

BOOK REVIEWS

F.M. Rothery, *Atlas of Bundaleer Plains and Tatala*, Ed. N.G. Butlin and J.N. Jennings. A.N.U. Press, Canberra 1970. Pp. XXIV + 55. \$10.00.

Three years ago the Australian National University Press entered the field of 'coffee-table' Australiana with an expensive edition of Samuel Shumack's *Autobiography or Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers*, which was notable for its lack of an editorial introduction to guide the reader through the author's detailed and rambling narrative, and of a map to locate the numerous places he mentioned. The present volume matches its predecessor as a piece of elegant book production, but there the resemblance ends, for it has been edited carefully for use by the serious historian. The editorial writing is meticulous, even delicate - descriptive nouns that may surprise readers of *Investment in Australian Economic Development* and other works by Professor N.G. Butlin. Should we thank Mr. Jennings for this, or has the element of piety evident in the editing of this *Atlas* inspired Professor Butlin to an unaccustomed level of literary finesse?

The editors' introduction contains a biographical sketch of the cartographer, Frederick Rothery, a history of Bundaleer Plains as a pastoral holding, and an assessment of Rothery's cartographic style and his accuracy in depicting the landscape. Bundaleer Plains was situated forty miles east of the Warrego River and had as its southern boundary the Queensland-New South Wales border. It contained 1,200 square miles of semi-arid country which Rothery was commissioned to map in 1876. His *Atlas* contains three attractive watercolours of the homestead, outhouses, and open country, an index map of the property showing its various sections, and then a series of nineteen sectional maps, fourteen of which are presented as pictorial maps, the artist standing on an imaginary high point to the south of the section, and so painting a perspective view complete with trees, ridges, dams and other features of interest to the pastoralist.

Rothery attached to the map of each section an official appraisal of the Queensland Government made in October 1874. The appraisal describes the boundaries and improvements made on the section, and estimates for the purpose of taxation the amount of land 'available to pasturage'. To the 1874 appraisal the editors have added one made in 1886, when the property had been fully developed by the construction of fencing, outstations and dams. These improvements are itemised in the 1886 appraisal, and when compared to the 1874 appraisal and Rothery's 1876 maps provide a clear-mental-picture of the extensive investment undertaken between the two dates. (Could not Professor Butlin and Mr. Jennings have set up their easels in the shade of the gums outside the H.C. Coombs building and painted some 1886 views of Bundaleer?)

Let us compliment the editors, briefly but unreservedly, for making available this *Atlas*, the original of which is part of the Business Archives Collection of the Australian National University. It will fascinate all lovers of maps, and is a valuable, if minor contribution to research and teaching in Australian pastoral history. The *Atlas* may also stand as a fitting memorial to the

revolution in Australian historical archives inaugurated twenty years ago by the A.N.U. Business Archives, whose archivists have consistently chosen to collect records according to their historical rather than antiquarian value. Crate loads of pastoral and trade union records are dirtier, more cumbersome and less romantic than first editions of 'First Fleet' narratives; that they are to be preferred involves a value judgement to which most Australian historians if not archivists now subscribe. In admiring Rothery's *Atlas* we should not forget that it is a small nugget embedded in hundreds of running feet of pastoral records. We turn now to test the fineness of the nugget.

Connoisseurs of cartography can arm themselves with a pair of callipers and check the various maps and the boundary descriptions in the 1874 appraisal for consistency. The relevant maps are Rothery's key map of Bundaleer and his series of maps of the sections and the editors' key map of Bundaleer redrawn from the *Atlas*. Some inconsistencies appear, as, for example, in the mapping of the Macclesfield No. 4 section. Rothery's detailed map of the section defines rectangular boundaries of six by ten miles, and this agrees with the 1874 appraisal and the editors' map; but not with Rothery's key map which measures three by ten miles. On the other hand, Rothery's key map does not correspond with his detailed maps of Macclesfield No. 1 and No. 2, but the editors' map this time corresponds with Rothery's key map rather than his two detailed maps of the sections.

Rothery's pictorial maps are attractive: but how accurately do they describe the vegetation and its pastoral capacity? The editors claim that Rothery "has represented physical features in their varying character, size and relationship with each other with great skill. Details of trees and shrubs, both in area and type of vegetation, are laid out faithfully" (p. XI). The maps contain "an amazing wealth of content and validity in their depiction of the character of the land" (p. XIX). This seems a fair judgement, but the editors themselves provide grounds for modest doubt. They have used Rothery's maps and other contemporary evidence to draw a vegetational map of Bundaleer in 1878 which employs modern cartographic methods. The editors' map (p. XX), even without the use of colours, seems to me to convey more information, more clearly and precisely, than do Rothery's series of maps. The maps cannot stand comparison with modern cartography. How would they compare with the best cartography of 1876?

