

## MARK R CABOURET

# ‘The premier bird painter of the colonies’:<sup>1</sup> the triumphant return of Neville Henry Cayley to Victoria

### Introduction

Neville Henry Penniston Caley was born in Norwich on 29 May 1854 into the evolving dynasty of Cayley & Co., milliners, silk mercers, outfitters, haberdashers and general drapers. The unexpected death of his father, Nathaniel Henry Caley (1824–67), determined that his future lay elsewhere and, on 20 September 1877, aged 23 years, and with his younger brother William Herbert, he arrived in Melbourne. By 5 April 1879 the brothers had changed the spelling of their surname to Cayley. My research into Neville Cayley’s early career as an artist in Gippsland was published in the *La Trobe Journal* in September 2014.<sup>2</sup> Leaving Victoria under financially distressing circumstances, he arrived in Sydney on 13 December 1880. After executing some private commissions he was sent by the Australian Museum and the proprietors of illustrated newspapers to Grafton on the Clarence River, arriving on 12 July 1881. He remained there until 29 December 1886, but for a sojourn to Sydney between October 1884 and August 1885. At this time, on 4 June 1885, he married Lois Emmeline Gregory (1863–1941) of Grafton at St John’s, Darlinghurst.

Neville Cayley, watercolour drawing of a pair of Common Bronzewings, 42.5 x 35.0 cm. Unsigned and undated but fully annotated below: ‘7 guinea at the lowest – (peace)’. Almost certainly exhibited at the Centennial Exhibition as no. 17 *Bronzewing Pigeons* or no. 37 *Bronzewing Pigeons*. Originally acquired by Lady Carrington, wife of Lord Carrington, Governor of New South Wales. Author’s collection. Imaging by Daniel Stainsby



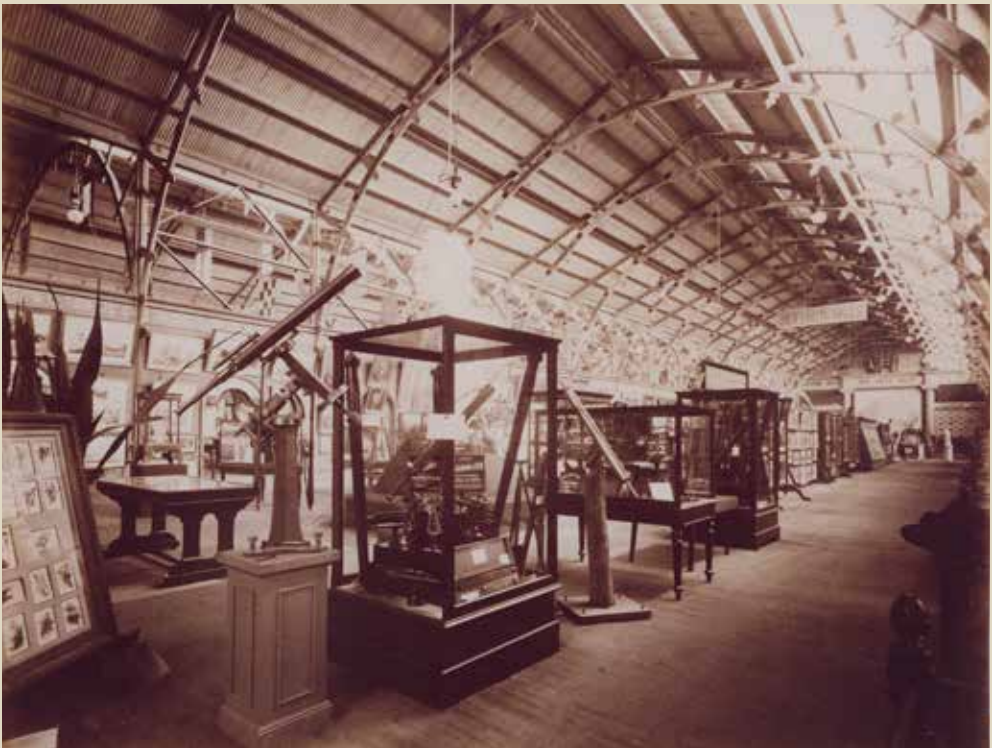
Cayley's time as an artist attached to a surveying camp on the Clarence River provided him with an unparalleled opportunity to gain necessary field experience and to observe subject matter as a naturalist and ornithological artist. His time there concluded on 23 March 1887 with a successful Art Union. In 1887 he resided briefly at Paddington in Sydney before proceeding to Moss Vale and, ultimately, to settle at Bowral in the Southern Highlands later that year.

