

Introducing *Sydney Journal*

This is the first issue of a new journal, the *Sydney Journal*, which is part of the Dictionary of Sydney Project. The purpose of the journal is to provide an opportunity for a more academic presentation of some of the scholarship being generated by the project, complete with the rigours of academic peer reviewing. In preparing the first issue, it became clear that we wanted also to include a range of the less academic, but no less interesting, work being done on Sydney's people and suburbs for the project. This first issue contains examples of each of these three types of contribution.

The articles range widely across Sydney's history. Richard Waterhouse's sweeping survey of the popular culture(s) of the city indicates the depth of cultural change and remaking that has always been part of Sydney's urbanity. Lisa Featherstone's account of changing ways of birthing in Sydney hints at the continuities of human existence across those cultural boundaries. Michael Darcy's analysis of Sydney's housing reveals the complexities that underpin equality and social mobility in the city. Garry Wotherspoon's piece on the history of transport highlights physical movement in the city and the interactions between economic necessities, technological change, scarce resources and government priorities in shaping Sydney.

The Sydney's People section showcases six of the more than 100 articles which will eventually be commissioned for the Dictionary of Sydney on Sydney's ethnic and cultural groups. In this issue, the Dutch, English, Germans, Italians, Latvians and Maltese are profiled, by writers eminent in and/or knowledgeable about these communities. As more of these articles are submitted, we are beginning to see the fascinating interconnections between many groups, quite independent of their relations with groups that are dominant because of their size or power. Each group has charted its own route through the challenges of building lives in a new city. This will be one of the most exciting areas for the Dictionary of Sydney to explore.

Finally, the Sydney's Suburbs section includes a first selection from the more than 650 suburb entries commissioned for the Dictionary. Like the Sydney's People entries, these pieces, read together, provide a fascinating insight into the patchwork of suburbs that gives pattern, familiarity and texture to life in Sydney.

The Dictionary of Sydney project

The larger Dictionary project offers exciting potential to communicate the city's history in more imaginative ways to more people than ever before. It will be part encyclopaedia, part gazetteer, part atlas and more. In terms of content it will provide information, from the smallest snippet of ephemera to learned interpretive essays that contribute understanding to the place called Sydney – the city as place, as fabric, as society and as cultural entity. It will explore the largest questions of

how Sydney works and in whose interests, and catalogue its past through a full range of written, graphic and audio material. Content will be a mix of representations of well loved documents, images and significant artefacts through to cutting edge new research and scholarship.

The Dictionary defines Sydney in natural as well as in human terms, arguing that the life and meaning of the city is not indifferent to its physical underpinnings. In temporal terms it will include its oldest rocks as well as its most recent events. In geographic spread, the work will encompass the whole of the Sydney basin and the Blue Mountains.

Working to a number of high level themes, the Dictionary has been commissioning a range of writing for the last two years and intends to have the ‘first cut’ of this material freely available on the web in 2008. At the same time, the research team is exploring leading edge technologies for the storage and presentation of historical information. The possibilities for presenting information to end-users change too rapidly for any one project to keep up with them all – our emphasis has been on designing and populating a flexible repository of information, encoded and cross-referenced in such a way that it can be presented in a variety of innovative and imaginative ways. The first of these will be a website, but eventually the Dictionary’s resources will also be accessible as mobile information, print-on-demand, a web service or through methods as yet unthought of.

The history of Sydney history

Urban history has always captured the imagination of those who respond strongly to ‘place’, although it was not a strong focus of Australian historians until the 1970s, when theoretical and academic works finally joined the long tradition of local histories generated by ‘amateurs’, sometimes fine historians in their own right. The greatest support for place-based history in Sydney has always come from the local government sector, which has funded local histories and supported local historical societies for many decades. Outstanding in this field has been the City of Sydney, whose History Program has been functioning for over 20 years, with earlier *ad hoc* work, such as Charles Bertie’s history, which carries the date of 1911. North Sydney Council, Marrickville Council and others also have active history programs and many other places have published multiple historical works on their areas.

In recent times this work has mostly been carried out by professional historians, who bring to their work an understanding of the discipline of urban history, which can track its origins back to Noel Butlin’s seminal 1972 work *Investment in Australian Economic Development, 1861-1900*. This work made it statistically clear that, in economic terms, the cities were just as much the powerhouses of growth over Australia’s history as the previously lauded export-focused rural industries. Indeed, even these rural industries had major multiplier effects on the city’s transport,

commerce, built form, expansion, and culture. Sydney, by the end of the nineteenth century was a large city by any standards, and its history was intrinsic to the nation's history.

The *Sydney Journal* follows in the tradition of the work published by the Sydney History Group, founded in 1975, to promote the then 'new' field of urban history. Over two decades, the Group published a magazine and seven edited volumes of essays on various aspects of Sydney's history. In the last volume – *Minorities: cultural diversity in Sydney*, published in 1995 – it was noted that the Sydney History Group would disband, 'not because it would see its work as a failure...rather because it has been successful in what it set out to do'.

The new *Sydney Journal* takes up the mantle of this work, using the digital media of the early twenty-first century. Many of the small group of scholars who pioneered the Sydney History Group are still writing and some are involved with the Dictionary project, but so are many others, who are bending their areas of expertise to an urban focus in an endeavour which will contribute to the general aim of democratising and widely disseminating all our understandings of Sydney.

What appears here in the *Sydney Journal* will be presented in other ways in the Dictionary, contextualised with linked entries and essays, illustrated with images, film and sound, and enriched with innovative interactive maps and timelines. The aim of this first issue is to give an indication of the range of writings that are being canvassed for the wider project as well as to publish some of the more significant articles commissioned. We hope it will whet appetites for the Dictionary's launch and inspire everyone with an interest in Sydney's past to get involved, as writers, researchers, volunteers or advocates for the Dictionary's exciting endeavour.

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