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# Old, Cold and Gold: a literary and artistic podtour of Ballarat

By Anne E Stewart

Welcome to *Old, Cold and Gold*: a literary walk through Ballarat. On this walk you'll hear the voices of Ballarat's literary legends, both past and present, guided along the way by local story teller Anne E Stewart, noted Ballarat thespian Peter Freund and ABC Ballarat station manager Dominic Brine. Additional interviews looking into the backgrounds and careers of some of our local literary legends as well as a detailed bibliography are also included here should you wish to explore Ballarat's literary history in more depth.

To download the podtour, locate the Old, Cold and Gold file next to the headphones icon on the bottom left of this page. For PC users, right click on the file and 'Save As' to save the audio file to your computer, or audio device. For Mac users, hold down the Control button and click. Or you may simply click and play the audio inside the webpage to hear the podtour play in your computer right now.

The tour will take an hour and a half, and you'll visit 20 spots, ending up back here at the railway station.

Of course, you can stop the tour at anytime and spend more time exploring Ballarat's galleries, museums, cafes and heritage sites.

## Stop 1. Ballarat railway station

The tour starts at Ballarat railway station, a place of arrival for many, but also a place where we need to acknowledge the original inhabitants of the region the Wathaurong people, before we set off on our walk.

We turn firstly to *Gilburnia*, a little-known work by reknowned Italian writer and famous Ballarat resident, Raffaello Carboni. He had great sympathy for the local Indigenous people and was a keen observer of their language and customs. He was one of the first white people to write about the local people and he empathised with their loss of their land.

## Stop 2. The Ballarat Fine Art Gallery

The Ballarat Fine Art Gallery has a long association with the Lindsay family of Creswick. Dr William Lindsay and his wife raised 10 children there in the late 1800s; of the 10 children 5 went on to become artists of reknown. Norman credits his childhood visits to the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery with his grandfather as a huge influence on his artistic career. As well as hearing from Norman's famous but grumpy invention *The Magic Pudding*, you'll hear more about the lesser known works of Norman's sister Ruby, and the writings of her husband Will Dyson.

### **Stop 3. Alexandria Receptions**

Noted author Hal Porter became well-known for his autobiography *Watcher on the Cast Iron Balcony*, so here in Lydiard Street, with its balconies and heritage cast-iron work it is fitting we find a link to him. Porter spent a short time in Ballarat and wrote the fabulous poem *In an Australian Country Graveyard*. There's a plaque here that marks the spot of the tea-rooms; maybe he sat in here and wrote the poem whilst enjoying a piece of the Tea-rooms' famous meringue sponge. Tragically, Porter was knocked down by a car in Armstrong Street and remained in a coma for 14 months before he died on September 29th, 1984.

### **Stop 4. Police Lane**

In Police Lane there are a couple of literary connections to uncover. At the end of the lane you're adjacent to the Eureka Flag, held inside the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, so we hark back to the notorious Italian, Raffaello Carboni and his literary classic, *The Eureka Stockade*.

A more contemporary continuing of the literary tradition inspired by Eureka is Susan Kruss' 2004 anniversary collection of poems, *Calico Celings: The Women of Eureka*. Another 2004 project was the Victorian Community History Award winner *The Eureka Encyclopedia*, by Justin Corfield, Dorothy Wickham and Clare Gervasoni.

### **Stop 5. Lizard etching and the stone steps**

At the end of Police Lane there's an amazing etching on the ground, a collaboration done as part of the Commonwealth Games in 2004, created by local Indigenous artist Dianna Nikkelson and notorious and notable community artists, Ratartat. You can read more about the design on the plaque, or read more online with Bruce Pascoe's 2007 publication *Convincing Ground: Learning to Fall in Love with Your Country*.

### **Stop 6. Back of the Mining Exchange**

The Ballarat Mining Exchange is lined with 40 small offices and it was here that sharebrokers and mining agents sold shares in goldmines and controlled the city's wealth. Maybe one of them was the real life figure of Alice Cornwall. Mrs Cornwall owned a mine at Sulky Gully known as the Midas mine. She was the inspiration for Fergus Hume's novel of greed, romance and intrigue, *Madame Midas*.

In Victorian times the general theme of much Australian writing was the bush, but Hume was a crime writer who set his novels in the more sophisticated milieu of Australian cities. His most famous novel, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, was set in Melbourne, but the lesser known follow-up, *Madame Midas* is set almost entirely in Ballarat.

### **Stop 7. Camp Street Precinct**

Local historian Ann Beggs-Sunter describes Camp Street as 'oozing with Ballarat history'. It's here we introduce the writings of 'Henry Handel Richardson', the *nom de plume* of Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson, who chronicled the life of her father Dr Walter Lindesay Richardson and his times in Australia in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*. She left Australia at the age of 18 to study music in Europe; but as an expatriate for many years she writes most vividly of the Australian landscape. Pause for a moment by the Trades Hall building and look towards Mt Warrenheip; try and take yourself back in time to see what inspired Ethel to write so vividly of the Australian landscape.