Two major events in and around 1888, the year marking the first century of English colonisation of Australia, were of immense value to Cayley in the popularisation of his work. As a result of these events and his connection with the artist, William Aldenhoven, Cayley's sole agent whose eponymous gallery was situated at 74 Hunter St, Sydney, was projected forth as the principal dealer and potential publisher of natural history art in Australia. The first event anticipated the celebrations of Australia's centenary and involved the reproduction of some of Cayley's pen and ink and wash drawings of birds as engravings in the *Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*.<sup>3</sup> The second event coincided specifically with the celebrations and involved the hanging of 77 watercolour drawings of birds, and another work, *Tiger*, at the Centennial International Exhibition held in Melbourne. This was followed six years later by a major display of his paintings at the Federal Coffee Palace in Melbourne, which cemented Cayley's place as the foremost natural history painter in the colonies.

### The Centennial International Exhibition, Melbourne, 1888

Neville Cayley's contribution to the New South Wales Court at the Centennial International Exhibition in August 1888 was a remarkable accomplishment and a spectacular monument to the depiction of Australian native birds in art, which had not been equalled by any single artist before. It is likely that Cayley was preparing for this exhibition for at least two years prior and the creation of this number of original artworks represented an herculean effort on his part. Hung en masse, his paintings must have represented a remarkable spectacle and had a considerable impact on the audience. This tour de force on behalf of Australia's remarkable avifauna was the ornithological equivalent of Ellis Rowan's massive exhibition of her botanical drawings at the same and other exhibitions.

The physical size of the Melbourne Exhibition Buildings was clearly intended to impress all comers. The report of the exhibition in the *Bowral Free Press* on the opening day conveyed the role played by the venue in placing the work of their resident artist, Neville Cayley, before the public.<sup>4</sup>



Photographs by Johnstone O'Shannessy & Co., view nos. 13 and 14 in *Selected Photographic Views of the New South Wales Court at the Centennial International Exhibition, Melbourne, 1888*. Mitchell Collection, State Library of New South Wales R TF00473

The undertaking is a gigantic one; and must, even though it should result in only partial success, give Melbourne a world-wide reputation. Melbourne ... through the medium of this colossal exhibition considerably advanced herself in the knowledge and estimation of the four quarters of the globe.

Overall, New South Wales contributed 91 lots of watercolour drawings of miscellaneous subject matter; some lots including more than one painting. Exhibit no. 72 consisted of 'A collection of drawings of Australian birds lent by Neville Cazley [sic], Esq.'<sup>5</sup> Exhibit no. 73A, by the same artist, was *Tiger*.<sup>6</sup> *The Official Record of the Centennial International Exhibition*<sup>7</sup> identified Cayley's contribution as:

Class 2:- Various Painting, Drawings, etc ...

41. Cazeley [sic], N. – A collection of drawings of Australian birds.

It is likely that some of Cayley's earlier pen and ink drawings were also represented at the exhibition and included in the same *Official Record*<sup>8</sup> under item 56 in the same class:

56. Picturesque Atlas Co.- The original drawings from which the engravings are made.

The *Catalogue of the Exhibits in the New South Wales Court*<sup>9</sup> fails, however, to mention natural history subjects in lieu of the preferred historical and topographical subjects.

About six months after returning to Sydney from the Clarence River district, Cayley started a commission for Dr James Charles Cox. He completed 28 of 142 paintings of Australian lepidoptera or butterflies between 1887 and 1888. PT Hammond painted the majority of the series, while an isolated work was signed 'H Irvine', and four were unsigned. These paintings were also almost certainly exhibited at the Centennial Exhibition as there appeared the following entry in the *Official Guide to the Picture Galleries and Catalogue of Fine Arts*<sup>10</sup> and the *Catalogue of the Exhibits in the New South Wales Court*.<sup>11</sup>

Art Loan Exhibits ...

... 1422. Cox, James C., Hunter-street, Sydney.

Collection of Butterflies, in Water-colours. ...

The above records pertaining to 77 paintings being 'lent by Neville Cazley, Esq.'<sup>12</sup> whilst misspelling his surname, suggest that it was probably Cayley who hung his works at the exhibition. The *Catalogue of the Exhibits in the New South Wales Court*,<sup>13</sup> however, suggests that they were loaned by and perhaps belonged to William Aldenhoven:

Class 2. Various Paintings, Drawings, &c.

20. Aldenhoven, William, 74, Hunter-street, Sydney. Water-colour Paintings from life, by Neville Cayley.

Cayley's 77 paintings were listed beneath this title and, to create further confusion, *Tiger* was identified in the 'Art loan collection' under item '1406: Aldenhoven, W., 74 Hunter-street'.