A further point of criticism relates to the editors' interpretation of the 1874 and 1886 official appraisals of Bundaleer. Comparison of the two appraisals shows that on most sections the "available area" for pasturage increased from half in 1874 to 80 per cent or more in 1886 as a result of improvements made. The detailed lists of improvements in the 1886 appraisal leave no doubt that carrying capacity had increased; but the editors are wrong to use changes in the official ratios of available to unavailable land as indexes of improvement, because the official assessments, at least in 1874, are calculated on an arbitrary rule. In 1874 all but two of the sections were appraised at precisely half available for pasturage, including those sections that had dams. Dr Heathcote (*Back of Bourke*) has

pointed out that official appraisals were made in order to levy rents and land taxes, and so they varied, not only with the quality of land under consideration but also with government policy; they became more severe after the 1884 Land Act.

The step from scholarship to pedantry is a small one, and this reviewer has clearly taken it. While some discussion of appraisal methods, inconsistencies in the maps and perhaps some other points might have been useful, one must agree with the editors' decision not to burden the *Atlas* with excessive commentary.

J.W. McCarty

Archives Authority of New South Wales
Guide to the State Archives of New South Wales
Record Group NG : the Governor, 1787-1935

(Prepared by Mrs D. Troy)
Sydney, the Archives Authority, 1969
pp. 136

To one who has attempted similar work, the strongest impression on reading this inventory is of the scholarship that has gone into its preparation – a familiarity with the records and understanding of their background – the foundation of the building. The function of the compiler of an inventory is to study the whole group of records and describe it in a way that will enable the reader to find what he wants without first having to study the whole group. That Mrs. Troy has succeeded is beyond question. To do this one would be justified in presenting only a description of the records, giving series titles and explanatory notes, more detailed lists of items in the larger series, and a brief administrative history to introduce the reader to the group. Whatever else appears is by way of bonus.

The present work is a good deal more elaborate. The basic elements appear as the introduction; a list of series titles, classified more or less by type, giving an easy conspectus of the whole group; the inventory proper, arranged by series number; and shelf lists of the larger and more important series (Appendices G, H and I). We are also given a subject arrangement of the series with references to supplementary material in various forms (Appendix A), a list of relevant Public Record Office material microfilmed for the Australian Joint Copying Project (Appendix F) and appendices containing lists of key persons. Each series appears in four sections of the inventory, and some in five. In addition some series appear more than once in the classified list of series titles, and some, dealing with more than one subject, appear two or three times in Appendix A. The complexity of this arrangement sounds daunting when stated baldly like this. However, it is an ordered complexity, which could not be simplified much without some loss.

The list of series titles tells nothing that is not in the body of the inventory, but experience has shown that it is sometimes easier to refer to the short list rather than the detailed description. As there are only 36 series it is hardly necessary to classify them.

With the main part of the work, "Description of the Records", one needs to be hypercritical to find fault. Descriptive paragraphs give useful references from one series to another, as well as the necessary information about the content, form and arrangement of the records, and the administrative background that gave rise to them. These are suitably elaborate for the despatches to and from the Secretary of State, the "backbone" of the group, to borrow a metaphor from Muller, Feith and Fruin. There is a little imbalance in dealing with series 31, where a page and a half are devoted to one volume. (It is rather ungracious to say that too much information is given!)

The shelf lists, equivalent to the English "class lists", enable the reader to give a precise reference to the particular volume or box of papers that interests him, but publishing the location symbols may give rise to variety in citation, as for example, "NG3, 1918 despatch no. 3" or "7/1567.2 despatch no. 3".

An introduction to a record group can be very compact, as in the *Guide to the Contents of the Public Record Office*, or extended to include more than bare facts about administration. Our colleagues in Sydney have chosen the latter form, and the result is an interesting account of the governorship and some of the governors, emphasising the earlier years when characteristic patterns and precedents were set. It is not a history of social or political movements, although some are mentioned, nor a collection of biographies, though personal details are included, but an outline of the development of an office and the changes effected in it by social and political pressures and personal idiosyncrasies.

