Alistair Gilmour

Alistair Gilmour worked for Victorian Fisheries and Wildlife in the 1960s and 1970s. He dived the coast of Victoria with the Underwater Explorers Club. In the early 1980s, Alistair was executive officer of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority before becoming Professor in Environmental Studies, Graduate School of the Environment, at Macquarie University, Sydney.

Book reviews

Wrecks on the reef: A guide to the historic shipwrecks at Port Phillip Heads

Author: Ross Anderson

Publisher: Heritage Council of Victoria, Melbourne, 1997.

Paperback, 83 pp., fully illustrated.

This production by the Heritage Council of Victoria, authored by a member of Heritage Victoria, is a well-written and produced book. It gives interesting details about, and describes the location, or probable location of, some 40 shipwrecks identified in the immediate area of Port Phillip Heads. Anderson pays considerable attention to defining the precise area of study and lists other wrecks associated with the heads, but not included in the book, in an appendix.

The detail and the style of the material gives the reader a great deal of confidence in the scholarship of the author. Where he is aware of disagreements about facts, these are noted, and discrepancies between historic references relating to each of the ships and their fate are also noted. Anderson provides excellent but concise details of each of the 40 wrecks in a nicely balanced set of notes, accompanied by diagrams and reproductions of contemporary sketches. The two main locations covered in the guide, Point Lonsdale and Point Nepean reefs, are displayed in two colour aerial photographs, each filling a page, with known and probable resting places of each of the wrecks, or debris of the vessels. These, together with detailed descriptions, often using contemporary accounts, are an excellent aid for divers wishing to visit these important heritage sites.

A series of chapters introduce the geography of the area and some of the historic context needed for a better understanding of the importance of this heritage in our cultural environment. The chapters include a discussion on the interpretation of shipwreck remains, the nature of the tides and their action in the rip, the geological history of the area, some notes about the history of the pilot service and the activities of local people as lifesavers and wreckers. At the end of the book is an appendix with a list of wrecks not included, a list of those included in the text with a synopsis of their details, a simple diagram of the types of sailing vessels and their rigs, a glossary and references.

The descriptions of each of the wrecks start with the name of the vessel and its building year and the month and year of its demise. Each vessel has a neat thumbnail sketch of its construction and early history. Excellent details of the wreck and the subsequent rescue activities follow. Anderson gives a brief account of any maritime boards of inquiry with information about the fate of the cargoes, insurance outcomes and other relevant details to round out describing the incident. Some vessels are covered in more detail, as might be expected, depending on the availability of historical records.

The whole production has a clear, modern print style with excellent diagrams and some photographs, including three pages of small colour photographs taken at some of the underwater sites. My only complaint is about the size of the pages — could not the Heritage Council have risked a larger format so that those of us with fading ocular acuity could enjoy the excellent diagrams, pictures and reproductions to full advantage?
That aside, I would strongly recommend this excellent volume to all who are interested in the history of Australia, and especially those interested in maritime archaeology. When can we expect the next production — in larger format, of course, on the other interesting areas of the coast?
Robert Green
Robert Green is an architect at Heritage Victoria. He has a long-standing interest in tramway history and is the author of The First Electric Road, a centenary history of Australia’s first electric tramway which ran between Box Hill and Doncaster, east of Melbourne.

Melbourne’s Marvellous Trams
Authors: Dale Budd and Randall Wilson


Paperback, 96 pp., illustrated (black-and-white and colour).

Melbourne’s electric trams, the largest in the English-speaking world, are much more than just a public transport service. In recent years the trams have become mobile icons of the city. The authors believe the attraction of trams results from a blend of characteristics, and this book relies substantially on its pictorial content to describe these attributes.

Dale Budd and Randall Wilson, of Canberra, have a long-standing interest in their subject. In his foreword, Keith Dunstan, the well-known Melbourne columnist who also seems to have a soft spot for trams, claims that while Budd has a vast technical knowledge of both trams and trains, Wilson, a native Melburnian, has trams in his blood.

