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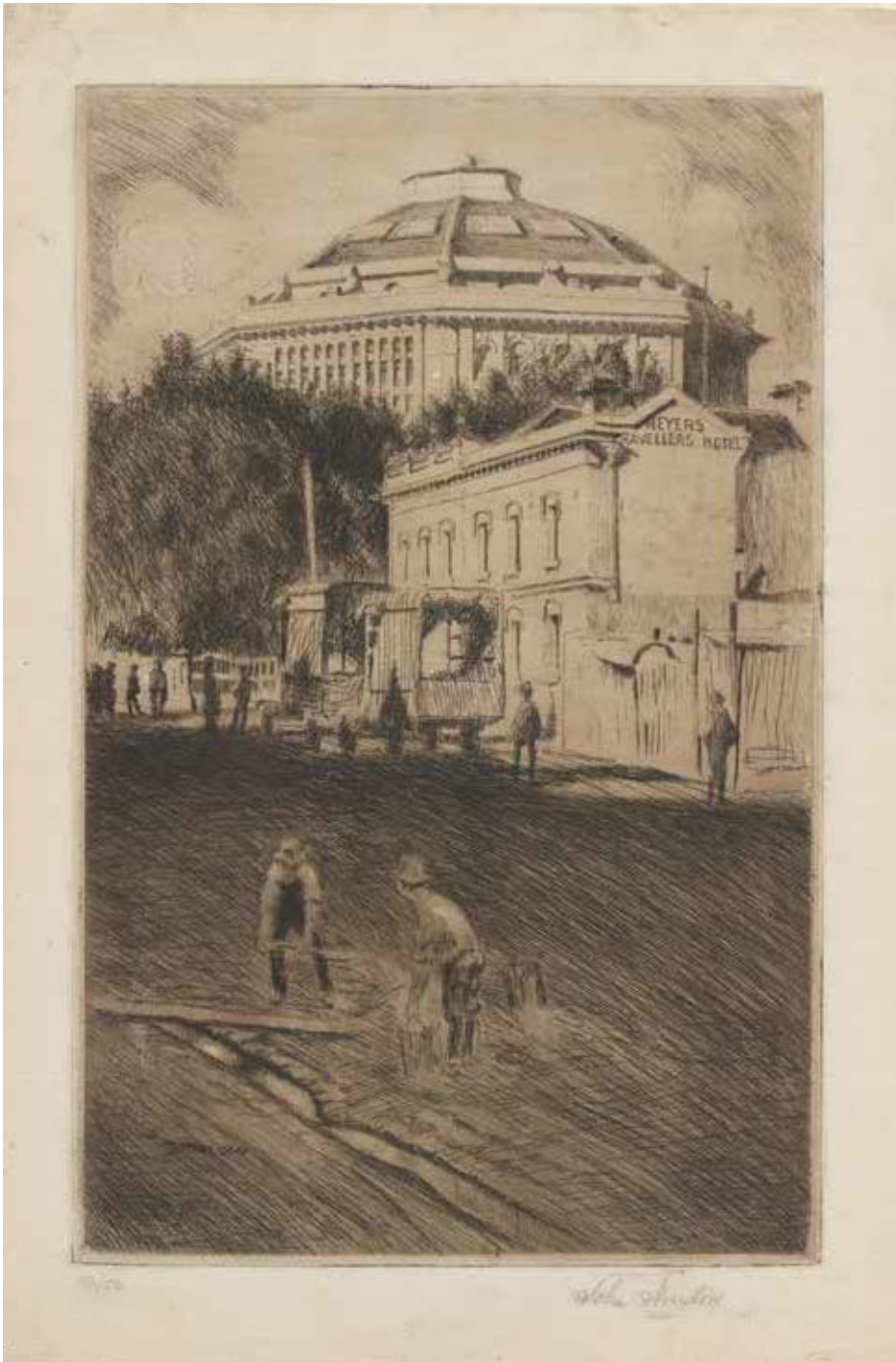
*Melbourne Modern Versus Sydney
Picturesque?: tales of two cities in print
1891-1934*

IN 1910, JUST THREE YEARS before the completion of the Dome of the (then) Public Library of Victoria, a young Melbourne artist, Jessie Traill (1881-1967) published the first Australian cityscape in print in a style regarded at the time as consciously modern. Her aquatint and drypoint *Melbourne from Richmond Paddocks* unashamedly sought to capture the rhythm of the contemporary, commercially-driven city enveloped in a cloud of industrially-created smog. At the time this striking print appeared, the dominant influence among Melbourne's artistic printmakers was the European etching revival, a nineteenth-century movement that consciously identified Rembrandt, Van Dyck and other old master etchers as models for both techniques and artistic values. Outstanding among the European revivalists who created cityscapes and architectural images were James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) and French etcher Charles Meryon (1821-68), the former admired for views of London and Venice, the latter for his record of Paris.