It is likely that this major collection of 77 paintings was still owned by the artist, but their preparation and exhibition were facilitated by Aldenhoven, who owned *Tiger*. The subject matter depicted under this intriguing title is unknown but, in keeping with Cayley's work as an animal portraitist, may have depicted someone's pet cat, possibly a tortoise-shell or ginger-coloured tabby.

An interesting discovery, which confirms Aldenhoven's role in the framing of Cayley's original paintings, is a note in Aldenhoven's handwriting located *en reverse* of a small watercolour drawing depicting a Silver Gull dated 1887. This painting may have been exhibited under no. 64. *Grey Gull*, although a larger painting depicting a pair of birds in the presence of some small, non-specific plovers dated 1888<sup>14</sup> was hung on the same occasion. Aldenhoven's note, made casually on the back of the painting, reveals his intentions for the framing of at least seven of the works, including the magnificent no. 1 *Still-life (Dead Birds)*, no. 3 *Mountain Ducks* and *Tiger*. Of the paintings discovered by the author that were prepared for this exhibition, all but two have unfortunately since been reframed resulting in the loss of their overall integrity, including possible notations.

Shipments of fine art began to arrive from New South Wales at the Melbourne Exhibition Buildings during the second week of June 1888. During this month, Cayley brought his family to Melbourne for a brief sojourn. He appears, however, to have returned to Sydney during the following month and the *Clarence & Richmond Examiner and New England Advertiser* noted on 28 July:<sup>15</sup>

Mr. Neville Cayley – this well-known artist is apparently going to make a big splash with his renowned paintings of Australian birds at the Melbourne Exhibition. Lady Carrington recently visited his studio for the purpose of inspecting the pictures. Clarence River people will wish their old friend well deserved success. It is scarcely likely that he will meet any at Melbourne to excel his productions.

In the *Report ... With Appendices and Views of [the] New South Wales Court*, published in 1890,<sup>16</sup> some views by the official photographers, Johnstone O'Shannessy & Co. Ltd, were reproduced. Their work had appeared in 1889

in an album of *Selected Photographic Views of the New South Wales Court at the Centennial International Exhibition*.<sup>17</sup> Original photographs were individually mounted on card, highlighted with red lines and each page hinged to form an album bound in full blue, crushed calf with gold embossing forming an elaborate spine and inner margins of the boards. The images were not numbered or given titles but, numbered sequentially, it is no. 13 that is of great interest. Illustrating the interior of the Fine Arts Court of New South Wales, a colossal plaster bust of Captain James Cook sits in the foreground and the remainder of the image shows a substantial wooden packing crate, stacks of paintings waiting to be hung, empty frames and bollards awaiting to be erected to hold guide ropes along public walkways. Altogether, the image suggests that the photograph was taken in anticipation of the public being admitted to the exhibition.

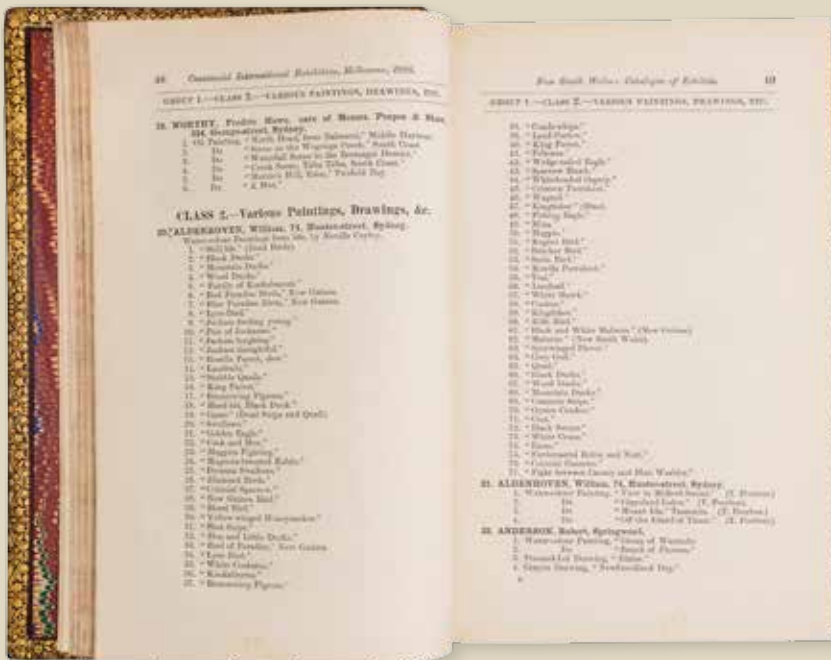
To the left of Cook's bust can be discerned three of Cayley's large paintings of ducks, which were to be placed on the wall facing Cook's right shoulder. Beneath a portrait of Sir Henry Parkes, lying on its end, is painting no. 2 or no. 66; both paintings being entitled 'Black Ducks', which depict at least five Pacific Black Ducks, the last in the flight being 'hard hit' (that is, shot) and, in the lower right area of the composition, one bird is seen falling into the reeds having also been shot. On the floor, leaning against the door, is another large painting, probably no. 3 or no. 68, both of which are entitled 'Mountain Ducks'. These Chestnut-breasted Shelducks are seen in repose and flight.<sup>18</sup> Amongst the stack of paintings behind the seat and lying on its left side is a painting that was probably no. 4 or no. 67, both of which were entitled 'Wood Ducks'. It is not possible to read the labels on the backs of the paintings that are stacked against it, but the one in front appears to have two labels: the one above probably making reference to being hung at the exhibition and the one beneath appearing to bear an heraldic insignia suggesting vice-regal patronage and, in bold copperplate manuscript beneath, appears to be Cayley's name and other information.