Appendix A serves a dual purpose, the main one being to make up for the large gaps in the original records. It is to be hoped that readers will be duly thankful for the diligent searching that has been done for them in the Archives and the Mitchell and Dixson Libraries. The second purpose is to provide a subject approach to the records, arranging them under 15 headings which are key words drawn from the series titles. Whether this is successful or not probably depends on the individual reader. I personally would prefer an arrangement by series number, making it easier to refer from the main part of the inventory to the list of supplementary material.

Appendix F is an excellent contents list of about 500 reels of the Joint Copying Project microfilms, and could serve the needs of other institutions holding these reels.

Technically, the standard of production is rather poor. The density of ink varies from page to page and from word to word – a perennial difficulty in large scale stencil duplicating. The inside margins of some pages are too narrow, making it difficult to read into the gutter. The title page and one or two others

in the copy reviewed look as if they had been knocking about the Government Printer's floor before going through the machine.

However, apart from its physical appearance, this is an impressive piece of work, giving the potential reader a good description of an important group of records, and a liberal allowance of bonuses.

J.H. Love

H.J. Gibbney and N. Burns
A biographers' index of parliamentary returns
for New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, 1850-1889

Canberra, A.N.U., 1969 \$2.50

Papers presented to Australian Parliaments are very useful for research as summaries and evaluations of information in the records of government departments, or obtained from evidence before select committees and commissions, particularly when the original sources are unavailable or too cumbersome for convenient use. However, they are difficult to use because they are quite unsystematic and "occasional". A list of pastoral tenants, for instance, will be presented when one member asks for it, and will probably never appear again. In fact they are a field of very mixed minerals, with lodes broken at every yard by faulting. This makes them a great field for amateur prospectors and a nightmare for professional miners.

This information can usually be retrieved only by a hopeful fishing expedition among the indexes to the various volumes, and by groping among their peculiar pagination systems. The only general index appears to be that for Victorian parliamentary papers from 1851 to 1909. Now H.J. Gibbney and Mrs N. Burns, of the Department of History, Australian National University, have prepared *A biographers' index* to the papers of the New South Wales, Queensland and Victorian parliaments for the years 1850 to 1889. It does not pretend to be a comprehensive index, as it is purely an off-shoot of indexing prepared for the Australian Dictionary of Biography. It indexes only those papers which include lists of names, and omits all items which deal with summaries of government administration and development. Among the useful items listed are civil service lists, names of surveyors and districts surveyed, magistrates, etc. As an indication of the mixed bag with which it has to deal, one may question who will be interested in the trustees of the Collingwood Branch, Order of Good Fellows, 1886, or would search parliamentary papers to identify them.

Owing to the emphasis on biographical use the *Index* at times lists papers under descriptive titles rather than those used when they were originally prepared. Perhaps, in view of the haphazard nature of the collection, it would

have been better to prepare an index in alphabetical order, with identifying description of office held or reason for inclusion, instead of indicating the relation of a list to subject matters of the papers. However that would be asking far too much of anyone who has other full-time duties. It may come in time, but the task grows steadily greater, and when someone faces the problem of accomplishing that job, it will simply be too costly in time and money. We can thank Mr Gibbney and Mrs Burns for the trouble they have taken to open up this goldfield.

The *Index* is divided into fifty-five general subject headings, some with a number of sub-headings, nearly each of which refers to all three States.

If the reception of the present volume proves the work is justified the publication of further indexes will be considered.

K.A. Patterson

NEWS NOTES

Archives Authority of New South Wales

The *Concise guide to the State archives of New South Wales*, which has been awaited for some time is now in the hands of the printer. Publication is expected about the middle of 1970, and the Archives Authority of New South Wales hopes to be able to give full details about this publication in the next issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*. The selling price has not yet been determined but will be not less than \$10.00. The *Concise guide* will list all series in the Archives Office of New South Wales which had been processed for use up to September 1969; descriptions of most of these series are included.

Mr R.F. Doust, the Senior Archivist, has recently completed a thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the School of Librarianship, University of New South Wales, for the award of its degree of Master of Librarianship. The thesis was "The administration of official archives in N.S.W., 1870-1960". Mr Doust has now had the degree of M. Lib. conferred upon him, and *Archives and Manuscripts* extends congratulations to him.

Queensland State Archives

After more than ten years' service as Archivist, Library Board of Queensland, the present Editor of this journal, Mr. R.C. Sharman, has resigned from his Queensland appointment, and has taken up duties as Archives Officer, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra. The vacancy in the Queensland State Archives had not, at the time of going to press, been filled, though applications had been called for. Mrs Janet Shield (the