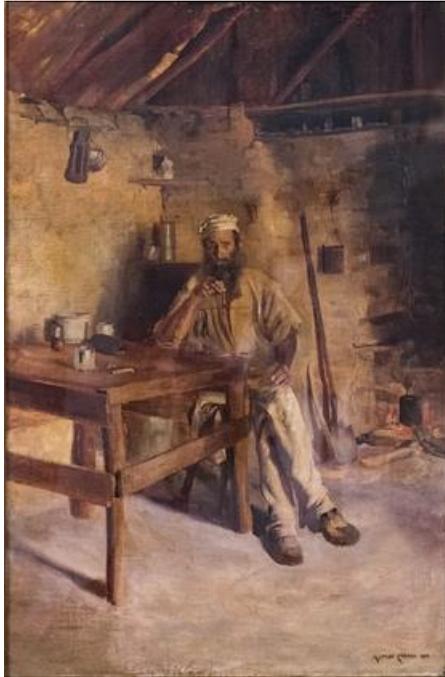


JULY 2019

The Pioneer



“Pioneer Seated”

by Alfred Coffey (1869-1950) c1900

PIONEERARTWORK

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The Pioneer

We began our Foundation Day lunch with the traditional remembering of “the toil, suffering and sacrifice [of] the pioneers, our ancestors.” But what, exactly, does and should that mean to us in the 19th year of the 21st century?

In a recent paper¹ Emeritus Professor Richard Waterhouse revisits the rise and fall of the ‘pioneer’ legend. Its antecedent, he argues, can be found in the early 19th century ‘bush’ ethos of mateship, anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism among itinerant workers (eg, shearers), which was identified in Russel Ward’s *The Australian Legend* (1958) but originally espoused and popularised by the writings of Henry Lawson and ‘Banjo’ Paterson, promoted in publications like *The Bulletin* and exemplified in the growth of the trade union movement (culminating in the shearers’ strike of 1891).

A competing concept of how Australians understood their past was proposed by John Hirst in 1978.² He contended that the ‘pioneers’ were not itinerant bush workers but the explorers who subjugated the wilderness, along with the selectors and squatters whose “conversion of ... the Australian landscape into agricultural farms and grazing properties” was celebrated at the centenary of European settlement in 1888 and again at Federation in 1901. As good an example as any is to be found close to home in the words of Sir Edmund Barton at the opening of the Club’s Hunter Street premises in April 1911:

“Who does not thrill with pride when he speaks of the explorers who forged the passage over [Australia’s] barrier mountains ... the men who surveyed and

opened the vast plains where lie her pastures ... who explored and charted her coasts ...?"³

Paterson plainly did: his 1913 *The Explorers*⁴ addressed

“Ye barrier mountains in the west
Who lie so peacefully at rest
Enshrouded in a haze of blue;
Tis hard to feel that years went by
Before the pioneers broke through
Your rocky heights and walls of stone,
And made your secrets all their own.”

A similar sense informed diplomat and author George Ian Smith forty years later:

“Every sinew of every pioneer was needed to make the land prosperous and self governing ... she fought with flood and fire to force us back but the axe bit hard, the toil went on and we reached the Mulga Plains, the Gidgee wood and Yarran.”⁵

At least two writers have specifically referenced the genesis of our club in this valorizing of the past. Siobhan Lavelle sees “the interest of prominent pioneer families in claiming credit as the makers of the current national prosperity [to be] manifest in the establishment of the Australasian Pioneers’ Club.”⁶ The late Professor Brian Fletcher recalls that Douglas Hope Johnston, the Club’s founder, was “immensely proud of his family’s connection, and often visited Annandale where his grandfather regaled him with his recollections of [Lieutenant Colonel Johnston] and of early New South Wales.”⁷