Few serious Melbourne printmakers deviated from norms encouraged by the etching revival and its best-known proponents. However, by 1934-5, when Melbourne and Victoria celebrated the centenary of European settlement, printmaking had experienced shifts encompassing both artistic styles and actual techniques. Artists working in woodblock and linocut often produced smaller-scale, more intimate images, many in colour, using cheaper materials than the etcher's copper, an aspect influenced by the onset of the Great Depression. Others obtained a range of new effects through lithography, already widely used in commercial advertising. Their works were, in every sense, modern images of a modern city. At the same time, some artists continued to create works that reflected the ideals of the etching revival.

Two works in the Library's Picture Collection exemplify these opposite poles. Troedel and Cooper published a large colour lithographic poster designed by Percy Trompf as publicity for the Melbourne centenary celebrations. From the south side of river, John Batman looks – presumably in amazement – at a city skyline in which the Flinders Street Station dome and clock tower, St Paul's Cathedral, the T and G building, the Forum theatre and the Manchester Unity building are all conspicuous. A modishly dressed woman and child stroll along the riverbank as a plane flies above. This and similar posters were produced as commercial works, and their creators were regarded at best as craftsmen, not artists.¹

On the other hand, 'Batman's Landing', an etching and aquatint by the young and emerging female artist Norma Bull (1906-80), likewise created as part of the Melbourne centenary celebrations, is almost painfully self-conscious in its intention as 'high art'.



John Shirlow, *artist*, The Great Dome, Melbourne Public Library. Etching on cream paper, 1924. H87.24/5.

"THIS WILL BE
EX



VICTORIAN & MELBOURNE CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS.

SEASON 1934-35
COMMENCING OCTOBER

THE PLACE FOR A VILLAGE"
Extract from JOHN BATMAN'S diary,
June 8TH 1835



AUSTRALIA

PARTICULARS AT SHIPPING
AND TRAVEL AGENCIES



THE AUSTRALIAN STEAMSHIP COMPANY
LIMITED, 100, COLLEGE STREET, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA
AUSTRALIA

Percy Trompf, artist. This will be the place for a village: Victoria and Melbourne Centenary Celebrations, 1934. Colour lithograph poster on white paper: H90.105/29.

The city is seen in a view looking straight up William Street as a train crosses the viaduct. Bull was determined to demonstrate her mastery of classical techniques. She worked scrupulously with her etching needle to capture the effect of the movement and reflections in the water in the foreground, highlighting the train and the stone wall on the river's edge by using aquatint.

This article examines some of the influences behind the many prints of Melbourne created between these two points in time. In particular, it examines contemporary perceptions of Melbourne in contrast with Sydney, both in the broader community and among artists themselves, and suggests that these perceptions explain the slightly different emphasis in the way each city was treated by its printmakers.

II

In Europe, the etching revival coincided with the Arts and Crafts Movement which rejected industrial and mass-produced products and despised the commercial. The consequence was a spate of works, the best often now unduly neglected, many others just competent but dull. Many British etchers turned for their subject matter to Italy, Spain, France and Germany, often to those areas least touched by industrialization – quiet provincial towns where tradition still held sway. Just before the Spanish civil war, Gertrude Bone wrote that the sense ‘that one is seeing the last of things’² was the great attraction of Spain for her husband, Muirhead Bone, a major British etcher and a friend of Lionel Lindsay. He and other etchers were catching the pre-industrial world as it faded in front of their eyes.

A powerful impetus in encouraging Australian printmakers to embrace the standards of the European etching revival was established late in 1891 when the National Gallery of Victoria acquired and exhibited the core of what would become, and continues to be, the nation's most significant European print collection. As well as works by Meryon, Whistler and his brother-in-law Francis Seymour Haden, the Haden Collection included a number of old master works.³ Exposure to this collection was the catalyst for two etchers who became Melbourne's leading proponents of the etching revival's values, John Shirlow (1869-1935) and Victor Cobb (1876-1945). Lionel Lindsay (1874-1961), then a young artist seeking his way in Melbourne, would later become one of Sydney's most influential printmakers, and a national spokesperson for conservative values in art: ‘I had been drawn to the Haden collection as by a magnet . . .’, he recalled in 1924.⁴

These three artists along with others adopted the etching revival's technical preferences. Most of their work was executed in etching or drypoint. They often used pure line work and were generally cautious in their use of plate tone – a film of ink left on the plate that would print as a tonal wash. They also experimented with aquatint. They imitated their European models in their subject-matter. Sometimes their prints directly referenced works by the European artists they so admired: a 1914 etching by Lionel Lindsay depicting a La Trobe Street Courtyard was modeled on Whistler's ‘Limeburner’ of 1859; Meryon's ‘La Galerie Notre-Dame’ reappeared in 1926 as Victor Cobb's



Norma Bull, artist, Batman's Landing 1935. Etching on cream paper. H86.40.

