The long-awaited revised edition of *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* was finally published in early November 2001. Edited by three of Australia's finest historians – Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre – it includes 1600 encyclopaedic entries, with contributions from 317 scholars and writers throughout Australia and New Zealand. The majority of contributors are historians; however, political scientists, social scientists, educationists, art historians and archivists are well represented – architects, however, are conspicuous by their absence.

The first edition of *The Oxford Companion* was published in 1998 – over 10,000 copies were sold; it has been out of print for almost two years. Ranging from essays of up to 2,000 words to succinct factual entries of 100 words, the Companion is immensely readable and provides learned, accessible and up-to-date studies of the key chapters and personalities in Australian history. Revised entries, such as John Howard and the Olympic Games, reflect important events since the 1998 edition.

As Geoffrey Blainey commented when reviewing the first edition, 'the three editors deserve praise, not least because they themselves have written many of the major articles...commenting with insight' (TLS, 1999). Blainey is himself a contributor to the Companion. Indeed, the list of contributors reads like a 'Who's Who' of prominent Australian, and a sprinkling of New Zealand, historians both of the older and the younger generation. As well as historians, notable Australians provide insightful contributions. Zelman Cowen writes on the office of the governor-general; Barry Jones writes on biographical dictionaries; and R J W Selleck on education.

It is possible to pick up this book and browse through it at random. Entries are thoroughly cross-referenced, encouraging the reader to follow entries – be they people, events or aspects of Australian life – thematically, factually and biographically.

As the editors explain in the preface, *The Companion* includes entries on politicians, colonisers, explorers, writers, artists and scientists. It includes major entries on Australian icons – such as Ned Kelly, Donald Bradman, John Curtin and Robert Menzies, to name but a few. More importantly perhaps, the Companion includes extended essays on key facets of our national life – political, social, cultural and economic.

There are major entries on branches of history, such as feminist and Aboriginal
(perhaps two of the most contested histories) which offer both a survey of the field and a commentary on the changing approaches and methodologies. Other entries on Australian life also identify and comment on the way subjects have been understood and assessed and include a thorough review of literature. This is perhaps one of the most valuable aspects of the Companion. As a major reference work in itself, the Companion draws on key reference works such as the Australian Dictionary of Biography, the Australian National Dictionary, Australians: A Historical Dictionary, and other publications.

Many of the smaller, 100 word entries, are written by research assistants Kim Torney and Helen Doyle; a similar number are written by the editors themselves. These factual entries provide the reader with sufficient information to further investigate a topic – for example, Black Thursday or Black trackers – and also provide bibliographic detail.

At times, however, the selection process is baffling; is there a slight element of New South Wales bias? The editors’ rule of thumb is set out in the preface: all prime ministers, for example, and most governors prior to the introduction of responsible government in 1851 (a separate entry) are included. However, the first governor of Victoria, Charles Joseph La Trobe is one glaring omission and an obvious disappointment to the newly formed La Trobe Society. Similarly, only a selection of state premiers, religious and business leaders have entries. In this instance Victoria’s 1890s speculator and premier James Munro is omitted. Entries on some of Victoria’s most influential architects and decorators are also sadly lacking. The volume includes entries on Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony, Francis Greenway, Joseph Reed and William Wardell, yet William Pitt, J J Clarke, Peter Kerr, Leonard Terry, Percy Oakden and Percy Everett et al, are excluded.

This volume is large and weighty – not the kind of book to transport easily but certainly one to stay shelved, within easy reach, for frequent reference. Its 722 pages are well set out; and entries are not cluttered by diagrams or photographic images. Such additions would, I believe, be superfluous. Coloured maps of Australia, and maps of each state are the only illustrations included. A comprehensive subject index – from Aborigines to Wars – indicates the breadth and depth of the entries.

In his review of the first edition of The Companion, John Legge (Age, 1998) pointed to the companionable nature of this work. The revised edition is exactly that, and more. It is easy to read, informative, good humoured and insightful. It is an essential reference work for, not only the student of history, but for any reader keen to explore the current dimensions of Australian history and culture.