This landscape-format A4-size book briefly covers almost every conceivable aspect of Melbourne’s trams, including:
• history
• maintenance
• types of vehicle now operating (including drawings and specifications)
• the preserved heritage fleet
• the highly successful mobile restaurant and city circle tourist services
• abandoned lines and services
• special advertising and artist-painted trams
• designs for vehicles that did not advance beyond the drawing board
• mishaps
• the reincarnations of many former Melbourne trams now scattered around the world (Elton John even has one in his garden)

The book is crammed with more than 200 captioned photographs, interspersed with more than 40 uncaptioned images of old and modern tickets, and various signs and logos found on the vehicles and items of infrastructure. A few black-and-white pictures provide a useful historical background to the present system. This aspect is further explored in an interesting chapter ‘Then and Now’. Considerable coverage is given to the succession of bright and decorative trams painted by noted artists during the ‘Transporting Art’ campaign of the 1970s and 1980s, together with some examples of the way trams have been perceived and depicted by artists since World War II.

The lengthy and informative captions give considerable support to the brief introductions to each of the chapters or themes. However, many captions do not refer to the date or approximate era of the illustration — some photographs were taken during tram-enthusiast outings on unusual vehicles — so the average reader may gain the incorrect impression that many of the old and odd types of tram depicted are still operating regularly. Unfortunately, two captions also give incorrect locations for the subject illustrated (the shunting cable car shown on page 12 is in Domain Road, not Toorak Road; and the 1960s street scene on page 57 is Glenferrie Road, not Balaclava Road). Another unfortunate distortion of the historical record occurs on the cover—the colour of one of the four trams illustrated has been changed from green to red.
presumably to enhance the book’s visual appeal to purchasers.

Maps of the cable tramway network and the electric tramways provide an immediate impression of the vast extent of the systems. Unfortunately, the electric tramways map is difficult to read because the current operating lines in yellow do not contrast enough against the background. Ironically, the closed lines, shown in red, are outstanding.

In addition to describing the tramways, the book compares the system with others around the world and examines why Melbourne is the only Australian capital city operating a major network. The authors contrast the circumstances in Sydney and Melbourne during the 1950s when cities around the world were replacing trams with buses. They conclude that Melbourne was unable to scrap its trams because the vehicles and infrastructure were still relatively new, since most of it was installed as a result of the electrification of the vast cable tram system during the 1920s and 1930s.

The authors also believe a key factor in keeping the trams was the persuasive advocacy of Major-General (later Sir Robert) Risson, the indefatigable chairman of the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board. The last chapter features an address given by Risson to the Institute of Transport in 1955, in which he points out that trams lasted 50 years longer than buses; in peak periods they could move four times more passengers in half the time; and they were environmentally friendly.

As well as appealing to tramway enthusiasts and tourists, this attractive well-illustrated book will provide considerable background information to general readers simply wanting to know more about Melbourne’s famous tramways.
Michael Pearson

Michael Pearson is a Canberra-based heritage consultant, specialising in site-based research, conservation planning and heritage management advice. He has worked on the conservation plans for many rural properties in NSW.

Warrock

Author: Michele Summerton (photographs by David Wixted and Michele Summerton)

Publisher: Heritage Council of Victoria, Melbourne, 1997.

Summerton’s short but well written and illustrated booklet provides a good introduction to Warrock, a pastoral property near Casterton in the Western District of Victoria.

Warrock was licensed to George Robertson, a Scottish cabinet-maker, in 1844. The lease was confirmed in 1848. George and his wife Mary continuously developed and added to the homestead and farm complex until their deaths in 1890 and 1886 respectively. Mary, who married her cousin George in 1852 at the age of 48, shared with her husband a particularly interest in horticulture, and introduced many exotic species into the homestead landscape. It is not clear from the text and photos how much of this planting survives today. The conservatory, propagation house and ‘pleasure ground’ still stand to reflect this interest. Other buildings include the original one-room cottage built by Robertson in 1844 and relocated to the current site, the 1846 homestead complex, stables, grain store, farm office complex, workers cottages and barracks, workshop, animal byres and woolshed complex.

On George’s death the property passed to his nephew George Robertson Patterson, and stayed in the family through another four generations until 1992. The property is still privately owned, but the State contributes substantial sums for conservation through the Heritage Council.