'Gothic Windows, Ruined Shrine, Ivanhoe'; and in a 1933 etching of the Sailor's Rest in Hobart, John Shirlow recalled Meryon's image of the Paris morgue. More broadly, just as Whistler had often eschewed the celebrated and familiar and sought out the byways and views known to Londoners or Venetians, these Australian etchers sought out hitherto-neglected subjects in their own cities – doorways and arches, laneways and courtyards, odd and battered shop fronts.

Their mood was as nostalgic as that of Meryon's etchings of Paris, produced at the time when as many buildings were threatened by Baron Hausmann's urban planning and renovation of the city.⁵ Lindsay revealed his disappointment at the nature of Australian city development in occasional comments pencilled in the margins of some prints in the collection of his long-term adviser, dealer and friend in London, Harold Wright. He blamed naked commercialism for the destruction of much that was beautiful in Sydney.⁶ Elsewhere, he wrote that as early as the Federation era, the commercial values predominant in Australian culture had killed off the possibility of 'a national platform' founded on something more idealistic.⁷ To that extent, his prints of old Sydney were underpinned by a sense of cultural betrayal.

In Sydney and Melbourne alike, many of the subjects chosen by these Australian etchers were destroyed by the march of modern commercial and industrial progress. In Sydney, the demolition of hundreds of buildings in the Rocks and Millers Point areas following an outbreak of bubonic plague in 1900 was an important stimulus to Lionel Lindsay.⁸ His appreciation for historic Sydney buildings had been boosted by his 1902 visit to southern Spain, where he was enchanted by a much older architecture. On the same trip, his presence in London coincided with an exhibition of Meryon's etchings of old Paris. It reinforced what he already knew of the emotional power of such city views.⁹ Over almost three decades, starting in 1910, he published a steady stream of prints based on earlier drawings of colonial Sydney buildings and streetscapes. Catalogues of later exhibitions in 1921 and 1936 show how he regularly recycled earlier etchings while adding new images to this corpus. The titles of a handful of the earliest – 'Old Hunter Street Book and Print Shop', 'Old Essex Street from George Street', 'Old Gloucester Street, The Rocks, Sydney', 'A Derelict, Old Kent Street, Sydney', – all share a feature common to many in the longer series: their subjects are all 'old'. Through such titles Lindsay verbalised the nostalgic mood of the images themselves.

Lindsay was not the first etcher to be attracted by Sydney's colonial architecture. Livingston Hopkins (1846-1927), who arrived from America in 1883, anticipated Lindsay by almost two decades. Hopkins' 'Old Sydney' (1886) or Julian Ashton's 'Old House, Trinity Lane, Sydney' also anticipated Lindsay's appeal to nostalgia and stress on the 'old', and A. H. Fullwood (1863-1930) and Alfred Coffey (1869-1950) created other etchings of a similar kind.¹⁰ At the same time that Lindsay began to publish etchings in 1910, Sydney's colonial architecture became the subject of illustrated books projecting similar images, sometimes reproducing etchings in lithographic form, or the drawings on which etchings were based.

The most consistent illustrator of these images was Sydney Ure Smith (1887-1949).



Jessie Trail, *artist*, Melbourne from Richmond Paddocks, 1911. Aquatint and drypoint printed in black ink on cream/yellow paper. H84.227.

His first work of this kind appeared in Charles Bertie's *Old Sydney*, published in 1911. As a leading figure in the Royal Australian Historical Society, Bertie campaigned ceaselessly for greater public awareness of colonial New South Wales' history. In 1914, Ure Smith himself published his *Relics of Old Colonial Days*, and in 1928, *Old Colonial Byways*. Charles Bertie's *Glimpses of Old Sydney* (1928) contained illustrations reproducing etchings by both Ure Smith and Lionel Lindsay. The texts in these works asserted the charm of the historic buildings against 'the Juggernaut progress'.¹¹ Until 1925, Ure Smith also published his own etchings of colonial buildings and streetscapes, but then moved to tinted drawing as his preferred medium.

In Melbourne, the narrow laneways of the city were often regarded as depressed or slum areas; the etchers treated them as picturesque subjects, often employing a narrow vertical format found in Meryon's Parisian views. The spire of a church such as Wesley or Scots functioned as an anchor in the background, just as St Etienne du Mont and other Parisian churches had for Meryon. The laneways off Little Bourke Street provided ideal subjects for such images, particularly for Shirlow. (Melbourne's Chinatown had been he subject of a very Whistlerian etching by Tom Roberts as early as 1887). At the same time, 'the Juggernaut progress' did not need bubonic plague to precipitate the demolition of earlier Melbourne buildings; commercial development and the flow of capital made this inevitable, and Melbourne etchers were as conscious as their Sydney counterparts of

the historic nature of their subject-matter. Victor Cobb noted that Sir Redmond Barry's old house, the subject of two of his etchings, had been 'Melbourne's first Library'. It was demolished in 1924, but was clearly under threat by 1912, when it was declared unfit for human habitation.¹²

