

from this BROKEN HILL

A place where the sky touches the earth, where the rim of the world, if there were one, would seem to the eye only an armstreach away.

The Paakantji are the owners and custodial caretakers at the heart of this country now described as Broken Hill and the regional Far West of NSW. We acknowledge this with respect for Paakantji ancestors, Paakantji elders and all those that share their present lives.

In recent times the silver lode that locals claim built Melbourne has also built a unique urban environment in the desert. In some ways Broken Hill was the experiment that became multicultural Australia – it had the country's first mosque, many communities continue to thrive within its boundaries. Alongside the city's famous arts life, the rough heart of Unionism still stands strong. People escape to this city, others escape a childhood there. It has its horrors and highlights, once there you'll never forget.

This is a portrait - undoubtedly only one of the possible perspectives - of a city and its surrounds.

It is a collection of photography, poetry and prose around/about this place. Pieces include an excerpt from a 'Napoleon Bonaparte' novel, an array of rich photography, material from some of the country's leading poets/prose writers plus a wide seam of work sourced locally.

Featuring writing by: **Christine Adams Paul Armstrong Elaine Barker
Tom Black Cathy Bray Roger Britton David Brooks Jane Carroll George Cole Sam Deed
Barbara De Franceschi Jennifer Dickerson Phillip A. Ellis
George Garnett Matt Hetherington Ion L. Idriess Rae Desmond Jones
Mike Ladd Myra King Mark Miller Frankie Mills Mark O'Flynn Teja Pribac
Marvis Sofield David Stavanger Jen Thompson Tom Thompson
Richard Tipping Arthur Upfield Amelia Walker James Waller Ramon Ware
Madge Welsh Les Wicks Irene Wilkie**

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Teja Pribac Georgie Sharp Amanda Slater Bill Strong Richard Tipping
Brian Tonkin Colin Tuckerman Andrew Wallace Frans de Wit**

ABOUT



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LAND

LIFE

LIVES

LODE

SILVER CITY





LAND

Mike Ladd

THE BARRIER

No traffic, but be quick on the wheel
dodging the living and dead roos –
a flat charnel where eagles and hawks
grow fat.

Beside the few curves, a cross or two
and faded plastic flowers.
Let us not apportion blame to “Damien”
who’s named the bend.
The details vary
but the story skids to the same end;
a harsh and final vision of the scrub.

Little Topar has us, Canbelego and Mullengudgery,
Trangie, Nevertire and Narromine.

The sky opens into the kind of light
that makes you wonder
which barrier you might be crossing.

published in *Transit* (Five Islands)



photo by **Grant Colhoun**



Elaine Barker

FROM THE BUS

There's a plastic bag ballooning
high in a dead tree.
No leaves are left to flutter
as red wind squalls through.
Black box, gums and mulga,
the cypress and the casuarina
have wasted away to skeletons
and claw into the sky,
their shadows taking giant strides
over empty paddocks, mere stubble now.
Others have flung down their limbs
and the branches are scattered
like tangled bones or
spread like serpents across the sand.

In a small valley a sudden gash of bronze
where dry bushes stand out
like dead men in khaki
still at their posts after the fighting's done.
Now and again, smooth areas of soil
where water once pooled.
Close by, tussocks gather in a mass,
a get-together of wily porcupine grass,
irreverent and surreal.

Late afternoon, and dust has settled
over every object on the bus.
Now with each breath you inhale
the dust's thin and faded smell.
Against a fence,
a snatch of soft grey-green.
Young gums are jumping up.
They're pushing their luck, though chance
and rain and time could save them.
I let the grey-green saplings
slip into my thoughts to accompany me.
As the hours go by
I'm still mindful of the graveyard trees
on either side and the corrugations
the bus is taking on,

but in my head those young gums
are carrying their colour
through the beaten landscape
like an unimagined opportunity.

Previously published in *The Day Lit By Memory* (Ginninderra Press, 2008).
An earlier version appeared in the *Barrier Miner*.