Photograph no. 14 also depicts the bust of Captain Cook, which presided over the collection of fine art, as well as a variety of cased instruments, principally theodolites. Along the left-hand wall, seven of Cayley's major works can be discerned in sufficient detail to be able to identify six of them with confidence.

In the top row, proceeding from left to right:

No. 1 *Still-life (Dead Birds)*

This painting, now in the National Gallery of Australia, contains a Superb Lyrebird as the central motif amongst 21 other individual birds



List of the 77 watercolour drawings exhibited at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition by William Aldenhoven on behalf of Neville Cayley. *Catalogue of the Exhibits in the New South Wales Court*, Sydney: Government Printer, 1888, pp. 48–49. Presentation binding

Neville Cayley, *The Silver Gull*, watercolour drawing, 17.6 x 22.8 cm, signed lower left N. Cayley. 1887. Possibly no. 64, *Grey Gull*, in *Catalogue of the Exhibits in the New South Wales Court* (1888), shown above

Works from author's collection. Imaging by Daniel Stainsby



representing 18 species (see Appendix). This was probably Cayley's second *Game Pantry* and, like the first,<sup>19</sup> it was painted in 1888 while he was resident at Bowral in a leased house known variously as Bon a Vista or Beuna Vista.<sup>20</sup> More so than the first painting, this was probably intended to represent the bag of the field ornithologist. To the left hang a brace of Grey Teal; almost identical to those painted in the same year as a game trophy for Abraham Salmon, tobacconist and newsagent in Argyle St, Moss Vale.<sup>21</sup> The birds are arranged in a masterly fashion, although appearing to have been casually deposited on the floor of the game pantry, which is flagstoned as an allusion to the wealth of his patron or prospective purchaser. The birds create a carefully balanced composition and reveal considerable variety in form and plumage, which creates harmony and great interest. The incorporation of seemingly exotic and unlikely species, including the Bush Stone-curlew, Noisy Pitta, Australian Pied Oystercatcher, Ground Parrot, Eastern Rosella, Rainbow Lorikeet and the Superb Lyrebird amongst quail, snipe, ducks and pigeon – the more commonplace, duller and cryptically plumaged game birds – give considerable relief and have aesthetic appeal.

The composition is cleverly crowned with the tail of the Superb Lyrebird, which elevates and gives balance to the design. The birds have been freshly deposited, as the macabre blowfly, which is present in many of Cayley's other still life paintings, has not yet been attracted to the scene. One's eye is drawn to that of the Masked Lapwing (bird no. 15 looking left to right), staring back through a bloodied nictitating membrane and which, with bill open in silent protest, eloquently recalls the exultation of an apostolic martyrdom and touches one's conscience. To the left of the composition and in the foreground lies a solitary and diminutive King Quail (bird no. 3) which in life reaches only 14 centimetres in length and possesses such sophisticated colouring that its solitariness poetically exaggerates the meaning of this whole essay in *Nature Morte*.

A manuscript note in the hand of William Aldenhoven applied to a label on the reverse of its photographic reproduction in one of three known remaining portfolios, which together contain 40 photographs of paintings entitled 'Australian birds. After original paintings by Neville Cayley, published by W. Aldenhoven' (hereafter *Australian Birds*)<sup>22</sup> designates this painting as 'No. 29'. It also reveals the title preferred by Aldenhoven as 'Still Life' and the 'Price of (Original Painting) £210.0.0.' In the *Official Guide to the Picture Galleries and Catalogue of Fine Arts* published in 1888<sup>23</sup> it was designated no. 1 *Still-life (Dead Birds)*.