In 1929, an otherwise obscure etcher, Lyndon Miller, published 'The Passing Pioneer', an image whose title was redolent with nostalgia. The pioneer in question was a colonial building being demolished, somewhere between Queen and William Streets. Perhaps the date of its publication was just a coincidence, but according to the number of building permits issued by the city council, 1929 was a record year, and the approved developments foreshadowed a commensurate level of demolition. The completion of the T and G building in 1929 and the Manchester Unity building in 1932, was matched by the disappearance of others such as Temple Court, the Old Colonial Bank, the Modern School and the Bank of New South Wales between 1923 and 1933.¹³

In 1935, as Melbourne's centenary celebrations continued, Cobb corresponded with R. H. Croll, who had organised the State Centenary Art Exhibition and was a friend of both Cobb and Shirlow. Cobb catalogued fifty-one of his etchings as 'historical subjects', and noted that 'many of the places have since been demolished or vanished . . .' The list included 'Ye Olde Mitre Tavern (City), a very Old relic of the earliest days' and the Selbourne Chambers in Bourke Street, both 'to be demolished'.¹⁴

Another subject was the 'School of Physiology, University'. Cobb etched this plate in 1932, the year Whelan the Wrecker demolished the Old Colonial Bank, a grand land boom building of 1880. As a result of petitioning by the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects, the bank's doorway was salvaged to become the entrance to the University's physiology school. Likewise, Shirlow's print output similarly contained a generous selection of works devoted to historic buildings in Melbourne and Hobart.

III

Occasionally, the role played by such etchings in raising public awareness of historic architecture was acknowledged, particularly in Sydney. The catalogue for an exhibition of etchings of Sydney subjects by Lionel Lindsay and Sydney Ure Smith includes this comment by Charles Bertie: 'unfortunately, in Australia we have no societies for the preservation of old buildings or beauty spots, and the remorseless hand of progress has destroyed many of the scenes depicted by the artist . . .'¹⁵ Sydney Ure Smith was involved in the Royal Australian Historical Society's unsuccessful attempts to preserve Burdekin House, an 1841 building in Macquarie Street, demolished in 1933. In the post-war years in Melbourne, Daryl Lindsay (1889-1976), Lionel's youngest brother, and a minor etcher himself in his early years, became a co-founder of the Victorian Branch of the National Trust of Australia. Given the etchers' interest in what would become known as heritage architecture, it is hardly surprising that this leading advocate should have been close to their ranks.

However, once the common interest of Melbourne and Sydney etchers in the earlier architectural heritage is acknowledged, some subtle and not so subtle differences

can be observed in their treatment of city subjects. Sydney printmakers, most of all Lionel Lindsay, realized a level of nostalgia unknown in the work of their Melbourne counterparts. In Lindsay's case, his tribute to the past involved scrupulously editing out most signs of contemporary, modern developments. His streetscapes are generally devoid of motor vehicles or any early twentieth-century buildings; so are those in Ure Smith's book illustrations. Two other Sydney artists, Hardy Wilson and the obscure Quinton Tidswell (d. 1991)¹⁶ went even further. Their drawings and etchings of historic Sydney buildings include doll-like figures in quasi-Georgian costume; Hardy Wilson may well have modeled his people on Georgian porcelain figures that he collected.¹⁷ In contrast, whenever people appear in Shirlow's prints, they are the men and women of his day, including the residents of the city's Chinese quarter, such as the men in his 'Chinese at a Doorway' (1922).¹⁸

Melbourne etchers showed a greater willingness to incorporate the modern city into their output – and this is true of Cobb and Shirlow, in spite of their innate conservatism in most other respects. In his 'Melbourne from the West' (1919), a panoramic view of the city from his *Melbourne Set*, Shirlow paid due tribute to the classical etching heritage by locating the city under a large open sky vaguely evocative of Rembrandt, but the city itself is irredeemably modern, dotted with industrial chimneys billowing smoke. His 'Entrance to the City' (1924), a view looking up Swanston Street, conveys an impression of commercial success, not nostalgia – the kind of commercialism that Lionel Lindsay identified as the canker that had corrupted Australian values.¹⁹ Flinders Street Station, at once a product and symbol of the city's busy commercial life, was the subject of an impressive view he etched in 1910, the year of its completion. To highlight the dome, he refrained from using any of the plate tone that he employed at the street level of the composition, where pedestrians walk under the verandah and across the Flinders Street intersection in a steady stream. Instead, he left the pure lines of the dome standing out against the white of the paper, creating an almost radiant effect.²⁰

In one of the last works to be completed before his death, Cobb created a bookplate for the State Library, featuring its dome. The bookplate underlines the Library's inheritance of a grand tradition and the modern, institutional monumentality of its architecture. Almost a decade earlier, in 1924, Shirlow had published an etching depicting what was already being described as 'the great dome', the title of the print when it was listed in *Art in Australia* the following year. Despite this, the dome is hardly the focus of the work. The foreground is dominated by a hotel on the other side of the street, and Shirlow's real interest lies in the drama of street life being played out in the foreground. Here, two workmen dig in the centre of the road, pedestrians pass along the street, and a van is parked outside the hotel (the kind of modern automobile sedulously avoided by Lindsay in his Sydney images). Behind all of this, the dome simply appears like a grand backdrop.

