

Dorothy Wall illustrations: Blinky Bill collection

Pictures Collection H2015.180/1-37

Acquired 2015

A State Library Foundation appeal raised funds to purchase an archive of original artwork by Dorothy Wall, the creator of the Blinky Bill children's books. Wall was trained in commercial art and design, and this archive includes designs both for her commercial work and for the Blinky Bill series.

Dorothy Wall (1894–1942) arrived in Sydney in 1914 from Wellington, New Zealand, where she was born. She showed an aptitude for drawing at an early age and subsequently received a scholarship to complete her secondary education and art training at Wellington Technical College. Her career in commercial art and design commenced with creating enamelled jewellery, stencilled patterns for fabrics, and advertising work in Wellington. In Sydney, she worked as a freelance artist drawing women's fashions, domestic furnishings, illustrations for commercial catalogues, and advertisements for newspapers.

Wall worked on the periphery of the Australian book trade until her first attributed illustration, *The Cheat*, appeared in the *Lone Hand* magazine of 1 October 1914. In 1920, she created a children's fantasy about the adventures of a young koala, Tommy Bear. This book is an early conceptualisation of Wall's evolving understanding of the appeal of Australiana in children's literature. Her publisher, Triumph Printers, produced a 16-page book with six colour plates titled *Tommy Bear and the Zookies*, and related memorabilia.

The Australian children's book trade in the early 20th century saw the emergence of the fairy book genre. Ida Rentoul Outhwaite produced a European style of fairy illustration, while May Gibbs imagined Australian fantasy characters such as the Gumnut Babies. In 1933, Dorothy Wall added her unique Australian anthropomorphic character to our national literary history, with *Blinky Bill: The Quaint Little Australian*, following Blinky Bill's debut earlier that year as a minor character in Brooke Nicholls' *Jacko the Broadcasting Kookaburra*.

Wall's illustrations for Nicholls' publication introduced her to publisher Angus & Robertson, and her children's book career then blossomed. In 1934, Angus & Robertson published the second book in Wall's series, *Blinky Bill Grows Up* and in 1937 *Blinky Bill and Nutsy: Two Little Australians*. Since then, the adventures of Blinky Bill have appeared as compilations in several languages, in audio-book format, as adaptations and even as unauthorised versions.

This archive, in combination with the Library's comprehensive children's book holdings, gives researchers a unique insight into Wall's diverse talents.

JULIET O'CONNOR



Dorothy Wall, *Blinky Bill and Mrs Koala*, watercolour on paper, c. 1933–40. Pictures Collection, H2015.180/28