politician, George Foster Pearce, help to explain the darkening mood of the era. A West Australian carpenter who became a union official before entering the Federal parliament as a Senator in 1901, Pearce took only a passing interest in the South African conflict. However, the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in February 1904 captured his attention, with its potential military and race implications for an Australia determined to be a stronghold of white race supremacy in the southern hemisphere. Pearce had Senate business suspended in July 1904 to discuss the state of Australian defence; in 1907, fearful of 'developments in Asia', he declared that the 'only doctrine that those races respect is the doctrine of force. Our White Australia legislation is so much waste paper unless we have rifles behind it, and are prepared to back it up by force if necessary'.[xix]

When Lord Denman arrived in Australia in July 1911, one Australian newspaper suggested that the country was entering 'a new military phase', but in reality this had started as early as 1907.[xx] During its term in office (1905-8), the Deakin government introduced military training for schoolboys, a decision later amended by Labor to entail compulsory military training for the under twenty-fives. The 'Great White Fleet' of American naval vessels visited Australia to massive public acclaim in 1908, and towards the end of the same year George Pearce became the Minister for Defence in Andrew Fisher's first Labor government.



The pride of the new Royal Australian Navy fleet, HMAS *Australia*, 'a ship for a nation', as one naval historian has described it.
Digital reproduction from a photograph

It is of significance for this exhibition that Pearce was again Defence Minister for the whole of Fisher's second (full-term) government, 1910-13, a period which military historian John Connor has described as 'the most significant peacetime period in the history of Australian defence policy'.[xxi] During these years, defence received one third of the federal budget. Just before the Denmans left England for Australia, Pearce and Prime Minister Fisher had returned home after the mid-1911 Imperial Conference in London. Both were convinced that a European war was inevitable.

So it was that Australia's fifth Governor-General, Lord Thomas Denman, assumed his new position at a perilous moment in global politics – not that this was in any way obvious in the prototypical dignity, decorum and ruling-class calm on show in the host of formal photographs taken on the Vice-Regal party's arrival day in Melbourne, 31 July 1911. Undoubtedly the two most striking individuals in the Governor-General's impeccably attired group were his Aide-De-Camp, fellow-Sandhurst graduate and Boer war veteran, the Coldstream Guard Sir Walter Balfour Barttelot, and his Military Secretary, Grenadier Guard Major J Arnold Cuthbert Quilter. Both of these men would fight at Gallipoli, Barttelot surviving to later be decorated for his service in France (where he was wounded) and Mesopotamia.

Lord Denman with his Aides, including Aide-de-Camp, Sir Walter Barttelot and M.S. Major Arnold Quilter.
From the Lady Barttelot album, Collection of Lady Margot Burrell

Quilter was the commanding officer of the Hood battalion in Turkey, highly respected, indeed loved by all his men, among them the 'Latin Club' of celebrated, artistic junior officers in the Battalion that included Frederick Septimus Kelly, the Australian Olympian and composer, soldier-poet Rupert Brooke, the future New Zealand Governor-General Bernard Freyberg, and English Prime Minister Asquith's son, Arthur.

Major Quilter died in action at Krythia on 6 May 1915, reputedly striding out towards the enemy, walking stick in hand. His death brought to a sudden close a passionate love affair with Lady Gertrude Denman that had begun in Australia and continued after the return to England. Having filed for divorce from her husband the day before Quilter's death, Lady Denman was inconsolable at the terrible news, writing to her aunt that 'he has given me so much, everything in life, and that can never be taken away from me'. The letter, together with a wistful album of Trudie's Australian photographs of mainly Quilter, resides at Knepp Castle in West Sussex, in family hands.

Surrounded, then, by a splendid entourage, and with the drama of personal stories yet to unfold, Lord Denman was welcomed by the Australian press as 'a staunch friend of the new defence movement'. As if to confirm the validity of the description, in one of his first speeches he asserted that 'preparedness for war is still the best guarantee of peace'.[xxii] He would go on to open the Royal Australian Naval College, the Royal Military College (Duntroon) and Lithgow's arms manufacturing factory. During his term, the Royal Australian Navy was established. Denman became a stout defender of Australia's regional defence priorities, in defiance of the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, and indeed, the British Colonial Office. It was implied that he went rogue, 'native'. In career terms it would cost him dearly, and he knew it. On his return to England, he continued to promote Australia's interests in the House of Lords and the columns of *The Times*, in defiance of the propriety and partisan diplomacy expected of him. Lady Denman would go on to lead a distinguished life post-Great War, as the political career of her husband went into decline. The Director of the Women's Land Army in World War Two, she was one of the most significant females in Great Britain during the 1930s and '40s.