No. 3 or 68 *Mountain Ducks*

No. 5 *Family of Kookaburras* or no. 36 *Kookaburras*

This painting appears to be 'identical' to that painted in 1887, which Cayley entitled *Jack's Yarn*. An ink manuscript annotation to its photographic reproduction in Cayley's album suggests erroneously that this painting was sold to the 'Brisbane Art Gallery' at a price of £100.<sup>23</sup> The Queensland Art Gallery has no record of such an accession.

No. 2 or 66 *Black Ducks*

In the second row of the paintings exhibited, proceeding from left to right:

No. 6 *Red Paradise Birds, New Guinea*, or no. 33 *Bird of Paradise, New Guinea*.

An adult male Count or Marquis de Raggi's Bird of Paradise is seen flying at top from left to right with another male below in the right-hand corner. This painting was designated no. 23 *Red Paradisebird* in *Australian Birds*. The lower left corner of the painting, which is hidden in the photograph by a potted aspidistra in the foreground, probably contained only palm fronds.

No. 7 *Blue Paradise Birds, New Guinea*

An adult male Prince Rudolph's Blue Bird of Paradise is seen at top right flying downwards to the right, while a female is perched at lower left. This painting is the same as that designated no. 1 *Blue Paradise-Bird (New-Guinea)* by Aldenhoven in *Australian Birds*.

These paintings were described as 'Water-colour Paintings from life, by Neville Cayley'<sup>24</sup> and, yet, it is highly improbable that he had seen any of these New Guinea birds represented as no.s 6, 7, 28, 33 and 61 alive. In the third row at far left is a large work that almost certainly depicts waterfowl but which is too overexposed to identify the subject.

Photograph no. 17 was taken in front of and slightly above the bust of Captain Cook and shows ten of Cayley's smaller paintings hanging on a freestanding partition. Proceeding from left to right (the first painting is indiscernible):

No. 42 *Wedge-tailed Eagle*

This title is misleading and, no doubt, reflects the misidentification promoted by the alternative use of the ambiguous vernacular name of 'eagle hawk'. This was generally, but not invariably, applied to the Wedge-tailed Eagle. The title 'Eagle Hawk' was provided in manuscript as an inscription on the mountboard within the original framing of this painting. Painted in 1887, it was a portrait of a captive specimen of the Little Eagle (*Hieraetus morphnoides*, dark morph).<sup>25</sup> The wooden perch and vertical lining boards behind the subject, which has abraded tips of its rectrices or tail feathers, indicate that this was a confined bird. The tarsi are not shown in the painting, but they would be feathered if this was a Little Eagle, and uncovered in the case of the Whistling Kite or eagle (*Haliastur*

*sphenurus*), to which this individual also shows some likeness. Manuscript annotations, more likely in the hand of Aldenhoven than Cayley, appear *en reverse*: 'paste this on cardboard first double thick grey neutral mount outside Sq. opening: 20 x 14½. D James & Co. 19 Macquarie Place'. D James & Co. were lithographers recorded in the *Sands Sydney & Suburban Directory* for 1887, but no known lithographic or other reproduction of this painting has been located by the author. The original backing board has been retained upon which is an internal gold border and, at lower left, the name 'Wood 314 George Street, Sydney'. Wood was a photographer working from this address in 1887. At lower right appears Aldenhoven's trade label, of a type different from all others examined, in which he identified himself as proprietor of a 'Picture Frame Factory and Moulding Warehouse' and the price of the painting was given as '£10.10s.0'.

No. 18 *Hard Hit, Black Duck*

No. 13 *Rosella Parrot, Shot*

This painting was that designated by Aldenhoven in *Australian Birds* as no. 6 *Shot Rosella Parrot*. It depicts an Eastern Rosella that has been shot and fallen to the ground where it struggles with wings outstretched and head raised in its last moments of life.

The subjects of the remaining six paintings are not discernible.

It is likely that Aldenhoven was responsible for at least some of the titles of the 77 paintings that Cayley exhibited. No. 5 *Family of Kookaburras* was an unlikely title for the artist to have used, and especially so if this was the painting that he entitled *en face* as *Jack's Yarn*. It is not known who was responsible for the title *Tiger*.