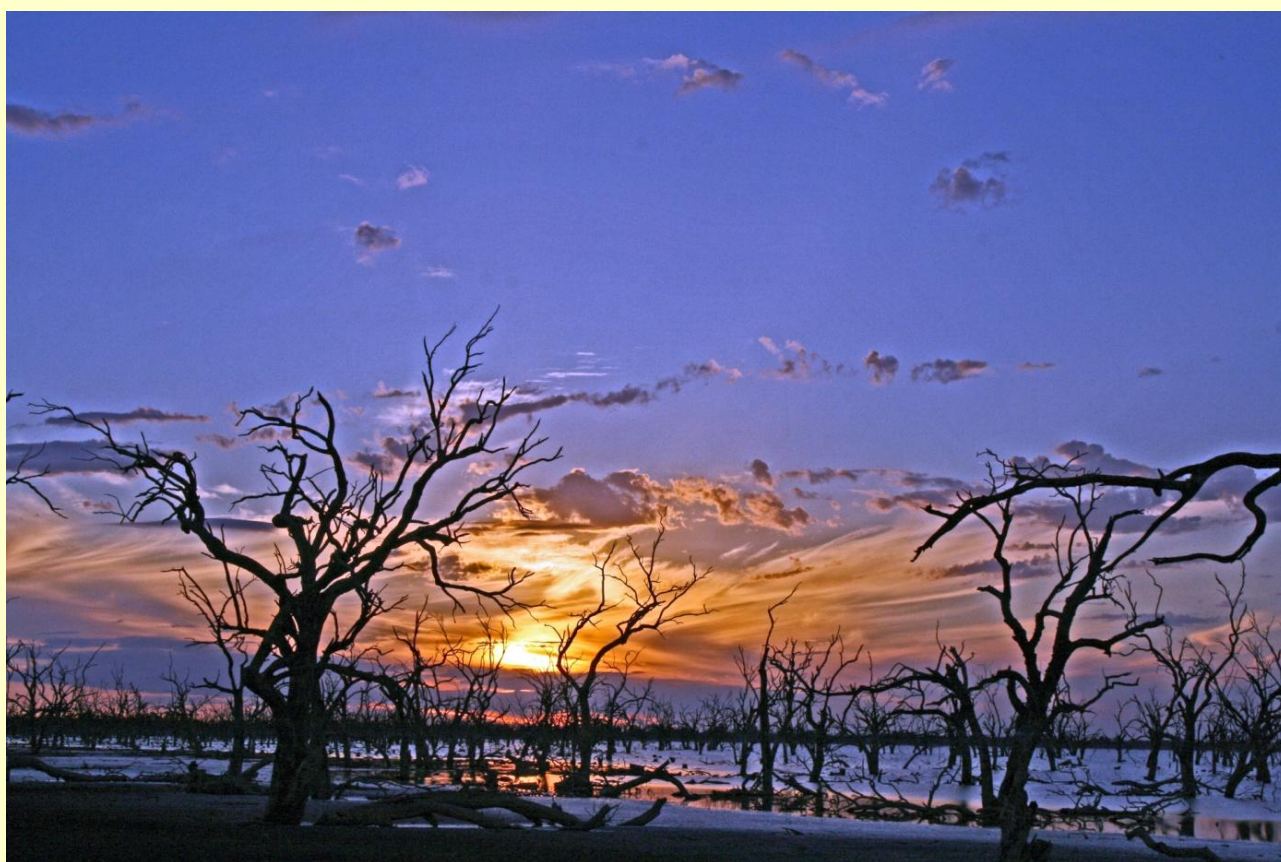


Photo: **Peter Middleton**



Jen Thompson

THE LIVING DESERT

All my life
this has been beauty to me:
derelict old man saltbush,
taste of tin on the tongue,
patch of quartz on a clay pan,
broken tombstones scattered
like knucklebones
over the Silverton common.

When the city asks where Culture is
the land asks what is culture.
Look what endures —
the concrete feet of pipelines,
silted ruins of stone houses,
bits of rusted tin and wire.
Our testament to civilisation.