The most unusual aspect of Warrock is the adherence to the particular building style instigated by George Robertson—a picturesque gothic-inspired design typified by long, narrow square and lancet-headed windows and ventilators, high pitched roofs, finials and decorative awnings. This style appears to have been used for nearly all of Warrock’s 57 buildings (or at least those shown in this book), despite the fact that buildings were continuously added throughout the 19th century. Most buildings are timber clad, the early ones using split palings from Van Diemen’s Land, which became the standard building material on the early Victorian gold fields. Many of the plans and building layouts seem to have come from pattern books such as Loudon. One of the remarkable things about the property is that George’s successors appear to have maintained his buildings even when original uses became redundant. They also made sympathetic alterations and additions to other buildings when circumstances demanded.

Warrock cannot be said to be typical of pastoral properties, in that most show much more layering of styles and changing uses over time. From the excellent photos Warrock looks too copy-book and neat to be Australian. Warrock is fascinating, but I got the feeling that its mannered uniform style would tell the visitor much more about George and Mary Robertson and the Robertson Patterson family (fascinating as that story is) than about Victorian pastoralism generally. It may well be a unique site rather than a typical one.

The book presents a tantalising glimpse of the property in its 42 pages, with a succinct introductory history and a short text supported by good photographs describing many of the individual buildings. The book makes me want to visit the property, especially the conservatory and garden, the marvellous woolshed, and the dog kennels from which the kelpie dog breed originated (a claim that, being a sceptic, I confirmed at the...
Working Kelpie Council's website). I want to know much more than a book of this size can tell me.

The reader feels that Summerton, who completed a Master of Arts thesis on Warrock, could say a lot more to pull the story together and put Warrock into a wider context if allowed more space. This booklet is more of a guide and teaser, and Heritage Victoria is to be congratulated in producing such an attractive, and within its limits informative, introduction to the site.
Landprints: reflections on places and landscape

Author: George Seddon
Publisher: Cambridge University Press, Oakleigh, Victoria, 1997.
Hardback, 254 pp., rrp $39.95.

Travelling along the Great Ocean Road, as it snakes around Victoria's south-western coastline, has been a delight for me since childhood. The journey has always been enjoyable, not only because of the beauty of the landscape, but also the evocative names, liberally posted along the road, of the typological features. Cinema Point, Shrapnel Gully, Mount Defiance and Big Hill are some of the feature-names. These names evoke images of returned First World War soldiers, and other unemployed workers, who constructed the road as part of the Victorian government's 'sustenance' program during the 1930s economic depression. Their hardships and frustrations, as well as their appreciation and delight with the landscape, survive in the names they gave to the Great Ocean Road's features.

George Seddon deals with this subject of place names and others in his collection Landprints: reflections on places and landscape. Although the essay form limits a thorough examination of the topic, his essay 'Words and Weeds: some notes on language and landscape' (pp. 15-27) nevertheless raises some thought-provoking issues about the contribution place names make to our cultural heritage.

The essays and reviews in the book are about landscape, usually Australian landscape, and its interpretation. The collection, as the author says, is '...intended not so much as a direct contribution to conservation issues as a contribution to the conservation debate and a better understanding of landscape planning' (p. xvii). The essays and reviews have been written over a broad period of time, the first published in 1972. The collection provides an indication of the issues and debates which have occurred in conservation over the last 27 years. They reveal the different emphases and the evolving attitude towards the conservation of our landscapes.

Seddon is well qualified to contribute to the 'conservation debate'. He is the author of Sense of Place (1972) and has taught in the English Department at the University of Western Australia, the Department of Geology and Geophysics at the University of Oregon, the School of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of New South Wales, and was Director of the Centre for Environmental Studies at the University of Melbourne. He is currently employed as an Honorary Research Fellow in the Centre for Studies in Australian Literature at the University of Western Australia and Emeritus Professor in Environmental Science at the University of Melbourne.

Some essays and reviews in the book are more relevant to students and heritage practitioners. The essay 'On The Road to Botany Bay: a review of a book with that name by Paul Carter' continues the discussion on naming topographical features. The discipline of writing environmental history is also examined in 'A Snowy River reader'. Other subjects discussed in Landprints which may be of relevance to students and heritage practitioners are the role of subjectivity in assessment and the evolution of the Australian suburban garden.
Landprints is well-referenced, allowing the reader to explore issues beyond the limits of the essay and review form. It is also thoroughly illustrated. The work makes a valuable contribution to the exploration of our cultural landscapes and heritage scholarship.