Local artists, too, were on board in awakening Australians to what Rex Ingamells has called the “environmental values” of their surroundings. Arthur Streeton’s *The Selector’s Hut* (1890) is viewed as “an iconic image of the ‘pioneering spirit’ that underpinned Australian nationalist attitudes of the late nineteenth century,”⁸ and Frederick McCubbin’s *The Pioneers* (1901) is “his greatest statement on the origins and aspirations of the new country.”⁹

The 20th century brought the Great War and with it, Waterhouse argues, the decline of the pioneer legend. Although historian Charles Bean attributed the 1st AIF’s endurance of hardship to its members’ backgrounds in coping with the

harsh outbreak, he nonetheless saw the Gallipoli landing as our defining national moment. For Bean, the pioneer was the predecessor of the “digger” who inherited the former’s qualities. However Anzac Day, together with the increased urbanisation and industrialisation of the inter-war years, would see the digger displace the pioneer, becoming the *source* rather than the *inheritor* of a national character. Next would come a wave of post 1945 immigrants to whom a bush connection was irrelevant ... albeit many of them would experience privations no less testing than the frontier pioneers when labouring to realise the Snowy Mountains Scheme. The melting pot of multiculturalism has further diluted the place of the pioneer.

The first two decades of the 21st century have brought a new assault on the pioneers. Celebration of European settlement is no longer a unified remembrance of the pride which Sir Edmund Barton (somewhat floridly) eulogised in 1911 but a catalyst for annual agitation that the day be euthanased and our venerated forebears rebranded as invaders. Respectable academic research, while not necessarily endorsing such extremist language, is affording credibility to what would once have been dismissed as noise from rent-a-crowd. For example, Australian National Maritime Museum curator Stephen Gapps’s *The Sydney Wars* (2018), and his even more recent siting of the first confirmed murders of members of the First Fleet by “natives” at (what Lieutenant William Bradley named) Bloody Point, persuasively document historians’ failure to record how British and Aboriginal forces *both* developed military tactics and how the white settlers lived in fear of Indigenous “guerrilla resistance” to early settlement. The *Mabo* and *Wik* decisions of the High Court have discredited the prior notion of *terra nullius*, allowing the term ‘First People’ to enter the lexicon alongside routine (some might say overly repetitive) recitations of the Acknowledgment of Country at public (and private) events. The 2017 Uluru Convention has gone further, rejecting mere *recognition* to push instead for *representation* in the Australian Constitution.

The last mentioned ambition would require a referendum, preceded by an intense national ‘conversation,’ if it were to have any hope of being realised. It is for us to decide whether, as a club, to be part of that conversation, which means there is first to be had a conversation amongst ourselves. The appointment of the first Aboriginal to the new Federal cabinet as Minister for Indigenous Australians has given the issue impetus, so if we are to have that

conversation we need to start having it now.

The alternative is to continue to “remember” the pioneers, but otherwise not contest Waterhouse’s averment that “in the continuing refusal of the custodians of the pioneer legend to acknowledge ... frontier violence ... can be found another reason why the pioneer legend has become increasingly anachronistic.”¹⁰

John Lanser

¹ *The Pioneer Legend and its Legacy: In memory of John Hirst*, Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society, volume 103, part 1, page 7

² *The Pioneer Legend*, Historical Studies 18

³ Sydney Morning Herald, 11 April 1911

⁴ Originally published in 1889 as *Song of the Future*, it was reworked to mark the centenary of the crossing of the Blue Mountains

⁵ Introduction to the reprint of Marcus Clarke’s *For the Term of His Natural Life*, Collins 1953

⁶ Lavelle, Siobhan: *1813 – A Tale That Grew in the Telling*, WriteLight 2013, page 55

⁷ Fletcher, Brian: *Australian History in New South Wales*, UNSW Press 1993, page 46. Annandale, from which the present suburb takes its name, was granted to Lieutenant Colonel George Johnston following his court martial for heading the deposing of Governor Bligh in 1808