Only the crow,
cynical scavenger,
caws above the rustle of wind.



photo by Steve Dagger



Photo
by **Amanda Slater**



Matt Hetherington

Mundi Mundi

half a drowning mind
to drink the still currents
the other part to fly

one yellow tree
one red grave
one black road

and one vast eye
to the next expanse
of dryer water

this ocean of sky





Photos by **Brian Tonkin**



Jane Carroll

22nd September

If I'd seen it coming I would have turned and fled. But I couldn't see the storm for the dust.

My phone rings as I'm driving home from Wilcannia. My nephew in South Australia asks if I'm all right. He's just seen film of Broken Hill, completely blacked out in a dust storm. I tell him it's dusty but it's all right to drive. I'm OK.

At Topar, where I stop for a drink, a fellow warns me that he's just tried to reach Broken Hill and has had to turn back. I listen, but already I'm thinking, 'I have to get home.' I decide that I will drive on slowly. It doesn't matter how long it takes. If the dust gets too bad I'll turn around and come back to Topar. My mobile is with me and there's a bottle of water in the car.

The dust is thick enough for me to put on my hazard warning lights as I set off again. It becomes increasingly hard to see. About 60 kilometres out of Broken Hill I take to straddling the white line on the left hand edge of the road to stop the car from wandering. I am sitting forward, peering through the windscreen as the red dust swarms around me. The car is sucked in to a vortex of red blackness. Where am I? Am I travelling forwards or backwards? Suddenly a giant hand pushes its palm into the windscreen and blinds me. Stop! it commands.

Turning around is not an option. The road has disappeared and the car is floating in a cloud. A B-double might slam into me. Even pulling off to the side is hazardous. The car could roll over a cliff. Of course there is no cliff, I tell myself, but there could be a deep gutter. I creep to the left with hazard lights flashing and hope that no blinded driver will hit me. Soon a huddle of blinking cars has clustered around me, all stopped by the giant hand of the storm. Time – 3.40pm.

I make contact with a man in a one-tonne truck behind me. To do this I have to open my car door. I battle to push it open, squint as the dust whips me, and squeeze out the gap, holding the door to stop it slamming shut behind me. My hair streams in the wind. I speak to the man, then battle my way back into the car. I have allowed in gusts of dust, so now I am breathing thick gritty air. Blinking it, biting it on my teeth.

The storm throws punches at the car and blasts the tender shell of my cocoon. It could rage all night. There is nothing to do but wait. My water bottle seems small and it is only half full. There is no torch. The dust catches in my throat and makes a track to my lungs. But I am safe. There is no tree to fall on me. No vehicle could drive fast enough to blunder into me. Thank goodness I am not asthmatic.

The radio links me to the outside. Broken Hill is blotted out, Andrew Schmidt broadcasts to the world. He has never experienced anything like it. I ring in to tell him where I am and what's

happening. Another fellow, who must be very close to me, says that he can't see the bull bar on the front of his vehicle. I turn the hazard lights and the radio off to save the battery. When I switch on again the radio has surrendered to the storm and can only make a static buzz.

My phone rings. It's my daughter. She is suddenly worried, knowing where I am and hearing the edge to my voice. She says she will ring at intervals. My husband rings from storm-lashed Sydney airport. He too sounds concerned though he speaks calmly. I am more worried for him, flying in a storm.

When did I last charge my phone battery? The car is shuddering in the wind. I look up through the closed window and see dust clouds racing skywards. There must be some modicum of light. Is it clearing? No, it refuses to clear. Will I know when the sun sets? I do. Unmistakably. The sky switches off from thick darkness to utter black. The sun has gone.

A truck creeps past, followed by a cluster of cars. My man behind me and I decide we'll try to follow. I start up. It's difficult to find the accelerator or sense that I am moving forward. After about ten metres I stop. I can see nothing but red blackness reflecting back from the headlights. My man pulls over too and fights through the wind to tell me that he won't go without me. I have wound the window down to speak to him, which means that there is more dust in the car. I tell him that he should go on if he wants to, that I will be perfectly all right, but he says he can't see either.