Postscript: In the momentous span of years between 1910 and 1917, Australia changed utterly. While military involvement in war was the main reason, this exhibition makes the case that the personality of the nation had already begun to alter. The net result was a country divided, wounded. The search for an independent identity, a priority for many colonial Australians in the late nineteenth century, was postponed indefinitely.

i Henry Lawson, 'When Hopes Were High', in Henry Lawson, *Complete Works 1901-1922*, ed Leonard Cronin (Landowne, Sydney, 1984), p.465.

ii 'Thomas Denman and Gertrude Mary Denman', MS in private possession of [Lord] Richard Denman, West Sussex.

iii See letter, 3rd Baron (Thomas) Denman to Colonial Secretary, Lewis Harcourt, 8 December 1910, MS 468, Denman Papers, Bodleian Rhodes House Library, Oxford University.

iv See Gervas Huxley, *Lady Denman G.B.E. 1884-1954* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1961), pp.22-3.

v Huxley, p.15.

vi See [Melbourne] *Punch*, 7 September 1911.

vii See letter to editor (by 'Denman'), 'Service For All. Liberal Opinion. A Notable Change. The Australian Example', *The Times* [London], 31 May 1915; entry on [Baron] Thomas Denman, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 8, 1891-1939 (Carlton, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 1981), p.285; Huxley, p.62.

viii Michael Dunn, *Australia and Empire: from 1788 to the Present* (Fontana/Collins, Sydney, 1984), pp.50-1.

ix John Dunmore Lang, *Freedom and Independence for the Golden Lands of Australia* (Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1852). See also David Headon and Elizabeth Perkins, eds, *Our First Republicans* (The Federation Press, Sydney, 1998).

x See Peter Proudfoot, 'The International Exhibition Phenomenon—Sydney on Show to the World', in Peter Proudfoot, et al, *Colonial City Golden City—Sydney's International Exhibition 1879* (Crossing Press, Sydney, 2000), p.xiv.

xi Se W. F. Mandle, 'Cricket and Australian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century' (*JRAHS*, Vol. 59, December 1973, Part 4), pp.225-46.

xii See David Headon, '"The Coming Australian": the Sport of Nation-Building Before Federation' (*The New Federalist*, No. 7, June 2001), p.60.

xiii See David Headon, ed., *The Best Ever Australian Sports Writing—a 200 Year Collection* (Black Inc., Melbourne), p.144.

xiv *Henry Reynolds*, *Unnecessary Wars* (NewSouth Publishing, Sydney, 2016), p.69.

xv Reynolds, pp.133-4.

xvi W. H. Fitchett, *Deeds That Won The Empire* (Smith, Elder, & Co., London, 1897).

xvii See, for example, 'Should Lord Denman Complain? No.), *Catholic Press*, 4 July 1912.

xviii Richard White, *Inventing Australia* (George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981), p.71.

xix John Connor, *Anzac and Empire* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011), p.13.

xx 'The Governor-General', *The* [Adelaide] *Advertiser*, 9 July 1912.

xxi Connor, p.43.

xxii See 'Lord Mayor's Dinner', *The Age*, 10 November 1911.

'Yellow Plush' patriots parade their finery at Government House, Melbourne, November 1911.
From the Lady Barttelot album, Collection of Lady Margot Burrell

Ceremonial spade presented to Lord Denman at the turning of the first sod of the Trans-Australian Railway.
Collection of Lord Richard Denman
Photograph by David Paterson

Trans-Australian Railway commemorative booklet, 14 September 1912
Collection of Peter Barclay OAM

Trowels presented to Lord Denman; Prime Minister, The Hon. Andrew Fisher; and Minister for Home Affairs, The Hon. King O'Malley. The trowels were used in laying the foundation stones of the commencement column of the Federal Capital city, 12 March 1913.
copper, gold and ivory
(Left to right)
Collection of Trevor Kennedy
Collection of Lord Richard Denman and Sir Charles Burrell
Pictures Collection, National Library of Australia
Photograph by David Paterson