⁸ Online citation, National Gallery of Australia

⁹ Online citation, National Gallery of Victoria

¹⁰ Op.cit p23

The Meaning of Victory in 1918

*Address to the combined APC and RACA Remembrance Day lunch on 13 November 2018 by **Dr Bruce Gaunson**, former Head of History at Sydney Grammar School and Norwich School (UK), whose third book, *Fighting the Kaiserreich, Australia's epic within the Great War*, was published in 2018.*



Ruins of Ypres: by the shattered medieval Cloth Hall, Canadian troops move out to relieve Australians and New Zealanders at Passchendaele. AWM E01171

On 11 November 1918, somewhere in north-eastern France, Private Bert Bishop slept in – like all his AIF mates, who were on a well-earned rest leave. Outside, someone ran past yelling ‘armistice’ and Bert, while most of his mates

didn't move, got up and walked outside. The place was deserted. On the notice-board, he saw a blank sheet with a single typed line: "Hostilities will cease at 11 am today". Full stop. No fanfare, nothing.

To see that bland little note, you wouldn't believe all the *fury* that had come down on those men and millions of others at the western front. The winter of 1917-18 had hardly ended before the Germans launched their mighty gamble to win the war. Their plan was to destroy the French and British armies by July, before the inexperienced US army could get its big numbers across the Atlantic, properly trained and on the battlefield.

- From March to July, *five massive German offensives* had been barely contained in the British and French sectors.
- Then came the turning-point, in two historic battles:
 - On 18 July, at the Second Marne, a stunning French victory, led by 530 new light tanks, sent the last enemy offensive into reverse.
 - Then, on 8 August, came Amiens. Spearheaded by Canadians and Australians, this great Allied attack destroyed the last hope of the Kaiser's armies.
- And from there to 11 November, there was the 95-day all-Allied coordinated advance which, with hard fighting, inflicted one disaster after another on an enemy who had lost but was still there, although there were increasing rumours ...

Indeed, at 5.20 am on 11 November, away in Marshal Foch's headquarters, the last German signature completed the armistice agreement. But around that very time, two of our five Australian Divisions were moving into the front, and preparing, yet again, to inflict the next blow on the stolid enemy in front of them who, despite rumours of peace, was still there. These Diggers had been given several weeks of rest, yet even with some reinforcements, their ranks still looked thin. But appearances were deceptive. This was how they'd prevailed, with half the prescribed manpower, since early August. Up their "corridor of victories" from Amiens, to the big bend of the Somme – the scene of improbable triumphs like Mont St Quentin – and finally through the Hindenburg Line itself, with its 10 km of formidable defences!

Now, in the dawn of 11 November, they were set to do it again, and trying not

to recall what one Digger had said: “a man would have to be pretty stiff to get hit this late in the game!” Then came the very news they hadn’t dared to think about: “it’s over”, they were told, with bare details. They stared at each other. None of them would be the unlucky soldier, **none** would die today. Along the 700 km of western front, the war had been stopped, the monstrous anger of the guns was silenced, making way for a blessed stillness.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART02929

Capture of Mont St Quentin, by Fred Leist (1920)

As well as the infantry divisions, there were many Australians in different formations, whose duties had simply continued after the Hindenburg Line. This was true for most of the artillery, logistics units, engineers, medical units, and of course the Australian Flying Corps. At 8 am, at an Australian airfield, Captain John Wright was about to take off and lead his squadron against a transport target when an orderly rushed out, waving his arms, shouting ‘peace’ and telling Wright that no more aircraft were to fly that day. And in the coming weeks, the meaning of the armistice would slowly sink in and all sorts of Australians would realise that they’d made it – they had got through the Great War.