While Lionel Lindsay described John Shirlow's etchings of Melbourne as 'the record . . . of what has already passed, and what is so swiftly passing away', he also acknowledged Shirlow's interest in 'the newer Melbourne'.²¹ Victor Cobb's 1932 etching,



Len Annois, *artist*, *City arteries*, c. 1940-1949.
Lithograph. H91.290/4.

St Paul's from Princes Bridge, equally incorporates the modern city.²² The tower of the Manchester Unity building, on the verge of completion, is surrounded with scaffolding, and St Paul's, whose spires were only completed in 1926, is shown from a far more interesting perspective than in his 1934 centenary etching of the cathedral.

A similar accommodation of the modern city characterised Shirlow's images of Sydney. His *Sydney Set*, a group of six etchings published in 1918, did not include a single image of the kind of heritage building beloved by Sydney's own printmakers. Instead, the city was typified by streetscapes of Bond Street and George Street, centres of modern commercial prosperity. Their narrow vertical format recalled that of contemporary streetscapes of London in its imperial heyday. Another etching in this series, 'Sydney from Taronga Park' includes modern shipping in middle ground, with tall modern buildings on the skyline as markers. The mood is the very opposite of the 'quiet peace, an air almost of desertion' that Lionel Lindsay admired in etchings of historic Sydney published in the same decade by Sydney Ure Smith.²³



Len Annois, artist, Demolition – Old Bijou Theatre, 1953.
Lithograph. H91.290/5.

IV

The different approaches of Melbourne and Sydney etchers to buildings and cityscapes are a visual expression of perceptions of the two cities, perceptions that were in circulation before the end of the nineteenth century. By that time, each of the colonial capitals had developed a character of its own as a city and community or combination of communities. The proportion of the population from different parts of the United Kingdom, their class, education, religious background were important elements in accounting for many of the differences. Richard Twopeny's *Town Life in Australia* (1883) offered the first comparative analysis of Australian cities on such grounds – even though at the time the author was only twenty-five years old.

Twopeny was in time to witness the beginning of the boom in which banks and insurance companies led the 'building mania'.²⁴ He identified Melbourne as the centre of 'trade and capital, the business and pleasure' of the whole country.²⁵ Its rectangular grid of wide streets was well-lit and 'there is certainly no city in England which can boast of nearly as many fine buildings, or as large ones, proportionately to its size, as Melbourne'.²⁶ Its greatest drawbacks were poor sewerage and drainage. In contrast,

‘there is a certain picturesqueness and old-fashionedness about Sydney which brings back pleasant memories of Old England after the monotonous perfection of Melbourne and Adelaide’ . . . it is in a permanent state of *déshabillé*; whereas Melbourne nearly always has its dress-clothes on.²⁷ Twopeny was far from alone in expressing such views. Other contemporary writers drew similar contrasts.²⁸ Twopeny’s insightful reflections became the progenitor of later academically grounded discussions such as Jim Davidson’s Sydney-Melbourne book, not to mention other, lighter reflections on the comparative merits of the two cities.²⁹

By the 1920s, the only national art journal, Sydney Ure Smith’s *Art in Australia*, devoted individual issues to both major cities.³⁰ Meanwhile, artists and those promoting art contrasted Melbourne and Sydney in ways reminiscent of Twopeny. In the journal of the Victorian Artists’ Society, an author writing under the pseudonym of ‘Le Boheme’, described Melbourne as ‘modern . . . up-to-date; American’.³¹ In the *Lone Hand*, a literary magazine modeled on the London *Strand*, a contributor contrasted Sydney and Melbourne, referring to the ‘planlessness’ of one as against the other’s ‘spacious’ layout.³² However, Melbourne’s very modernity might be a challenge, rather than a blessing, to artists. In 1924 Lionel Lindsay wrote disparagingly:

Melbourne is not a picturesque city . . . it stretches from the flats of the River Yarra in indeterminate vistas of house tops, broken at intervals by the spires of churches, clock towers, and factory chimneys.³³