I wait. The radio is still static. Vic rings again. We try to drive again. My man leads the way. Again we are forced to stop.

Eventually, at 7.40, we make a third attempt and this time we keep going. I can see the tail lights of his truck and after a while I can read the number plate. It's South Australian. I sit very straight over the steering wheel so I can look down on the road and trace the broken white line. That's how the truck drivers must do it from high up in their cabins. I can see three white lines. Gradually the dust clears and we pick up speed until we are doing 70 kilometres an hour.

We sail into Broken Hill where we stop and both get out of our vehicles. I give him the thumbs up then hold my hair away from my face with both hands. It's whipping around like wire.

'We'll probably never meet again,' I tell him, 'but my name's Jane.'

'Peter,' he says, and we shake hands.

'Thank you so much,' I say. 'I am so grateful.'

'You did a great job,' he replies, and even in this surreal scene I'm thinking how sexist we're both being. But I could hug him. I *am* grateful.

At home I see myself in the mirror. I try to take a photo with my phone of this woman with orange hair sticking out from her head and dark red face powder daubed across her nose and cheeks.

I shower in glorious clean warm water and watch the red mud swirl down the drain. Then I crawl into bed. The dust that has forced its way into the house flutters and settles around me.



Photo by **Brian Tonkin**



Photo: Rae Desmond Jones



Cathy Bray

Broken Hill Pastoral 1968

Eight hours out from Central...

We came onto the heavily watered plains,
hosed down now, to puddles.

Clumps of green lay strewn round
like lurid plastic bath mats on the red dirt.

Proliferating pink and purple wildflowers
derailed the most devoted English gardener.

Cinematic wildlife, de-mobbed and oversensitive to noise,
appeared beside the train.

The rattling wooden windows,
thrown wide open, were roaring their approval.

I balanced my elbow
on the peeling windowsill.

The carriage-cradle rocking me to sleep
while the silent newsreel played relentlessly to the racket.

Previously published in *Phoenix* (2006).



Irene Wilkie

On the Edge

Ice-neededled stars,
frozen moon,
a mallee-wood fire,
are lonely points
on the edge
of the plain.

Hot faces,
cooling backs,
flinch at every flame burst,
every skitter in the dark.

You tell me,
Kangaroos out there,
big fellas.

I hear them,
black against the sky
beyond the smoke.

We lean against each other –
the warmth,
the sound of breathing,
the rise and fall.

Out of the wind
we find moonlit plains
aphrodisiac
and garnets fire- dance
like rubies
in world-ancient rocks.



LIFE



photo by **Frans de Wit**



David Stavanger

poems for the owl

1.

no-one
sees
the owl
seeing
the snow
seeing
the silence
seeing
the shadows
seeing
the scripture
of the
human
heart

2.

if you kill an owl
ask permission
to take a feather

place it on your hat

kiss your lover once

then be prepared to take flight
the night
will forgive you

sit in ghost gums
watch the main road
for strays

breathe shadow

mice and men
will approach
with awe & caution

kiss them once

talons by your side
spread your
take flight

wing

span

wide

Previously published in Foam:e #5;
And the Ringmaster Said... (Small Change Press, 2008).



photo by **Bill Strong**



Photos by **Georgie Sharp**





Teja Pribac

ROAD-KILL

These creatures tonight
breathing
moonlight and dust
tomorrow
faceless, motionless
lumps of flesh
and coagulations
an aesthetic embarrassment
to sweep off the road
before the shade of habitual annoyance
on the faces of
drivers and passengers
surfacing at every impact
becomes that small scar
in daylight
engraved in each one of us
spreading as we drive
down our own road until
immortality meets reality
and I too will be swept off before
the sight of me or the smell
begins to inconvenience
and my children too will weep
quietly like joeys

why can't I feel endearment
for the peaceful faces of my fellow
passengers
breathing moonlight and
dust tonight?