There was another fine body of Australians, for whom, only ten days later, the armistice would result in an unforgettable day, and one of the most stirring sights in the history of naval warfare. Out on the North Sea – where even the weather was good on 21 November – 70 ships of the Kaiser’s battle fleet were

heading for the Scottish coast. *But not to fight.* Well out to sea, and expecting the German fleet, was a vast array of 370 British and Empire and Allied warships. They formed two gigantic lines through which the Kaiser's battle fleet – that extravagant strategic folly – would sail into British waters to surrender. **Taking a well-deserved place in those lines** were three of Australia's fighting ships: the light cruisers *Sydney* and *Melbourne*, and the powerful battlecruiser *Australia*, the pride of Australia's 1913 fleet unit. During the strenuous efforts of 1918, those three ships almost doubled their previous year's sea time. Now, as they took their places with the Royal Navy ships, the battlecruiser *HMAS Australia* was placed at the head of the port line. What a day for the Royal Australian Navy! Young, yet so timely and so capable.

The story of our World War I ships, of their first actions in our region, and how, in 1914, they had foiled Graf von Spee's intended cruiser attacks on our sea lanes and ports, is told – together with the naval espionage operation revealed by its own files in Germany's archives – is told in *Fighting the Kaiserreich*. We can't linger there now, but may I say (if like me you're a landlubber) *let's ensure we remember our navy*, of whom Australia can be so rightly proud, for all its active service since October 1913 – when Australia's new fleet unit, with a battlecruiser, light cruisers, destroyers and submarines, appeared almost outside these windows. In the Great War, they were resolute, able and strong in our defence, despite their own loss of lives, a toll which began on 11 September 1914, as close as the port of Rabaul. **But let us also remember this** – none of those sailors who lost their lives, and none of the Diggers, of whom 46,000 were killed on the western front alone, lost their lives to no purpose.

Because it was not in vain. *Not in vain?* To say that, wherever people consider the end of World War I, can be to find that there's an elephant into the room.

This elephant might as well have a slogan painted on its side: *“the war to end all wars”*. What absolute rot! This is one of the places where the fallacy about World War I starts – the fallacy of futility. The idea that it was all to no good purpose. What reckless, heart-breaking and misleading nonsense was aired in that slogan. The war was not undertaken with that in mind. Yet this doesn't stop all sorts of people from using the routine introductory line: *“they called it the war to end all wars”*. Did they? Who did? *It was never an Australian, or British or Allied war aim.*

So how did this nonsense become such a cliché? One reason is that many hopes were born in the hard work and sacrifices of countless good people on the home front. Their hopes were soon inflated and distorted by soap-box spruikers and catchpenny scribblers, of whom the front runner, in 1914, was H.G Wells, with a short book called: *The War that will End War*. Of course, when that war ended but its repercussions and the baffling international problems wouldn't go away, Wells made a rapid retreat. **Some years later, however, a clearer British thinker** looked back on all this and on what people were saying about the Great War. Here's what he said to them:

Those who are disappointed with the great defence of civilisation are those who expected too much of it... Mr H G Wells is typical of the whole contradiction. He began by calling the Allied effort *The War that will End War*. He has ended by saying that it settled nothing. It is hard to know which of the two statements is more absurd... We never promised to put an end to all war, or sickness or worry. **We only said we were bound to endure something very bad because the alternative was something worse – to be flattened out by Prussianism.**

Yes ... *flattened by Prussianism*. That's reminiscent of a sensible Australian view of the whole Great War issue. Charles Bean (who'd been with our troops through thick and thin) personally wrote the AIF story, in six hefty volumes. And his final pages include this reminder:

The first achievement of the AIF was that by playing its full part with the Allies, it helped to save the world from a peace treaty dictated by Ludendorff.

By *Ludendorff* – like the plundering, predatory treaty he had imposed on Russia. Bean understood that the iconic German army commander, Field Marshal von Hindenburg, relied heavily on the younger Ludendorff as his indispensable fixer who did nearly everything including the paperwork. Let's briefly look behind the idea of a treaty dictated by Ludendorff, because it throws more light on our theme. These two Prussians were very successful against Russia, and from mid-1916 they rose to command all Germany's armies, and even the country itself unofficially. But Hindenburg and Ludendorff were not hollow power seekers. They believed in the values and methods of Bismarck: in Hindenburg's youth, Chancellor von Bismarck had

deliberately engineered three wars in nine years, to unite all 38 separate Germanies into a great nation-state, with Prussia's king as emperor – Kaiser – of the new, Prussian-dominated Germany. As Prussians, Hindenburg and Ludendorff believed that war was not only part of God's world order, but 'the highest and noblest expression of progress'.