Earlier, in 1909, an article in the *Lone Hand* stated that it was ‘in the slums and through the city lanes’ that John Shirlow found his best subject-matter, and Victor Cobb described how he was interrogated by a policeman at two in the morning as he stood ‘in the shadows of a dilapidated building in a dark lane’ as he made preliminary drawings for his etchings of Sir Redmond Barry’s old home in West Melbourne. At another site whose picturesque qualities had attracted him, Cobb was warned that he ran the risk of being shot by the guard from the nearby ammunition works.³⁴ The Chinese quarter, whose lanes feature in many of Shirlow’s etchings, was certainly regarded by contemporary writers as an exotic and alien world.³⁵ More even-handedly, ‘Le Boheme’ identified both the city’s narrow lanes, and its more spacious streets, as ‘the basis of some really fine pictures’ – and referred to Pissarro and Monet as European artists whose depictions of French cityscapes should be consulted.³⁶

Over several decades, etchers praised the more run-down areas of Sydney such as the Rocks and Surry Hills which offered more attractions than Melbourne’s fashionable modern aspect. Victor Cobb, writing under the pseudonym ‘Aqua Fortis’ (etching acid), also in *The Lone Hand*, acknowledged the primacy of Sydney’s claim to picturesqueness for etchers, while implying that there was plenty of suitable material in Melbourne – ‘Sydney, in particular, is abundantly rich in etching subjects’ – ‘Although Melbourne has not been so generously gifted by Nature as Sydney, yet she can claim a large number of etchers.’³⁷ It was also acknowledged that the pictorial quality of such areas was closely related to problems that threatened their very existence. As another writer in the *Lone Hand* put it, while ‘the slum is the most picturesque quarter of a city– at a distance . . .

the criminal negligence of the past is matched by a criminal content and neglect as to the possibilities of present improvement and future growth.³⁸

V

In its focus on the modern city, Traill's groundbreaking *Melbourne from Richmond Paddocks* stood in dramatic contrast to the nostalgic undertones of contemporary Australian prints. Within her own output, it invites comparison with her painting of Market Street,³⁹ executed at much the same time, in which Melbourne's skyline is enveloped in a smoke haze from a steam train, then a symbol of industrial progress. Most importantly, this print reflected something that immediately distinguished her from most other Australian printmakers – extensive study in Europe and exposure to its art scene. In 1907 and 1908 her mentor was English artist Frank Brangwyn (1868-1955).⁴⁰ As an etcher, Brangwyn preferred printing large images from deeply bitten plates covered with generous washes of plate tone. For this he was criticized by his more conservative and academic English contemporaries, but was lauded by his continental confreres. Buildings under construction, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum, furnished him with subject matter for images that he imbued with a dark energy; scaffolding could be seen as a fascinatingly intricate pattern or could suggest something more constricting or repressed.

These elements of his vision, translated into her own language, appear in Traill's prints over several decades. Meanwhile, Australian public collections, notably the art galleries in Melbourne and Sydney, acquired representative examples of Brangwyn's work. By the late 1920s and until World War II, commercial art dealers in Melbourne and Sydney advertised his prints among their stock.⁴¹ And while conservative etchers such as Cobb were guarded in their praise of him, he found many admirers in the next generation, who could also view his work reproduced in the English art journal *The Studio*.

In its combination of subject and style, Traill's *Melbourne from Richmond Paddocks* remained in splendid isolation for some time. However, by the late 1920s, cityscapes of Melbourne and Sydney that expressed a clearly modernist outlook were becoming increasingly common. Artists such as Ethel Spowers (1890-1947) and Eveline Syme (1888-1961) brought back the influence of Claude Flight and the Grosvenor school from London. German expressionist influences surfaced in other artists such as New Zealand-born Frank Weitzel (1905-32). Such artists engaged with the speed and energy of the modern industrial city. If they showed slums areas or victims of the depression, it was as an indictment on society, or undesirable by product of modern city development, not as witness to a past way of life.

In the 1920s, Spowers created two colour linocuts of Melbourne's Collins Street in which the Japanese woodblock, not the etching, is the dominant influence. In one, 'On the City Skyline' (c. 1927) cranes and scaffolding around the T and G building compete for attention with the spires of the Independent and Scots churches. Another linocut shows Scots church on a wintry night. The flat planes of turquoise and green, and the

single source of warmth from the yellow of a small gothic window, all produce effects very different from those in etchings of the same subject by Cobb and Shirlow.⁴² Weitzel's linocut, 'Sydney Bridge' (c. 1929) turned a handful of girders into an abstract pattern in a way that again had no parallels in works inspired by the etching revival.⁴³

Any earlier suggestions that the New South Wales capital was above all a picturesque city were dispelled by the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The Bridge appeared in colour lithography on travel posters, and in the work of artists in many mediums. Yet was it just a coincidence that among printmakers, the most distinctive works, a whole series depicting the stages of its construction, were created not by an artist based there, but by an 'outsider' from Melbourne – Jessie Traill. Like her earlier *Melbourne from Richmond Paddocks*, these were aggressively industrial images. In them, she condensed the fascination she had long shown for turning 'huge scaffolding into rough poetry', a phrase used by an admirer of her teacher Brangwyn, but equally applicable to her work.⁴⁴ In 1924, several years before the start of Traill's series, Adelaide artist and printmaker John Goodchild had employed a more traditional etching technique in his *Circular Quay Sydney, The Heart of Sydney*. It too showed Sydney as a modern industrial hub, its waterfront dominated by storage sheds and modern commercial buildings. These visitors avoided being caught up in the nostalgia wave that absorbed Lionel Lindsay, Sydney Ure Smith and others around them. It was as though Traill, Goodchild, Weitzel and their ilk were in a completely different space.