Ramon Ware

Maggie's Family

Many years ago I found a distressed baby magpie. She wasn't old enough to fly and shouldn't have been out of her nest. I assumed that some irresponsible person may have taken her out of her nest, because she was a long way from home. Home for a magpie is a tall gum tree and there were no gum trees anywhere near where I found her. She appeared to be in very poor condition so I took her home. The children made quite a fuss of her and named her Maggie.

Because she couldn't fly, we didn't keep her in a cage. Instead, we let her sleep where she chose, perched on the handle bar of my motorbike, which was leaning against the wall of the house. She probably felt safe there because she was near the back door and up off the ground.

It only took a few days of regular food and tender loving care from the whole family to get Maggie looking healthy. While she was convalescing she never moved far from her perch on the motorcycle handlebar, but as her health improved she began to follow us about the yard.

Although we had no front fence or gates she never ventured out of the back yard.

Maggie was terrified of dogs but not afraid of cats. If a cat came too close, Maggie stood as tall as she could and thrust out her beak, glaring at the cat. The cats understood the message and kept their distance.

Maggie liked helping me in the garden. While I was on my hands and knees pulling weeds, Maggie occupied her favourite place, between my arms and right under my chest. From there she could catch worms as I pulled out the weeds and also spot and collect grubs from the plants ahead.

She often shot out from her vantage point to catch something that I only saw once she had it in her beak.

Maggie loved slaters or woodlice, her favourite delicacy. When I disturbed a nest of slaters, Maggie dived in and began gobbling up the tiny bugs as fast as she could lest any escaped.

After learning to fly, Maggie followed us when we went visiting down the street, flying past and landing on a fence to rest when she got ahead, then catching up after we passed.

When she had grown up and could fly properly, a wild bush magpie came a courting her. She flew away with him to build a nest in a tall gum tree not far from our house.

After that whenever Maggie saw me working in the garden she brought her mate down to help me with the work. They always stayed behind me about two metres away, collecting worms from the loose soil.

In the spring they had two babies and as soon as the babies could fly, Maggie brought them down to meet us, her 'other family.'

She perched on the rotary clothesline like she always did when she was home and called to her babies to come down beside her. The babies were afraid to come as close to people as their mother did so they stayed looking down from the roof of the house.

For several years Maggie continued to bring her mate to help in the garden and in the spring she brought her babies to show us. We felt privileged by her show of affection for the family she grew up with and also humbled because she never forgot us.

It is many years since Maggie ceased visiting but quite often a group of magpies take over our garden, sifting through the soil for worms and bugs. Magpies are territorial birds so I assume they are Maggie's descendants



Christine Adams

Dingo Heartache

Stan Hotchin

The dogs at Waka Station were bad. I had been trying to get a particular dog for weeks and weeks- he used to come into Waka every day. I worked out what was happening. The dog would come in and kill four or five lambs; take the heart out of them. I used to say to myself 'It takes five bloody lamb hearts to fill a dingo up' because that is all he would take. He'd be back the next night and do the same thing about half a mile away. You would think the sheep would move but these ewes stopped there looking for their lambs. I would go up there every day and I was sickened by it.

Hector Harrison was working at Olive Downs at the time and he came to help me track the dog. The first morning we went out, we found the lambs dead all right and the old ewes looking for their lambs; always in the same little area. Anyhow we got onto this dingo's tracks and we followed him and old Hector said, 'He is going straight that way. I think the best thing to do is to canter off to the big water-hole' and we did this but we didn't catch up with the dog on the way and I didn't think we had any hope of catching up with him.

Hector suggested we go back from where we left him and track him-and this was a smart move. We had initially just galloped on thinking that we would catch up with him but this bloody dog must have watched us from a sand-hill and instead of going to where he always went,-where I used to track him-he went west straight down the sand-hill.