Who's running the Fatherland? Field Marshal Hindenburg (left) and dynamic General Ludendorff (right) observed all the formalities, but Kaiser Wilhelm II (centre) was reduced to a symbolic figure with publicity duties, like this one. AWM H12326

Like the entire Prussian militarist oligarchy, they believed in the social values of authority, hierarchy and order, and they detested the whole decadent tide of western culture, especially liberal democracy – and socialism, which had spread rapidly through Germany's huge industrial working class. Thus, by 1914 all the top Prussians including Bethmann Hollweg, the civilian Chancellor, believed the time had come to use their mighty army as the Bismarckian solution to what they believed were Germany's **three great problems**:

1. The alarming trends in German society
2. The humiliating anomaly (in the golden age of overseas colonies and imperial prestige) of Imperial Germany possessing only some shabby colonial leftovers and remote island groups

3. And above all, their urgent military crisis: Germany had alienated Britain, and thanks to its own blundering foreign policy, it faced on two fronts the Franco-Russian military alliance. The Prussian solution to this dilemma had been the Schlieffen Plan – first, attack and defeat the accessible enemy France; second, with clever use of railways, send the strongest forces east to slaughter Russia’s armies and destroy its power in Europe. **But, by 1914, this Schlieffen Plan had a use-by date:** the Russians were drastically upgrading and modernising their entire army, and this program would be completed by 1917.



Symbolising the struggle with Prussian militarism? A Digger ponders a rare German A7V tank. Its monstrous brother Mephisto was hauled back to Australia and is still on display. Mephisto is the only surviving 'sturmpanzerwagen'. AWM E02369

What would a Bismarck do? He'd find a cunning justification for war, and activate the Schlieffen Plan as soon as possible. And in 1914 that's exactly what his Prussian disciples did. In France, after only five weeks, they were on the brink of a dazzling victory when Marshal Joffre wrecked it with his superb counter-attack at the Marne. But suppose the Germans had succeeded, and won the entire war? Well, the Prussian elite knew what to do next – for no power on

earth could then stop them imposing their drastic solutions to their three problems. So they would set to work:

- Cleansing Germany – a sinister program – to make their Prussian social and political values irreversible.
- Confiscating some of the most profitable colonies – certainly some French African colonies, and chunks of the British Empire – and some influential Germans wanted Australia and New Zealand to be the nucleus of a greater German South Pacific. In 1912 their Consul-General here in Sydney informed his Berlin masters that Australia was “one of the most glittering prizes” to be won in the coming war.
- And thirdly... Consolidating their continental supremacy, in which a Prussianised Germany would be the single superpower of Europe. This, as Bethmann Hollweg stated, would provide “security for the German Reich in west and east for all imaginable time”. France would be permanently crippled & reduced, and the Russians almost driven off the map. These and more details of the Chancellor’s September Program (early September 1914) were set out on the eve of what Berlin expected to be total German victory in France.

There, in microcosm, is *why the Prussian-Germans chose war in 1914, and what they wanted to achieve from it...* we’ve looked at this because it’s inseparable from what they wanted to do when they won – so here endeth the detour we had to have. It started, you’ll recall, with Bean’s reminder that we’d been saved from “a peace treaty dictated by Ludendorff”. Saved from punitive peace terms. As well, the French and the British empire were to be loaded up with an ‘indemnity payment’ so staggering as to make the postwar German reparations look mild. In pondering these things, we’ve also approached today’s question – **the meaning of victory in 1918** – and in particular what, **for Australia**, was the meaning of the Allied victory.

