

From Rotuma, at the beginning of September, the *Waterlily* sailed to the rarely visited island of Nuku'fetau in the southern Ellice Islands (now Tuvalu). cursory though it is, Atkinson's 35-page report of their six weeks there has value as being the fullest first-hand account of that island yet to be published. And if sea levels continue to rise it may retain that distinction forever.

Also valuable, especially because of the rarity of such material, is an account of a week-long visit to the island of Funafuti, which was presided over by the redoubtable New Zealand-born administrator/teacher/scholar — and, later, soldier — Donald Gilbert Kennedy. Here, though, the bulk of Atkinson's report is taken up with Kennedy's account of a former resident of Funafuti named Ernest Allen, also a New Zealander. Allen, founder of the Samoa Shipping and Trading Company, had shifted the operating base of his company to Funafuti in 1910 and built up a large plant there. He died in 1925 while Kennedy had come to the group only in 1923, and the two had had little opportunity to see much of each other. Nevertheless, Kennedy regaled Atkinson with a highly coloured story of Allen, associating him with various notable literary figures. Thus, Allen was said to have been an intimate friend of Robert Louis Stevenson (although no other sources mention this); Jack London was said to have written him into the hero of *The Cruise of the Snark* (but that is not a novel, and it has no hero), and Allen is said to have been well acquainted with Louis Becke (although there was scant chance for him to have become so).

For all that Kennedy, presumably gulled by Allen, was an unreliable source for these stories, their literal preservation by Atkinson is not without significance, for they provide a salutary cautionary tale in relation to historical enquiry. They illustrate the inventiveness and errancy inherent in oral tradition, and the dangerous — and currently fashionable — tendency to treat it with too-ready euphemism as 'oral history'. 'I believe' and 'I was told' offer no grounds for saying 'it was'. Certainly, my own detailed and verifiable research into the careers of Allen and Kennedy offers no support for the stories that have now found their way into indelible print.

It is regrettable that the editor did not comment on this part of the text himself, but in fairness it should be said that the data on which to base a critical evaluation of Allen's putative literary hobnobbing was not available to him. On the other hand, he has provided an extensive body of notes explaining and identifying numerous references, and so enhances the value of Atkinson's diary for maritime historians. One is left wondering, though, about the contents, location and availability of the other *Waterlily* diaries.

And how did it all end? With dissension among the crew and the *Waterlily* breaking up, the expedition was abandoned in the Ellice Islands in February 1933. Its members gradually straggled back to New Zealand, largely per courtesy of Ocean Island phosphate ships. Atkinson later took up farming on Banks Peninsula, but died in a motor accident in 1945. His informal description of a youthful folly, though, can be expected to enrich scholarly footnotes.

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Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia. Edited by Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001. 344 pp. NZ price: \$35.95. ISBN 0-521-80595-3.

THERE IS no better description of this fascinating examination of Australia's vexed relationship with gold-seeking than that provided by Stuart Macintyre on the dust jacket

— ‘a rich collection of substantial originality and substance’. Appropriately the first chapter is a call by David Goodman for an ‘edgier’ history of gold. For beyond the rhetoric, and standard historiography, associating gold with demographic, democratic and economic progress, is a world marked by the displacement of indigenous people, discrimination against other non-whites — and in some cases non Anglo-Saxons — poverty, moral panics, industrial unrest and irreparable environmental damage. At the same time, there was ethnic diversity and co-operation, a thriving material culture and greatly enhanced artistic and literary creativity.

Adopting an unashamedly narrative style, the book consists of 20 highly accessible chapters in five sections — Gold and Modernity, Immigrants and Ethnic Relations, White Gold/Black Gold, Daily Life and Domestic Culture, and Art, Visuality and Material Culture — contributed by historians, cultural anthropologists, heritage consultants, archaeologists and art historians. The primary focus is on contemporary perceptions of and responses to life on the goldfields, rather than gold as a cog in the broader mechanism of Australian history.

The substantial Victorian gold rushes from 1851 onwards, and the chaotic and uneasy cultural milieu they filtered through Melbourne, are the dominant themes of a number of chapters. But this collection displays an impressive geographical coverage and chronological span. There is an important reminder of the optimism accompanying the New South Wales gold discoveries of 1851 that was stifled by the much larger gold finds and subsequent growth of neighbouring Victoria. Similarly the quest for gold amid the harsh terrain and unyielding climate of north, west and central Australia is a vital corrective to the common emphasis on the eastern seaboard. The account of the harrowing and sometimes fatal search for ‘Lasseter’s Reef’ in central Australia during the 1930s also demonstrates that the obsessive and frequently irrational determination of the individual gold seeker continued long into the twentieth century. There is also a welcome discussion of Australian involvement in the search for gold in New Guinea and of what will surely be the last alluvial gold ‘rush’ in Australasia by more than 7000 miners on the misty slopes of Mount Kare in the southern highlands in 1988. But the exhaustion of easy pickings on this field by 1990 merely reinforces the point that on all fields the stereotypical individual digger in search of a fortune close to the surface had been rapidly usurped by capital-intensive company mining and ever-improving extractive technology. While some made individual fortunes, and a few retained them, the majority found themselves as wage labourers.

More than anything, this collection shows that extraction was only one part of gold culture. Many of those who made the most enduring reputations, and sometimes fortunes, were not the diggers but the merchants, entrepreneurial artists and entertainers such as Charles Thatcher, whose career embraced Australia and New Zealand. Meanwhile, amid the tents, bark huts and dominant masculinity of goldfields communities, women of different social classes variously suffered the deprivations attendant on unsuccessful or absent husbands or thrived on their own account as storekeepers, grog sellers, entertainers and socialites. Others no doubt spent time in the various ‘pleasure’ vegetable and flower gardens that were established in response to contemporary concerns about the ravaged mining landscape. Much later, the Warlpiri people of the Tanami Desert in the Northern Territory, after being forcibly relocated in the 1940s, have been able to establish mutually beneficial relationships with mining companies. The more than \$3 million in mining royalties distributed annually under provisions of the 1976 Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act has enabled a resurgence of ceremonial life and re-acquaintance with sacred places. But the necessity for such arrangements is of course an embodiment of the central themes of this superb book — that Australian gold seeking had already shaped a plethora of economic, cultural and environmental relationships.

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