VI

In Melbourne, a small but significant group of stylistically modern city images was created by Len Annois (1906-66). He turned to black and white chalk lithography, as distinct from the colour lithography widely used in commercial posters and advertising. In 1929, with the onset of the Great Depression, he had lost his position as a draughtsman with the Melbourne Harbour Trust, a position that brought him into daily contact with the inner city and its buildings. Through much of the Great Depression he remained unemployed, but in that time, attended the art school of the Working Men's College (now RMIT), while being supported by his mother and sister, who ran Toby's Tavern in the inner city.⁴⁵ At least two contemporaries played a role in encouraging him to take up lithography in these years. One was James Flett (1906-86), who enjoyed a short period as an innovative printmaker and shared his admiration for the work of Frank Brangwyn, whom Annois later described as one of the 'standard heroes of the students of that time'. The other, Nutter Buzzacott (1905-77), had already experimented with lithography before 1930, and his studio in the old St James building (on the corner of Little Collins and Williams Streets) was a regular meeting place for lithographers and advertising agents.⁴⁶

Though Annois apparently did not execute some of these lithographs until the early 1940s, they are based on earlier drawings.⁴⁷ Annois's lithographs represent many different aspects of the Australian city of the 1930s. A view of the Flinders Street Station dome, not seen from the street but from within the railway yards, a dense network of

tracks and overhead lines, presents Melbourne as a busy centre of modern commerce and industry. The title he gave this image, 'City Arteries', further underlines this. In other prints, the city bustles with people: burly porters at the fish market, or shoppers on a Friday night to take advantage of late trading.⁴⁸ A dramatic lithograph, reminiscent in some ways of Brangwyn, showing a brawl outside a blood house in Woolloomooloo, is further evidence of Annois's unsentimental approach to the city and city life.⁴⁹ Though he never saw himself as a social realist, the lithograph dealt with another level of street life in the city.

Annois clearly appreciated and enjoyed architectural subjects. His subsequent reputation was built on his talent as a watercolourist, and the State Library's Picture Collection holds many of his watercolours of buildings and streetscapes in inner Melbourne, executed in the 1940s and 1950s. Among his chalk lithographs are three depicting demolitions. Two are different depictions of the demolition of the Bijou Theatre in Bourke Street in 1934. The other shows the Royal Bank, demolished in 1939. In each, Brangwyn's influence is apparent: in the energetic activity of demolitionists, the dramatic contrasts between the surfaces of different buildings, and their silhouettes against the sky behind them. However, for all his enjoyment of architecture and buildings, Annois was not attracted to these subjects in terms of creating a record of what was passing, as was Cobb, but for their inherently dramatic qualities.

The surge of prints of Australian cityscapes by artists fluent in contemporary styles and currently fashionable techniques did not herald the immediate demise of etched views. The ageing John Shirlow continued to publish etchings featuring the modern city up to his death in 1935. A group of etchings in the State Library of Victoria Pictures Collection dating from 1929 is particularly unusual because they appear to have been intended as commercial publicity, not as high art. They show different facades of the Myer Emporium building.⁵⁰ Their creator, Stuart Wade, known by only one or two other prints in public collections, remains an elusive and obscure figure. The availability of an aquatint of his in 1934 from a major Melbourne dealer suggests an attempt to enter the world of artistic printmaking, and the ongoing shadow cast by the receding Great Depression perhaps explains why he did not persist.⁵¹

Two etchers who visited Melbourne on the edge of the city's centenary celebrations published images showing an essentially modern city. John Goodchild created a scene looking from near Queen Street up a Bourke Street busy with trams, cars, pedestrians, and ongoing construction with a crane hovering behind the General Post Office.⁵² An obscure visiting English artist, Fabian Swire, published a small book reproducing pen drawings and at the same time, published etched versions of the same scenes.⁵³ His Bourke Street is similar to Goodchild's, with busy crowded pavements. In Collins Street, his focus is not on the 'Paris end', but the recently completed Manchester Unity building. His image of Flinders Street Station matches its caption, which claims that 'through this station more traffic passes than any other station in the world'. And to the extent that Norma Bull's 'Batman's Landing' includes a steam train whose smoke drifts across the cityscape, it is as much a representation of the modern city as Trompf's Melbourne

centenary colour lithographic poster with its modishly dressed figures.