Fay Woodhouse

Dr Fay Woodhouse is an academic and Senior Historian with Allom Lovell & Associates, Conservation Architects. Her published work includes Anti-Communism and Civil Liberties: The 1951 Communist Party Dissolution Referendum Debate at the University of Melbourne; 'Ripples on the Lake: A Conservative Response to the Depression, 1930-32', Australian Studies, and 'Catholic Action and Anti-Communism: The Spanish Civil War Debate at the University of Melbourne, March 1937', Journal of Australian Studies; as well as numerous book reviews in Australian and international journals.
Victorian Historical Journal, 

A Special Issue Celebrating 150 years of Goldmining in Victoria.
Publisher: Royal Historical Society of Victoria.
Paperback, black and white photographs, 208 pages, rrp. $20.00

The RHSV is to be congratulated for producing this special issue of the Victorian Historical Journal, as its contribution to the sesquicentenary of gold discovery in Victoria. The production was supported by the Heritage Council and the Australian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy.

The celebration of the discovery of gold has to some extent been overlooked by that other much recently celebrated event, Federation. In a year when many thousands of words have been dedicated to describing and analysing the awkward coming together of the Australian colonies, much less page space has been dedicated to gold. It could be argued, however, that the discovery of gold was in fact much more significant and far-reaching than Federation, and that gold helped to drive the colonies towards union by stimulating economic growth and political consciousness. Certainly the gold miners of the late 1890s were vociferous proponents of Federation, with the goldfields of both Western Australia and Central Victoria being hotspots of Federation support.

Historians are particularly fond of assessing ‘impacts’, and it is doubtful if more fertile ground for such assessment exists in our nation’s history. The impacts of gold in Victoria were many - economic, social, cultural, political, environmental and physical. The papers in this collection range across this rich historical landscape, but the historiography, to its credit, does not just focus on the ‘positive’ and the ‘transformations’, but also on the ‘negative’ impacts.

Weston Bate commences proceedings with a lively discussion of gold in the role of ‘social energiser’. Gold freed the people and communities ‘who dug it’ from outside control and the need to borrow capital. These communities then had the confidence and the opportunity to shape themselves in new democratic terms. Bate also talks about the ‘social power’ of gold in Victoria, and the extraordinarily rapid transfer of economic power ‘to those who previously had little’. In viewing the impact of gold in this way, Bate reminds us that the Victorian rushes, particularly the mad rush to Castlemaine and Bendigo (the famed Mount Alexander Diggings) were like no other goldrushes the planet had ever seen. Bate is an eminent historian of gold, and he captures the excitement, diversity and urgency of the phenomenon, but always with an emphasis on the commonplace, on the ordinary people of the goldfields.

Don Garden calls on contemporary accounts of gold mining activities and settlements, to enhance our awareness of the environmental degradation caused by mining in all its forms. The destruction of forests, the polluting of waterways, the leaving behind of often toxic dumps and other detritus of mining, are themes which are increasingly making their way into our ‘gold’ consciousness.

Martin J Hughes and Neil Phillips step outside the conventional borders of historical narrative to examine the geological framework of the gold ‘province’ of Victoria. Such a scientific foundation is often absent from historical analysis. In taking their readers back a mere 450 million years before the present, the authors provide us with an overview of the formation and nature of the gold deposits which helps to explain where the gold occurred, and why it was extracted by the various methods. The authors also make the point that the opening up of the Victorian fields made significant contributions to the study of science and geology, particularly the field of ‘economic geology’.

At a more micro level, the collection includes essays on Warrandyte, Christian
'missionising' to the Chinese, and our heritage of goldfields public buildings.
Diann Reilly looks at Charles Joseph LaTrobe and his administration of the
goldfields, including his role in the introduction of the much hated Gold License,
one of the factors which led to the Eureka Stockade uprising. Ian Rae examines the
'marriage' of gold and arsenic, and what this has left behind - another potent
reminder of one of gold's negative impacts.

Jan Penney concludes the collection with a paper on the Creswick Mining Disaster
of 1882, when 22 men died in a deep lead mine. The attempts at rescue, and
subsequent events above the surface, are all graphically described. The paper also
highlights another significant impact of gold - that on the trade union movement
and the development of more stringent mining safety regulations.

This issue of the Journal is well illustrated and includes a useful collection of
graphs and maps, although the reproduction quality of some of the historic images
is poor. This can be forgiven, however, because of the age of some of these images.
Many Victorian goldfields were opened up in the early years of photography, and
we are fortunate indeed that photographers were equally as susceptible to the lure
of gold as anyone else in Victoria in the 1850s.

Anita Brady

Anita Brady is a heritage practitioner and professional historian, currently with
Allom Lovell & Associates. Anita has worked for several government agencies in
the field of heritage practice, including Heritage Victoria and the Department of
Natural Resources and Environment in Victoria. In both those roles Anita has been
involved in the assessment and documentation of gold-related heritage places, and
in analyzing the broader impacts of gold on Victoria.