### **Stop 8. The Old Library**

The library occupied this building from 1901 to 1994 and will always be associated with one man in particular, Austin McCallum. A remarkable man, he was involved with the restoration of the Eureka flag, as well as the establishing of the Central Highlands Regional Library service, the Historical Society of Ballarat, the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery and the Ballarat Historical Park (later renamed Sovereign Hill). A prisoner of war for four years during WW2, he is quoted as saying "It was my kit bag of novels which kept me and my fellow prisoners sane during the awful experience of our incarceration." Also a passionate Shakespeare devotee, Austin remembered enough Shakespeare to put on plays at the Hainan prison camp, and then went on to write his own play, *When Grief Hath Mates*, referencing a line from Shakespeare's King Lear.

"When grief has mates, and bearing fellowship  
How light and portable my pain seems now  
when that which makes me bend makes the king bow."  
(*Shakespeare Act 111 - Scene VI - The Tragedy of King Lear*)  
Alan Marshall said of it, "One of the finest one act plays I have ever seen."

It was first performed in Ballarat in 1948, and then again in 2000 as part of a fundraiser for Ballarat's Ex-Prisoner of War Memorial.

### **Stop 9. Titanic band stand on Sturt Street**

The Titanic Bandstand is one of only two memorials in Australia to the Titanic, the other is at Broken Hill. It's here you'll hear of that literary giant Mark Twain, who visited Ballarat in 1885 where he lectured at the Mechanics Institute. Mark Twain was full of praise for Ballarat and he said of Eureka "it may be called the finest thing Australasian history. It was a revolution - small in size: but great politically; it was a strike for liberty, a struggle for a principle, a stand against injustice and oppression. Eerily, the fabulous portrait I found of Mark Twain in his younger days was painted by Francis Davis Millet who lost his life on the Titanic.

The links below are to the Project Gutenberg's on-line copies of the lecture series, *Following the Equator*. You can go to the e-book or the audio version of the series (His Ballarat visit is covered in chapter 5).

### **Stop 10. The Ballarat Mechanics Institute**

The Ballarat Mechanics Institute is Ballarat's oldest cultural and educational institution, listed on the Register of Historic Buildings. The statue of Minerva atop the building acknowledges the aims of the Institute as she was considered to be the virgin goddess of warriors, poetry, medicine, wisdom, commerce, crafts and the inventor of music.

Here, we look at the great Charles Thatcher, whose great talent was to write humorous songs and cover sketches about a digger's life. He arrived on the goldfields in 1853, coming from Bristol, with its grand tradition of music halls. He toured the goldfields as an entertainer, and was renowned for the parodies he wrote about local situations. Singer Danny Spooner has a passion for Australian culture through its folk music, and he shares a classic Thatcher song, *Look Out Below*.

### **Stop 11. Robbie Burns statue**

This statue of Robbie Burns, Scotland's national poet, was actually the first statue dedicated to a poet anywhere in Australia. It was unveiled on April 21, 1887, by another Scotsman, Thomas Stoddart, to a crowd of 15,000 people.

### **Stop 12. Her Majesty's Theatre**

In the recently published *Her Maj: A History of Her Majesty's Theatre*, authors Peter Freund and Val Sarah state: "There is no other theatre in Australia to match her. She stands proudly in Lydiard Street, just as she did in the day she was opened in 1875." It's been an extraordinary cavalcade of entertainment since that day; Melba sang here, Jack Johnson threw punches and Stiffy and Mo raised eyebrows. Live shows jostled for space with increasingly popular movies, and the ubiquitous South Street competitions encouraged many generations of young performers.

The Queen of the Ballarat Theatre was the creator and producer of amazing pantomimes, Ms Wavie Williams. She had extensive experience in calisthenics, dance and acting before she produced her first big pantomime at Her Maj, *Babes in the Wood* in 1940. Starry-eyed artists flocked to perform in the shows, among them one Fred Fargher - hear him talk about the early days with Dominic Brine in our audio links.

### **Stop 13. Craig's Hotel**

Adam Lindsay Gordon met Thomas Bath, the owner of the first hotel on this site (check the plaque there on the wall) at a race meeting in Melbourne. A deal was struck that Gordon could rent the stables behind the hotel (behind the wooden doors down Bath Lane).

How ironic that a man known for his life affirming mantra:

"Life is mostly froth and bubble

Two things stand like stone

Kindness in another's trouble  
Courage in your own"

- would later take his own life at Brighton beach, on June 24, 1870.

As well as a monument to him outside the Victorian Parliament buildings in Spring Street in 1932 Adam Lindsay Gordon became the only Australian to be honoured a place in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey, erected to him also in 1932.

#### **Stop 14. The Town Hall**

James Oddie, known as the 'father of Ballarat', secured the Alfred Memorial bells for the Town Hall. He had in mind his dear wife Rachael, who had so loved the bells of London; he thought Ballarat deserved their own. Inside the clock tower are the eight Prince Alfred bells, one of only four full sets of working Town Hall bells in the world. The poem *The Alfred Bells* was written during the Victorian era from a strangely titled volume, *Lays of Lake Wendouree: Mind your locomotive and other poems*, by JW Mills.