To look at this a little further, suppose, again, that the enemy had won the war. ***In that case, imagine the plight of so many Australians over there:*** because it wouldn’t have been the Kaiser’s fleet, but the British – including our sailors and ships – that had to cross the North Sea into captivity; and it would not have been Germans but the men in our AIF divisions, along with countless British and French soldiers, who would have gone into captivity, and the Diggers

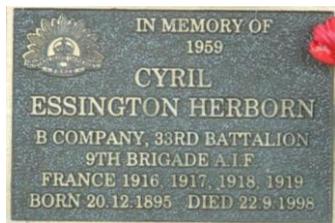
would not have known when they might ever get home. As for Australia, it might have been the Kaiser's pleasure that our country and New Zealand should become the jewels in the crown of his new South Pacific empire – in which case, what would have become of us and our freedoms?

For the fact that none of these things, nor so much more misery, ever happened, we look back with gratitude to a brave and resolute generation of men and women – from our own country and our steadfast allies.

Therefore... the meaning of victory in 1918 for us, and for our Kiwi and Canadian mates, and the British people themselves, and the brave Belgians who stayed in the fight until their brutalised country was liberated, and those gutsy French who took 6.2 million battle casualties rather than allow the creative life and freedom of France to be wiped off the map ... for all of us, **the meaning of victory in 1918**, a meaning that stands firm today, is the affirmation of those freedoms we have, resting on great and wise foundations, **freedoms now more precious than ever, because those who have gone before us defended them to the utmost.**

* * *

We began with sleepy Private Bert Bishop and that little typed armistice note. Let's finish with another 1918 Digger, Private Cyril Herborn. He was gassed at Villers-Bretonneux in April 1918, but he recovered soon enough to fight at, and through, the Hindenburg Line. On Armistice Day, his entire brigade had quickly organised a big sports afternoon. Cyril, a former Sydney GPS athlete, was a battalion runner, and he had an unforgettable day. This time, he could just forget about the snipers, the screaming shells, the fear of gas. He could fill his lungs with clean air and run for the sheer joy of it. Cyril won the half-mile race and then came the big one, the 1760-yard mile race. He won that, too! But he wasn't just running, **he was celebrating** – peace, at last, and being alive and free.



Herbert Beecroft - our pioneer portraits

Background

The years immediately before World War 1 were busy and confident times in which to found a new City club. Sydney saw the founding of the Women's Club, the University Club, the Queen's Club, the Lyceum Club and the Millions Club, as well as the **Australasian Pioneers' Club** (APC) in 1910. Membership of a private City club became a mark of your professional and social success.

At the same time, while everyone was being swept up in the excitement of the new Commonwealth and the waves of new immigration, there was also a view that important memories of the early struggles and achievement of the pioneers were fading and that efforts should be made to promote and rescue those memories.

The **Royal Australian Historical Society** was established in 1901 as a broad-based society for the purpose of promoting academic research and education. But it did not have the particular features of a gentlemen's club.

Nine years later, the **Australasian Pioneers' Club** (APC) was established specifically as a club to promote the memory of the "*splendid courage, perseverance and endurance that added Australasia to the British Empire...*" and to provide a gentleman's club venue for the continuing association of the (male) descendants of those early pioneers. The particular use in its title of *Australasian* was intended to include pioneers from each State as well as New Zealand, Fiji and Papua. The collection, with its many Tasmanian, Queensland, New Zealand and Pacific portraits, clearly reflects this original wider embrace.

Initially, the new Club rented space at 114 Hunter Street, just around the corner from the **Australian**, the **Union**, the **New South Wales** and the **University** clubs. It promptly began the business of acquiring art and artefacts, both as part of its repository role and to decorate the walls of its rooms.