Cayley's works were well received at the Centennial Exhibition:

The award for collection of drawings of Australian birds at the Melbourne Exhibition was given to Mr. Neville Cayley.<sup>26</sup>

More specifically he was awarded a 'Second Order of Merit ... Neville Cazaly, a Collection of drawings of Australian birds'.<sup>27</sup> This seems like a grossly inadequate response to his major contribution in which many works of great importance were hung. Cayley considered that he had been awarded a 'Special Gold Medal' and wrote a note to that effect on the inside of his photograph album; no doubt prepared for him by Aldenhoven, in which a selection of his paintings were reproduced photographically.<sup>28</sup>

In order to understand the significance of the awards of first, second and third order of merit, however, it is necessary to appreciate the restrictions placed upon the adjudicators, and this matter was clarified in the *Age*:



Neville Cayley, not titled [Australian gamebirds] 1888, watercolour, 73.8 x 128.2 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1973. Although untitled, listed as 'Still-life (Dead Birds)' in the watercolours of Neville Cayley exhibited (see page 51) at the 1888 Melbourne International Exhibition. See Appendix for list of birds represented in this picture

The jury expressed regret that the requirements of international competition prevented any Australian picture receiving first order of merit, but at the same time refer in encouraging terms to the progress and to the probable future of Victorian art.

Cayley's silver medal for Second Order of Merit on this occasion represented putatively his seventh award for distinguished work in ornithological art. Other New South Wales artists exhibiting watercolour drawings in the same gallery included Conrad Martens, JR Ashton and the marine painter, George Frederick Gregory Snr, whose versatile artistic son bearing the same name (1857–1913) was to subsequently plagiarise Cayley's work, or copy it under instruction for Aldenhoven.<sup>29</sup>

The appearance at the Centennial Exhibition of a series of at least three portfolios measuring 41.7 x 31.7 cm including in all 40 mounted albumen photographs entitled *Australian Birds* made clearer the intention of Aldenhoven to publish Cayley's original designs.<sup>30</sup> The printed title awarded in small and larger formats to this set of photographs clearly anticipated, with minor alteration, the title given to Cayley and Aldenhoven's intended ambitious publication *Australian Birds*. Publication was anticipated between late 1894 and early 1895. Most of the paintings for that larger work were

executed between 1892 and 1894, but many were derived from this earlier period and, dated 1887–88, appear to be identical to some of the paintings reproduced photographically in the three portfolios that are now in the National Library of Australia. The artist's capacity for almost photorealistic reproduction of his own works requires great caution in accepting that a contemporary photograph represents an original or prototypic design when it may reproduce a close facsimile.

It was probably the relative ease with which these three portfolios were produced in Aldenhoven's photographic establishment, and the favourable response that they would have received from the public, that created the nidus for the conceptual development of the larger work that was to evolve from this point. It may have been Cayley who proposed to Aldenhoven hand-colouring photographs of his original paintings, a practice he would have witnessed in the photographic studio of Josiah Stevenson in Grafton. It was here that the 'Magistrates' Address' to commemorate the visit by Lord Carrington to Grafton, which incorporated watercolour drawings by Cayley, was reproduced photographically. It was also here that photographs could be enlarged and a service was offered in which they could be coloured in oils or watercolour. Cayley may have been engaged to this end when he hand-coloured in oils the photographic portrait of Emma Hannah Annette Pegus, post and telegraph mistress at Yamba.<sup>31</sup> Given that only one collection of 40 mounted photographs in three portfolios is known to exist, this could not be regarded as a publication in its own right. Whilst helping to germinate the conceptual development towards the later publication, it was also making reference to Aldenhoven's concern over copyright with respect to Cayley's original paintings. The reference in the title to *Australian Birds* being 'published by W Aldenhoven' suggests that, at this early time, the notion of publishing reproductions of Cayley's paintings was already afloat.

When Aldenhoven exhibited 130 'Beautiful paintings of Australian birds' at the Federal Coffee Palace in Collins St, Melbourne, in May 1894, he offered for sale:<sup>32</sup>

Besides the above original paintings there is a fine collection of hand-coloured reproductions for sale, one guinea each. Also, three large reproductions 32 in. x 26 in., Kookaburras, Magpies and Nest, Lyrebirds, one guinea each unframed, or one and a half guinea framed.

These three volumes have suffered neglect over many years and they represent, no doubt, all that remains of an original set of five or



Neville Cayley, *Wood Ducks*, or Australian Wood Ducks, watercolour drawing, 63.5 x 97.0 cm, signed lower right N. Cayley

Full plate albumen photograph, 18.4 x 28.0 cm, from Aldenhoven's studio reproducing Cayley's watercolour drawing *Wood Ducks*. Album belonging to Neville Cayley

Works from author's collection. Imaging by Daniel Stainsby

six volumes. They originally stood as a unique visual record of Cayley's remarkable series of paintings that were exhibited at the Centennial Exhibition and also included a few other works of the period. No doubt, these portfolios were available for inspection at the exhibition and thereafter at Aldenhoven's gallery. They would also have functioned as an effective promotional device in which potential patrons could commission copies or similar designs. They represented, however, less than 40 of the total of 77 paintings and a complete set of photographs originally may also have included one of *Tiger*.