General Reading with a Heritage Theme

Fiction

The Grand Complication
Allen Kurzweil
Publisher: Hyperion.
Hard cover, rrp $59.95.

Alexander Short is a reference librarian who spends his days dealing with the
minutiae of his work. He is fascinated when he meets Henry James Jesson 111, an
everly man with equally obsessive interests. In Jesson's Manhattan mansion there
is a cabinet of curiosities that tell the life of an 18th century inventor. But one of
the compartments is empty. Jesson, and soon Alexander, are agog with curiosity
about what was in that compartment. This is a book for book lovers: for those of us
who like the look and feel of a book almost as much as we like the reading. By the
author of A Case of Curiosities.

Autobiography/History

Journal 1935 - 44
Mihail Sebastian
Publisher: Century.
Hard cover, rrp $67.90.

This extraordinary personal diary, describing, day by day, the "huge anti-Semitic
factory" that was Romania in the late 1930s and early 1940s, deserves to be on the
same shelf as Anne Frank's Dairy and to find as huge a readership. Sebastian is no
child, however - his is a sophisticated literary mind observing the horror, and then
portraying, with a fluent, lucid pungency, the cruelty, cowardice and stupidity of his worldly Gentile friends in Bucharest’s cultural elite as they voluntarily transform themselves into intellectual criminals and, allied with the Nazis, participate with fanatical conviction in “an anti-Semitic delirium that nothing can stop. - Philip Roth

History

Gallipoli

Les Carlyon
Publisher: Macmillan.
Hard cover, rrp $45.00.

Gallipoli is Les Carlyon’s magisterial account of the campaign, and the greatest work to be written on this seminal Australian drama since Alan Moorehead’s brilliant recreation almost 50 years ago, Carlyon’s book recounts the individual experience of battle, describing the characters both great and small who fought and died there, as well as clearly setting out the strategic and political background against which the campaign was conducted.

Biography/Curiosity

Lord Minimus

Nick Page
Publisher: HarperCollins.
Hard cover, rrp $32.95

Lord Minimus was Jeoffrey Hudson, born in 1619. ‘The smallest man in England’ ventured forth from a humble rural background and set course on an episodic roller coaster that led him to the edges of the known world. From the lowest social strata he rose to the courts of Kings and Queens. His portrait was painted by Van Dyck and Ben Jonson cast him in one of his masques. He was the subject of poems, prints and books. Yet, he died alone and forgotten, abandoned by a society which no longer cared and which had long moved on to the next object of fashion.

Cultural Tourism

Paris Sketchbook

Moireau & Kelly
Publisher: Editions Didier Millet.
Hard cover, rrp $70.00.

Paris seen through the eyes of artist Fabrice Moireau, with sketches in watercolour and pencil perfectly matched by an introduction by Mary A. Kelly. These residents of the world’s most romantic capital city are the perfect guides to its streets, monuments, gardens and delightfully hidden corners.

Art and Literature

Elements of Italy

Editors: Lisa St Aubin de Teran
Publisher: Virago.
Hard cover, rrp $45.00.

Lisa St Aubin de Teran conveys the message of what Italy means to her by dividing this anthology into the four classical elements – earth, fire, air and water. She explores the work of Italians including Dante, da Vinci, Goethe, Primo Levi, and non-Italians including Turner, Shelley and Keats.
Architecture/Follies

In Ruins
Christopher Woodward
Publisher: Chatto & Windus.
Hard cover, rrp $39.80.

Why are we so fascinated by ruins? In this elegant, provocative book, the brilliant young art-historian Christopher Woodward looks back to the start of the cult in the eighteenth century, when follies were built in English landscape gardens. With its fascinating stories and characters, and its telling illustrations. In Ruins is full of strange delights and startling surprises, exploring the mysterious, melancholy charm of eternal fragments.

Young Adults

Hannah's Winter
Kierin Meehan
Publisher: Puffin.
Paperback, rrp. $14.95.

When her mother takes her to Japan, Hannah would much rather be back in Australia starting secondary school with her friends. But her stay turns out to be nothing like she had imagined, and when she finds an ancient message in the stationery shop, she is drawn into solving, a mysterious riddle. A highly original novel that blends fact with fantasy in a style that is both funny and touching. (Ages 11-14).

Andrew Robertson

Book Reviews kindly supplied by Andrew Robertson, Manager, Hill of Content Bookshop, 86 Bourke Street, Melbourne.