The APC pioneer portraits project

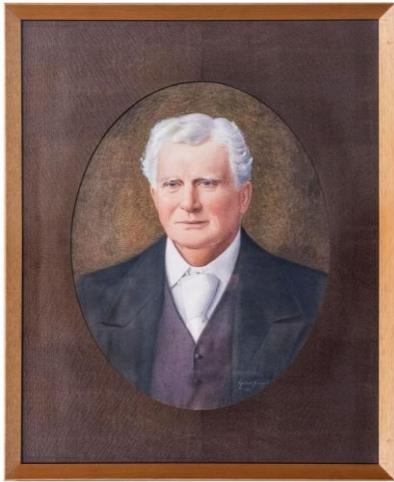
To promote the particular purpose of the new Club, (and undoubtedly as a way quickly and cost-effectively to start an art collection), founder **Douglas Hope Johnston** (1874-1957) asked each member to provide the Club with a sketch of his (male) ancestor. Additional portraits of British colonial officials were also to be included to round-out the collection. To facilitate this project, prominent Sydney sketch artist, (Lawrence) **Herbert Beecroft**, was set up in rooms at 114 Hunter Street as a temporary artist-in-residence.

Using photographs or family portraits supplied to him by the member, Beecroft provided a standardized sketch for £2 6s 6d - the equivalent of approximately **\$300 today**. The result was a collection of agreeable ancestor portraits. Most drew on the living memory of sons or grandsons and have a certain verisimilitude. Within two short years over one hundred portraits were produced.

First lining the walls of 114 Hunter Street, and later the clubhouses at Phillip and York Streets, they were an affectionate, if looming, presence. The photo (below) of a 1919 Returned Servicemen's dinner at the Phillip Street clubhouse illustrates the manner of their display.



While not necessarily High Art, effort was made by Beecroft with each portrait to show the character of the subject. As a collection, it is both unique and important. One hundred years on, many may be the only image surviving of the particular pioneer - fully justifying the original rescue purpose of Douglas Hope Johnston's project. As such, the collection was photographed as a whole by the Mitchell Library in 1971 and it remains a reference point for researchers.



Dr James Cox- First President



Captain Salmon Deloitte

With the sale of the Club's York Street clubhouse in 2002, and the lack of a suitable display space, the Beecroft pioneer portraits remained largely in storage, save for a limited display for six months in 2017 at the APC's previous post York Street domicile, the **Union, University & Schools Club**. Happily, opportunity was taken with the Club's recent relocation to the **Royal Automobile Club of Australia** in Macquarie Street to recreate a permanent display of this unique collection in that Club's Billiards Room, much in the manner of the original hangings.



A part of the 2017 display at the Union, University & Schools Club

(Lawrence) Herbert Beecroft (1864-1951)

Born in 1864 outside London into a family of printers and engravers with strong Methodist associations, Beecroft was trained as an artist in Paris and in the family business. He was an established caricaturist, sketch artist and recitalist when he migrated at age 40 to Australia in 1904 in the company of his wife and of relatives *en route* to missionary work in New Zealand.

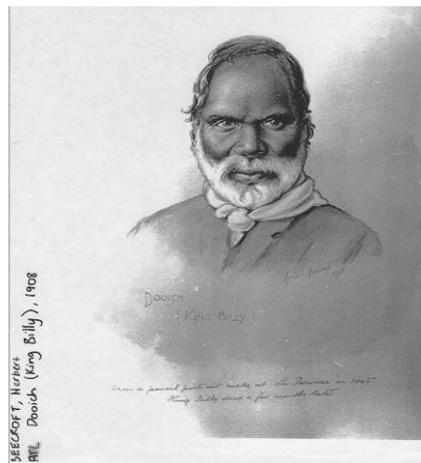
Upon arrival in Sydney, with a London reputation and an elegant presence, Beecroft gave popular lectures with recitations of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain, musical interludes and illustrations of the art of the caricature with lightning sketches of members of the audience.

