



Top: JW Lindt, *Divers, Yarra River*, albumen silver print, c. 1883. Pictures Collection, H42622/11

Above: JW Lindt, *Cumberland cave, interior*, albumen silver print, c. 1876–94. Pictures Collection, H42622/32

## John William Lindt, ‘Views of streets, buildings and gardens in the city of Melbourne and surrounding country’

Pictures Collection H42622/1-86

Acquired 1980

This collection of 86 photographs by JW Lindt was purchased with funds provided by the Friends of the then La Trobe Library. The scenes captured by Lindt’s lens range from a bustling Collins Street to the contemplative interior of Cumberland Gave, off Victoria’s Great Ocean Road (see image, opposite bottom). Melbourne’s beloved botanical gardens feature strongly and Keppel’s Australian Hotel of Marysville, now lost, was fortunately documented by Lindt.

From this varied collection, the photograph *Divers, Yarra River* is also shown opposite. At first glance, the suited divers appear like tethered astronauts before the eye adjusts to the scene. Three men stand on the barge assisting the dive, but they seem more interested in the photographer than the task at hand. Not pictured are the many people who gathered each day to enjoy the spectacle.<sup>1</sup>

Lindt’s image captures one moment in a lengthy project to remove reef obstructions in Melbourne’s Yarra River. The work was largely a flood-control measure, as Melbourne had suffered from a series of damaging floods in previous decades. Concerns over the progress of the project were expressed by one citizen in 1883 who passionately addressed the editor of the *Argus* with suggestions on how to speed up and improve the project, thus ‘averting of another calamity, viz, the flooding of land.’<sup>2</sup>

The calm picture of the river’s surface belies certain dramatic events surrounding the project. One diver was almost buried alive under debris before being rescued; another discovered a dead body in the riverbed during excavations.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1880s, diving and photographic technology were both in fast development. Photography shifted from wet- to dry-plate processing, while diving moved from pumped to portable air supply, both developments allowing greater range and flexibility of use.

Lindt had a commercial studio in Collins Street, Melbourne, and was affectionately known by his contemporaries as ‘The Great Lindt’, due to his character and appearance.<sup>4</sup> He is now recognised as a master photographer of the 19th century.<sup>5</sup> We can only imagine the ‘handsome giant with a barrel of a chest, a dark sandy beard and a mass of strong hair’ perched by the river capturing this unusual image.<sup>6</sup>