Anyway, we tracked him down there, another couple of miles, and we were riding along; looking here; looking there and then Hector saw him way over on a sand-hill. 'There he is!' He could see the tracks way over on top of a sand-hill. The dog was camped under a bush-all he did was jump over the brow of the flat. We galloped over there and there was this big, fat old dog just trotting down the fence. Boy, I'll never forget that one. We got him; we only had to chase him a couple of yards. The bastard-he used to eat the lambs every day; just the hearts; the crows would eat the rest.

Taped interview between Christine Adams and Stan Hotchin at Broken Hill 7th January 2004. Published in Christine Adams *Way Out West: Pastoral Stories of Western New South Wales*, (Ocean, 2008)



Mark Miller

This Summer

1

(i)

Crouched on fence-posts
studding the horizon,
two wedge-tails,
like trophies,
defy the weekenders
just up for the shoot.

(ii)

Dad and Uncle Brian put nets
over burrows near logs and straggly bushes

they fetch and carry cages
from the tray of the old battered Ford
and let the ferrets run free down the mother holes

and while dad rolls a smoke
we wait and watch
until all hell breaks loose
as rabbits and ferrets hurtle into the nets -

we do this for other burrows
each time re-capturing the ferrets
and tossing the wriggling, mewling rabbits
into hessian bags
to be taken home and cut up for Uncle's dogs

his frantic greyhounds
that never do much good
on the racetrack anyway.

2

(i)

Corellas skirl in gumblossom,
a drugged snake
is scribbled in dust
on the sun-tight plain.

(ii)

It's afternoon

in high summer

hotel doors gape
at the baking street

race calls blare
through the open windows

a dog sleeps fitfully
in the verandah shade

a young woman,
captive of her dreams

waits upstairs
for the perfect stranger.



Marvis Sofield

broken hill landfill

Crows
fat squat overfed airbuses
line the dirt mound
over the meat hole.
They are too heavy for flight.

Shopenhauer once said
the pain of the devoured is always
greater than the pleasure of the devourer.
What transient satisfaction
created this carnage.

A kangaroo paw
lies on red sand soil. Small, delicate
severed from life.
Body parts, spinal columns
de-fleshed joints are scattered about.

Whole animals
pile at the bottom
of a man made ditch.
A stench you can taste
glues breathing lungs to rib cage.

No blood at the meat hole.
It has drained into the earth
to feed the soil of local landfill
barren as a moonscape.





Photos: **Teja Pribac**



LIVES

Jen Thompson

THE RANGER AT WILLANDRA

The black man at the dinner table
frowns at the cloth,
searches his mind
for the right ways to speak of it.

You ask about the knowledge
closest to his people
closest to his heart
and he struggles for words
to show the mysteries to you
without disturbing their resting place.

Had he asked about
your lost virginity
you may have struggled too.
Our white intellect rides rough-shod
into territory
we have never known.



Arthur Upfield

from **The Bachelors of Broken Hill**

He arrived at Broken Hill on 2nd October, entering the city on a mail car from Wilcannia, and there, sick of big cities and tired by his mental activities, it proceeded to relax.