Etching continued to persist alongside other printmaking techniques to some extent until World War II. The ultimate watershed was the culture and art world that emerged in the post-war era. In Australia, there seems to have been a healthy market for etchings until the Great Depression. Keith Hancock in his 1930 groundbreaking history of Australia included a chapter on the arts where he wrote: 'it has been asserted that the annual sales of the Australian Society of Painter-Etchers (founded in 1920) considerably exceed those of its London parent, the Royal Society of Painter-Etchers!'⁵⁴

The Depression-period correspondence, however, of artists such as Lionel Lindsay and his brother-in-law, Will Dyson, contain references to a marked slump in the sale of etchings.⁵⁵ Before the Wall Street crash, they had been compared in terms of investment value to stocks and shares. Yet etchings of school buildings provided a staple income during these years and beyond them for the craftsman-like but unimaginatively formulaic Douglas Pratt (1900-72), who had cornered this 'market' after obtaining the support of the New South Wales' state government's Minister for Education.⁵⁶ The attraction of prints for institutional alumni probably also explains the large number of etchings by Victor Cobb that encompass most of the individual schools at Melbourne University, along with comprehensive views of the residential colleges. In 1934, he etched Walter Burley Griffin's dining room at Newman College in all its modernity. Elsewhere, a notice in a parish paper advertising etchings of a historic Melbourne church – St Peter's Eastern Hill – at a discount price for parishioners, suggests another institutional clientele to which etchers could, and did, appeal.⁵⁷

The sale of etchings also seems to have been more closely linked with the world of books than was the case with the more modern prints. Shirlow's Melbourne and Sydney sets were presented and sold as bound folios; the Japanese elements in the design of the cover for his *Melbourne Set* were intended to make it appeal to the collector of *de-luxe* books. Shirlow issued other series such as his *Five Etchings* (1905) and *Four Etchings* (1921) in editions of twenty-five or thirty impressions. The former was reviewed among books, while the latter was available at Melville and Mullen's bookshop in Collins Street, the predecessor of Robertson and Mullens (later taken over by Angus and Robertson).⁵⁸

Further evidence of the inter-related world of etching and book-collecting appears in an easily overlooked corner. The bookplate of at least one Melbourne book collector, Madeleine Tracy, was based on a Shirlow view of Melbourne along the river.⁵⁹ Also, Hardy Wilson's *Old Colonial Architecture in New South Wales and Tasmania* illustrates the connection between fine printmaking and book collecting in yet another way. Hardy Wilson published his fifty collotype images of Georgian buildings, many in Sydney and Hobart, as a folio-sized book in 1924. It could be treated as a folio as much, if not more than, as a book. The individual plates, tipped onto the pages, were fastened lightly only at top corners so as to make it easy to remove them for mounting and displaying as framed works. He even designed a custom-made frame, available from a supplier named in a prospectus.⁶⁰

The exhibiting and sales of woodblocks and linocuts was primarily the business of galleries and art dealers. Occasional evidence suggests a connection, perhaps largely vestigial, with their sale and the selling and collecting of books. Many such works are reproduced in the issues of *Manuscripts*, a literary journal published between 1931 and 1935, by the Book Nook in Geelong and the Bookshop of Margareta Webber in Melbourne. While it is unclear whether Margareta Webber sold such prints directly, she certainly decorated her shop with prints of this kind.⁶¹

Irrespective of the style or technique employed, prints of city views published in Australia throughout the period under consideration had at least one thing in common. Apart from commercial posters, with only a handful of exceptions, they were all of a modest size. Hancock was referring to etchings when he wrote that '[t]he large section of the Australian urban community which enjoys middle-class comfort is naturally attracted by the process . . . which makes it possible to distribute original works on many drawing-room walls at a moderate price . . .'⁶² – he might well have added the walls of a variety of professional offices, waiting rooms and studies. What Hancock wrote of etchings was equally true of the relief-technique colour prints of Syme, Spowers, Preston and others, or the lithographs of Len Annois.

VII

The prints surveyed in this article present quite different responses to the kinds of changes that were taking place in many Western cities in the early twentieth century. Some suggest a large degree of confidence in ongoing development and industrialization; others are tinged with regret at the disappearance of seemingly venerable and historic survivors. In both Melbourne and Sydney, commercial redevelopment in the central business districts reached a peak in the 1920s. It slowed down in the 1930s, and ground to a halt during World War II, as national resources were directed to the war effort. Not until the 1960s did it return to the level of momentum seen before the Great Depression. By then, both cities were being driven by the desire to be recognized as modern centres of international significance. The two cities that evolved as a result were again quite distinct from each other, but the lines that distinguished them were new ones. Already, the prints surveyed in this article were aesthetic records of perceptions that belonged to their past.