To His
Excellency
The Right Hon.
Thomas Baron Denman
G.C.M.G.
K.C.V.O.
Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia
Your Excellency,
We on behalf of the Grand Council of the Royal Society of St. George, and of the Branches throughout Queensland affiliated therewith offer you a most cordial greeting on this your first visit to our State.
We greet your Lordship as an Englishman, and as a descendant of one who, as Lord Chief Justice of England won high fame in the succession of judges of the Motherland; also as one of the distinguished Vice Presidents of the Parent Society of the Royal Society of St. George which is doing so much to keep alive the patriotism of the English people in all parts of the Empire. We also greet you for that you personally in the days of anxiety rendered good service in South Africa, and further as one on whom His Majesty King George has conferred the signal honour of the position of Governor General of this great and important part of His Majesty's dominions. We feel confident that the appointment of one so well equipped personally for the duties of the high office which you hold will conduce to the continuance of the loyalty of the Australian people. We wish for your Excellency and Lady Denman much enjoyment during your short sojourn amongst us.
We have the honour to be Your Excellency.
Your obedient servants
Grand President
Grand Secretary
August 1912

Illuminated address to Lord Denman from the Grand Council of the Royal Society of St George.
Manuscripts Collection, National Library of Australia
Photograph by David Paterson

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Canberra Museum and Gallery (CMAG) Director, Shane Breynard, for inviting me to curate this exhibition. It was an idea we discussed for the first time about three years ago, and it has been an exciting challenge for me since then to try and realise the potential of the original concept. In some ways, this exhibition might be regarded as a (personally) necessary Great War expansion on Canberra's 2013 Centenary story.

The job has given me the chance to work for the first time with some talented staff at CMAG though one individual must be singled out: Mark Bayly, Assistant Director of Exhibitions and Collections. He has been a pleasure to work with, patient, persistent and hard-working.

There have been so many individuals in the community who have helped me on the way, among them Barbara Coe, the best proof-reader in the business, and Mariana Rollgejser, the expert on image access. But a special thanks must go to Peter Barclay OAM, not only for his usual immense generosity with his own private cultural collection, but also for his sponsorship of this catalogue through King O'Malley's. I am just another in the long list of those whom Peter has assisted in Canberra with their worthy projects over the years. I would also like to extend my thanks to Denman Prospect, a part of Capital Estate Developments for their further contribution to the catalogue.

I have been fortunate to obtain the support of a number of people with vitally relevant manuscripts and material, particularly Kerry O'Donnell, Gib and Sue Owen, and Trevor Kennedy (and his assistant, Lisa Delaney). They made their wonderful collections available for my use, and I can't thank them enough.

With the Denmans, Thomas and Gertrude, being such an important narrative focus for this exhibition, I was fortunate indeed to meet and get to know several members of the Denman and Burrell families: the present Lord Denman and his wife, Richard and Jane; Lady Margot Burrell and her son, Andrew; Sir Charles Burrell; and William Burrell. One inspiration for me in my endeavours was chatting with Richard's extraordinary father, the late Lord Charles Denman, over a very long lunch at Brooks's Club in London in 2012. I won't forget it. In England, I would like to acknowledge, as well, James Morton, Robyn Cann, William Lucy and Thomas Kelly for their assistance when needed. James went above and beyond the call of duty.

I would also like to thank the staff of a number of our national cultural institutions who have assisted with the loan of objects and the facilitation of image reproduction for this exhibition – the Art Collection and Exhibitions office of the Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament House; National Archives of Australia; National Library of Australia; National Museum of Australia and National Portrait Gallery. I also thank the staff of the Bodleian Library, Oxford for their assistance. The staff of these institutions continue to show a remarkable resilience and perform with great professionalism despite the diminishing resources available to their organisations.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the in-principle support for this exhibition provided by the CEO of the ACT Government's Cultural Facilities Corporation, Harriet Elvin, and the Australian High Commissioner in London, the Hon Alexander Downer. We are currently exploring the possibility of taking the exhibition to London in 2017, and the great steps we have made toward this reality are in no small measure as a result of their enthusiastic involvement and that of one member of Mr Downer's AHC staff, the indefatigable Alessandra Pretto.

Dr David Headon
Exhibition Curator

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Historic Memorials Committee, Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra ACT

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