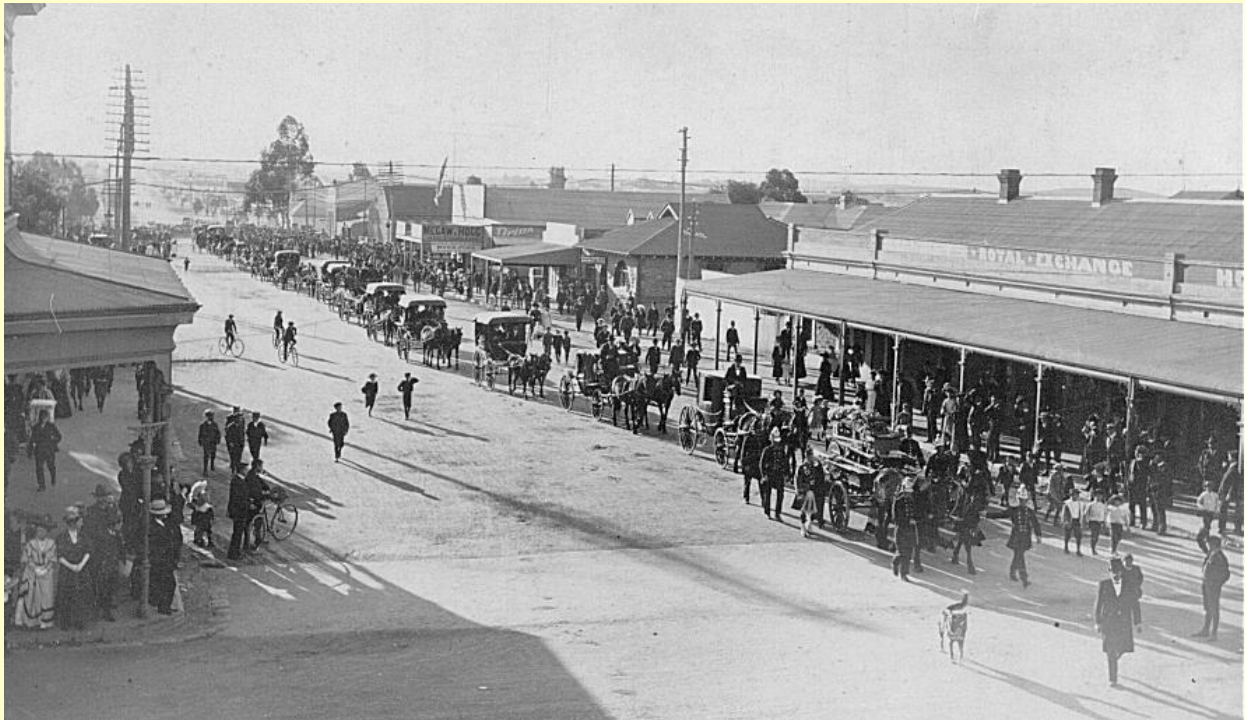
There is nothing parochial or bucolic about Broken Hill. There is no city in all Australia remotely like it excepting perhaps the golden city of Kalgoorlie. There is nothing of the snobocracy of Melbourne, or the dog-eat-dog taint of Sydney, in the community Broken Hill, and there is no thoroughfare in Australia quite like Argent Street, Broken Hill's main shopping centre.

Argent Street is unique. Besides being a street of shops it is the universal place of rendezvous. "Meet you down Argent Street" is the phrase employed by husband to wife, by friend to friend. You may pause before a building erected in the mid-19th century; proceed and gaze at a section of a mining camp of the 1870s; stay at a hotel the exact replica of those from which emerged the American Deadwood Dicks; eat at ultra cafes run by smart Greeks and Italians; hire a gleaming automobile and shop at lush emporiums.

Down Argent Street, Mr Samuel Goldspink had begun business in the clothing trade when Queen Victoria found little at which to be amused. He had prospered less because of his own acumen than by the growth and the wealth of the city he watched mature. He was an ingratiating little man, having an infectious chuckle and a store of jokes against himself, so his customers found it pleasant to be overcharged.

Mr Goldspink was 59 and a bachelor, seemingly hale and hearty, yet he collapsed and died inelegantly right in front of his own haberdashery counter. The doctor was dissatisfied with the manner of his passing, and the post-mortem revealed that the cause of death was cyanide poisoning; and, as it was quickly established that Goldspink had been in no mood to commit suicide, the effect was not dissimilar to that of a stick thrust into a bull ants nest -- Detective Sergeant Bill Crome being the chief bull ant.

from The Bachelors of Broken Hill (A&R, 1958)
courtesy the publishers, ETT Imprint, Sydney.



From the Outback Archives Broken Hill City Library





Frankie Mills

No Mention Must Be Made

Two brown paper bags
Hidden among the pristine baby clothes
Blue embroidery edged the cream blankets
Tiny green leaves sprouted amongst the rosebuds.

The cupboard door opened,
A hand moist from rubbing tear-filled eyes
Stroked the small bronze urns at rest in plain paper bags.

A voice called
The door shut
No one must speak of these two-day old boys, gone
The mother's pain raked across the tortured senses,
Would no-one understand her empty arms.