Importantly, the numbering of the images does not generally coincide with published lists of the paintings at the exhibition. The remaining portfolios await discovery but, in consideration of the neglect that the surviving volumes record, they may have been lost. Taken in conjunction with the photographs of the New South Wales Court, they provide an unparalleled insight into the exhibition of Cayley's work, which stood as the crowning expression of his artistic achievement.

Not surprisingly, Cayley assembled his own album of photographs, or was presented with one by Aldenhoven, which represented, exclusively, reproductions of his own paintings.<sup>33</sup> Many of these photographs represent paintings that appeared at the Centennial Exhibition. It may be the same that he exhibited on 14 November 1888, 15 weeks after the official opening of the exhibition when he attended and contributed to a 'Conversazione and Concert' held in Bowral:

Mr. Cayley, 30 large photographs of his own paintings, stuffed bird, and model of lion.<sup>34</sup>

#### Exhibition at the Federal Coffee Palace, Collins St, Melbourne, May 1894

In 1894, Neville Cayley was at the pinnacle of his career as a popular and commercially successful natural history artist. He was also preparing *Australian Birds* for publication with William Aldenhoven, which they anticipated would bring him fame as an ornithological illustrator as well as bird artist. When the 130 original watercolour drawings were exhibited in Melbourne at the Federal Coffee Palace in May<sup>35</sup> and the unsold paintings were hung in Sydney at Aldenhoven's gallery in December, he was hailed as 'the greatest bird painter in the world'.<sup>36</sup>

The Federal Coffee Palace was situated at the corner of Collins and King streets and was advertised as 'The largest hotel in Australasia'.<sup>37</sup> The exhibition was held:



Left: *Australian Magpie*, 1892, hand-coloured and re-signed by the artist, 35.8 x 27.5 cm, from 'Reproduction of Neville Cayley's Watercolour Drawings', Aldenhoven Photographic Studio, Sydney

Right: *An Australian Wood Duck, Hard-hit [shot]*, 35.8 x 29.2 cm, unsigned, undated, almost certainly hand-coloured by the artist, from 'Reproduction of Neville Cayley's Watercolour Drawings', Aldenhoven Photographic Studio, Sydney  
Works from author's collection. Imaging by Daniel Stainsby

In the Corner Shop ... for one week only, with subscribers' lists for the Magnificent work, "*AUSTRALIAN BIRDS.*" Painted by NEVILLE CAYLEY, The most celebrated living bird painter, And published by W. ALDENHOVEN, Fine Art Publisher, ...<sup>38</sup>

The exhibition was opened on Tuesday 8 May and remained at the Federal Coffee Palace until Friday 11 May when Aldenhoven announced that:

Yielding to the persuasions of my friends and patrons, I have made arrangements to remain another week in Melbourne, and have REMOVED This magnificent collection of bird paintings to a more central and convenient position, 239 COLLINS-STREET, Two doors below the Age office.<sup>39</sup>

The 'Australian birds exhibition'<sup>40</sup> was thus now to be seen at the premises of William Detmold, book manufacturer.

An 'Important notice', including a list of the subject matter and preferred titles of a selection of the paintings, as well as reference to their means of



reproduction, was published on Wednesday 9 May in the *Argus*<sup>41</sup> and a different notice was issued on Monday 21 May.<sup>42</sup> An article appeared on 10 May in the same newspaper:<sup>43</sup>

The increasing scarcity of Gould's great work on the birds of Australia will cease to be a matter of regret after the publication of the still more important folios devoted to illustrating the ornithology of this continent by Mr. Aldenhoven, of Sydney. An exhibition of the original water-colour drawings, 130 in number, which have been made for it by Mr. Neville Cayley, has been opened for a few days in the ground floor of the Federal Coffee Palace, and is sure to attract considerable attention. The artist, who we are informed commenced his studies in Gippsland, possesses an innate talent for the portraiture of birds, whether in motion or repose, alive or dead; delineating their plumage with singular fidelity and conscientious care, while proving himself at the same time a skilful colourist. Some of the drawings are life-sized, and close observation has evidently familiarized Mr. Cayley with the characteristic habits and attitudes of his subjects, their modes of flight, and their particular habitat, so that each picture is to some extent a page of natural history. The whole of the drawings are to be faithfully reproduced on stone, and then coloured by hand, under the immediate supervision and with the final touches of the artist himself. The undertaking is a very bold and costly one on the part of the publishers, and it is certainly deserving of support by the lovers of art, by sportsmen, and by students of ornithology.