#### **Stop 15. The cafe strip**

As you head towards the cafe strip, you'll see a tribute to Ireland and its poets. They say that on the day the statue of Robbie Burns was erected here in Ballarat, the Irish started a collection of funds so they could honour their national bard, Thomas Moore. You'll see his statue in the central median strip on the corner of Sturt and Armstrong Streets. We've chosen the work of an Irish immigrant to Australia, Andrew Orr and we share his poem *The Sunny South* with you. This small strip of Sturt Street is quite the gathering place for Ballarat's coffee and breakfast set, including some of its renowned authors; strolling along you'll hear excerpts from some of their work, including award winning authors Ross Gillett and Peter Temple (one of these cafes actually appears in one of his novels). Keep an eye out for some writers as you walk along here - but be warned! - they're loathe to discuss anything until they've had their first coffee.

#### **Stop 16. St Patricks and St Andrews**

It's well known that Ballarat used to have a pub for each day of the year, and a church for every week (in 1870 there were 470 hotels and 56 churches). Here are two of the most prestigious churches in Ballarat - the Catholic St Patrick's cathedral and on the right side of the road, St Andrew's Presbyterian church. Local writer and historian Jill Blee explores the different beliefs represented by these churches in her book *The Liberator's Birthday*. When the great Irish statesman Daniel O'Connell was elected to the House of Commons in the English parliament, he gained emancipation for all Catholics of the British Empire. Her fictitious story tells how the celebration of the centenary of O'Connell's birthday was marked in Ballarat in the year 1875.

### **Stop 17. Grainery Lane.**

Although sadly now defunct, the Grainery Lane Theatre was housed for just over a decade in a converted bluestone grainstore built in 1873, and has a long association with Ballarat's contemporary literary tradition. Over the years playwrights, songwriters, poets and other spoken word performers have all taken to the stage to bring their words to life. The Theatre opened in 1994 with the play *Rebellion*, by Chris Dickens, and over the years a vast range of people have performed here. One of those was Guy 'Badger' Fairnie, who passed away on April 11, 2003. In a tribute concert acknowledged his death and contribution to Ballarat's arts and culture local musicians The Underminers penned the song, *Page 21*.

### **Stop 18. Civic Hall and Library**

Here is where the Ballarat library was relocated, and the site of Austin McCallum's 'dreamed of' Australiana collection. We pay tribute here to native-born writer Bernard O'Dowd. Born in Beaufort in 1866, he was a well-known poet, radical and foundation member of the Victorian Socialists Party. A plaque in the Australiana room acknowledges the poet, and we share with you his poem *Democratise the World*.

### **Stop 19. Mair Street**

In 1889 a citizens committee was formed to raise funds for the Shakespeare Memorial, but it wasn't until 17 November 1960 that the statue was finally unveiled. " It says much about the civic pride and cultural endeavours of this community .... that cultural icons like William Shakespeare have a place beside war memorials and monuments to local heroes.

Bruce Widdop, director of Ozact, Australia's leading environmental Shakespeare company joins us to share a small reading with you, in fact the reference to 'where grief hath mates', from *The Tragedy of King Lear* by Shakespeare.

Old shop signage still marks this strip as a Jewish precinct. In his book, *Formula for Survival: The Saga of the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation*, Newman Rosenthal notes that through the long journey and exile of the Jews from their homelands they always traveled with a 'cherished heritage of story, of song and legend, of wit and humour.' Nathan Frederick Spielvogel was born in Ballarat in 1874, a teacher, writer and historian and according to Judah Waten "Jewish Literature in Australia began with him." Here's *The Wandering Jew* from a collection of poems, *Our gum trees and other verses*.

### **Stop 20 Ballarat railway station**

Opposite the Railway station you will see Ludbrook House; it was the warehouse for Irwins Hotel, but during WW2 it was a hostel and canteen for thousands of departing servicemen. Now at the end of the tour it has become a place of departure, rather than arrivals, none more poignant than the young men heading off to war.

The letters they sent home were published in the *Ballarat Courier* and have now been collected in a book called *Dinkum Oil*, edited by Amanda Taylor. The letters became an unedited source of information about the war and the welfare of the men that went away. They are heart wrenching, inspiring and at times comical, with that particular brand of laconic humour that has come to be identified as typically Australian.

And finally to our very own 'Agatha Christie'. Kerry Greenwood is a Melbourne writer, play write, director, folk singer, choral musician and cook when she is not being a barrister and solicitor for Victorian Legal Aid. We leave you with the crime mystery *Murder on the Ballarat Train* and introduce you to the exotic and talented private detective the Honourable Phryne Fisher. She is a seductive, pretty flapper of the 1920's and this book was her third adventure, Greenwood's up to her 16th Phryne Fisher story.

**Credits:**

*Script and research:* Anne E Stewart

*Readings:* Peter Freund, Caleb Cluff

*Audio production:* Dominic Brine

*Online production:* Jarrod Wat

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