He and his wife lived modestly in a semi-detached cottage in Woollahra and were active in church welfare outreach programs. A large project such as the Australasian Pioneers' Club pioneer portraits must have given him valuable employment continuity in 1910-11 and drawn his name to the attention of future private and clubland clients.

Beecroft's La Perouse portraits

Like many at the time, Beecroft had a strong view that the character of a man was shown in his face. He also had an interest in the popular pseudo-science of phrenology. In the 1920s, he attempted in popular newspaper articles to analyse the character of political figures such as Jack Lang!

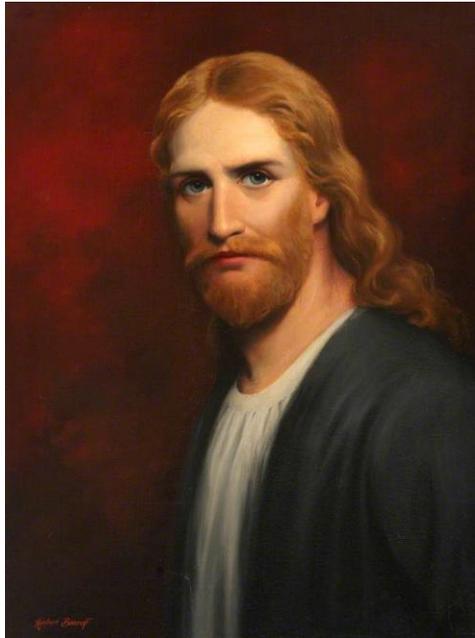
But as a mid-life immigrant in 1904 he brought a fresh eye to the difficult situation of surviving Sydney-basin aboriginals at the church mission station at La Perouse. Using his missionary connections Beecroft embarked on a project of his own to paint in oils the elders of that aboriginal community, to record their faces and to preserve for history the character of an ancient people and a presumed vanishing race. Some of these elders had lived at the same time as the British ‘pioneers’ found in the APC collection.



As with the APC pioneer portraits, these sketches are now an important and a unique collection. They have been carefully restored and preserved by the **Randwick and District Historical Society** and can be viewed at the Lionel Bowen Library, Maroubra Junction.

Beecroft's "Peter" painting 1927

As already noted, Beecroft had a strong protestant background. He was active in his local Presbyterian church, *St Columba*, Woollahra. In 1927, at the age of 63 and after a period of prayer and meditation, he claimed to have had a **vision of Christ** staring back at Peter who had just renounced him.



Over the following two weeks he painted a very 'British' Christ in oils. Much an image of its time, it was an inspirational favourite of the **Rev Dr Gordon Powell** at St Stephen's Presbyterian Church and was widely exhibited. Copies were endlessly reproduced by protestant biblical societies for the next 30 years.

The original was later placed with the British and Foreign Bible Society and, thanks to the research efforts of Beecroft's biographer, **Ellen Waugh**, in 2002, it was found in storage at the Wesley Chapel, Reading (London). It has now moved into the Museum of Methodism.

Beecroft's other clients

Beecroft was a working commercial artist with other clients and other artistic interests beyond the APC pioneer project. He produced novelty postcards and was the man to whom clubs and the University went for the celebratory sketch of a club dignitary or the departing faculty member. Examples of his work are to be found at the **Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron** and the **Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club**.



He also had private clients. There was the **Harris family**, prominent colonial pioneers of Rum Rebellion and Ultimo House fame. In 1919 he was commissioned to produce a major portrait in oils of **Sir Matthew Harris** in his Lord Mayoral robes. As with the pioneer portraits, it was a posthumous study; Sir Matthew had died two years earlier. It is a dramatic portrait and nowadays hangs on the main staircase of the Town Hall.



Sir Matthew Harris in his Lord Mayoral robes.

In conclusion

All members and their guests are encouraged to visit the Club's unique pioneer portrait collection now on display in the Billiards Room at the Royal Automobile Club of Australia. You may find a long lost image of a pioneer ancestor.

Robert Whitelaw

Honorary Librarian



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