On 12 May 1894, the *Australasian*<sup>44</sup> also greeted this exhibition with much enthusiasm. Importantly they identified Cayley as 'a sportsman, an artist, and a lover of nature combined', and described the exhibition as follows:

PAINTINGS OF BIRDS.

Lovers of art, and all who take interest in Australian birds, should not miss seeing the beautiful collection of paintings on view at 239 Collins-street. The paintings are by Mr. Neville Cayley, of New South Wales. They give life-size representations, coloured with marvellous fidelity, of the most familiar birds, namely, magpies, lyre-birds, rosella parrots, &c. In addition there are several realistic 'studies,' such [as] 'House to Let,' which depicts a family of fledgeling butcher-birds quitting the old nest. 'Jack's Yarn' is a corroboree of laughing jackasses over a small snake. 'Hard Hit' represents a shot duck falling in mid-air, a subject which could only have been conceived by a sportsman, an artist, and a lover of nature combined, which Mr. Cayley is. The collection is under the charge of Mr. W. Aldenhoven, fine art publisher, of Sydney.

The 'Great success of exhibition of paintings of Australian birds' encouraged Aldenhoven to extend it until Wednesday 23 May.

Not surprisingly, with the apparent intention to publish Cayley's popular designs as well as increasing pressure from plagiarists, principally Frederick Thomas (Tom) Flower (1857–1936), Aldenhoven issued shortly thereafter an 'Important public notice'. This warning about copyright infringement was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 30 June, 4 and 7 July, and 28 August 1894. The notices appeared in anticipation of Aldenhoven exhibiting the unsold paintings at his gallery in Sydney after their removal from Melbourne. A related notice of copyright was also issued as part of the preliminary pages in a sample copy of *Australian Birds*.<sup>45</sup>

It appears that Aldenhoven may have possibly purchased these paintings from Cayley as the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on 21 December 1894<sup>46</sup> that 120 paintings, presumably from the original collection of 130 works, could now be examined at Aldenhoven's art gallery:

ALDENHOVEN'S GALLERY.

Most people who have passed along Hunter-Street must have had their attention attracted to the beautiful pictures that generally adorn Aldenhoven's shop-windows, and those who have inspected Cayley's wonderful bird portraits will be glad to know that Mr. Aldenhoven is at the present time erecting a spacious and well-lighted gallery, in which the works of the greatest bird painter in the world will occupy a prominent position. All the latest and most effective pictures by this clever hand photographer are to be found in the establishment, and some of the latest productions of this brush clearly indicate the work of a well-controlled genius. No less than 120 original pictures by Cayley have been secured by Mr. Aldenhoven, but probably one of the finest in his extensive gallery is the 'Convention of Parrots'. In this the artist has displayed to the fullest extent his regard for detail, his brilliant colouring, and unsurpassed faithfulness. Other late works from the same prolific brush are on view.

It is likely that a large number of this collection of 120 watercolours accompanied Aldenhoven to Brisbane where, on Monday 10 August 1896, he held a massive exhibition of 800 pictures at the Royal Arcade.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

Having survived the wilds of Gippsland, Neville Cayley found himself in the uncertain world of Australian artists in New South Wales as they struggled towards a national identity free from English and European indebtedness, as

well as competing amongst themselves according to professional or amateur status. In keeping with his professional standing, he maintained active, albeit intermittent, membership of the Art Society of New South Wales from the time of his arrival in Sydney, six months after its inauguration on 22 June 1880, until his death on 7 May 1903, only two months prior to the society gaining regal patronage on 6 July. Between illustrators and artists, descriptive nationalists and impressionists, he sailed between Scylla and Charybdis. In this respect, he was singularly successful in becoming highly respected during his lifetime in his specialist department of watercolour painting of natural history subjects and enjoyed greater remuneration for his efforts than did many of his contemporaries, who have enjoyed far greater appreciation posthumously.

In the 1888 Centennial Exhibition, Cayley chose a favourable venue for the promotion of his work, which might attract national as well as international recognition. While his work was already publicly well-recognised, this was an exhibition of his work on an heroic or monumental and hitherto unknown scale, which was probably only to be surpassed in numbers of paintings when William Aldenhoven exhibited 130 of Cayley's watercolour drawings at the Federal Coffee Palace in Collins St, Melbourne, in May 1894 and later at his own gallery in Sydney during the following December. These three exhibitions anticipated their intended but unfulfilled joint publication of the book, *Australian Birds*.

The Melbourne showings of 1888 and 1894 cemented Cayley's place as the 'premier bird painter of the colonies'.

I dedicate this article to Andrew Keep, Ulverstone, Tasmania, an honourable and generous friend and ardent student of 'Cayleyana'.