David Brooks

The Cull

Tired and reluctantly this
morning on the desert's edge I
pick up a pen again, don't
know if I have a poem in me but maybe another
appalling list, the news just to hand
of a cull of camels a long way from anywhere
but perhaps they are taking precious food from cattle or are simply
too hard to muster for export; one million apparently,
and the Prime Minister has signed off on the program put up by the famous
ex-rock-star-turned-politician, on the back
of the 'culling' of 6000 kangaroos on
Defence department land six weeks ago, word
of a 'cull' of wild horses in Queensland and the news
that the New South Wales government is about to approve
'recreational' shooting in National Parks as if the murder of a wild
goat or pig or kangaroo were somehow a re-creating of anything other
than the primal crime of Cain; all this alongside calls
to 'cull' Indian Mynahs, ibises, feral foxes, crocodiles, cane toads, dingoes, water
buffaloes and almost any other thing that
bites, or shits on washing, croaks or sings too loudly in the early morning, all our
xenophobia our racism our fear of others, the inside-turned-outward of our
horror of the different – so
no, no poem, not even
a diatribe, only a small
and private screaming-place, a cull-de-sac, a
ghostly Valley of the Lost, or museum
of referents, full of whispers, snort and pad and
shuffle under starlight, sound of
the trees' the sand's
breathing. (Oh
animals, poor animals, how
we have failed you.)



Ion L. Idriess

from the Silver City

It was near a certain lonely shanty that dad pulled up at the sight of a greybeard staring dubiously at a fence. Fences were certainly few and far between, but he was glaring at this one as if he had never seen a fence before - lanky old chap, skinny as a poor goanna.

"Good day," call Dad.

"Day," replied the greybeard, his eyes never lifting from the fence, and kept muttering to himself.

"What's the trouble?" enquired Dad.

"This darned fence," answered the greybeard, frowning. "I reckon I'm the best blooming hopper ever browsed on these plains - but I can't jump *that* fence!"

Dad slapped the reins on the pony, leaving the greybeard still staring at the fence, still angrily muttering.

"Let that be a lesson to you," advised the Ancestor.

"What's the matter with him?"

"He's just recovering after a spree, or else just developing the horrors. At present, he thinks he is a kangaroo, but can't jump the fence. I'll call in at the shanty and tell them they'd better go out after him and bring him in. Otherwise he might wonder away and perish. Let that be a lesson to you, young fellow or one of these days you might imagine you are a kangaroo!" And the ancestor passed the time until we pulled into the shanty by giving me a horrifying examples of men he'd seen in the horrors. In coming years I was to see for myself that he had not been drawing a long bow either.

However the ancestor's hair raising examples became a little monotonous to a bored youth jogging along in a dusty sulky watching the little grey butterflies darting amongst the grey salt bush.

"Who put up the first fence in this country?"

from The Silver City (A&R, 1956)
courtesy the publishers, ETT Imprint, Sydney





From the Outback Archives Broken Hill City Library



Jennifer Dickerson

Doing a Valuation for “Pro”

Arrival at Broken Hill Airport
lurching into a bumpy touch down
the plane door lets in a blast
from the outside fan forced oven

“Pro” Hart waiting with the Rolls
recognizable, nonchalant, overalls daubed
in burnt sienna and blue and gold
fresh from another carpet?

At his house I drink strong bush tea
While a young girl with all the time in the world
Reads the serial from dog eared pages of
an ancient Women’s Weekly.

I begin to value this life collection
A thousand pennies saved from years
and thrown into a cupboard he declares
“Somewhere there’s a 1930”

“Pro” begged me to see his chook house,
a valuable white leghorn to admire.
Not needing a distraction I claimed
ignorance about the price of chooks on the hoof.

He found a hundred bits of porcelain,
some ornate, a few chipped cracked
Royal Doulton, missing parts, curiosities
with makers marks to catalogue

Then the Painting Collection. If I was six people
there would still be insufficient time
left to take it in, measure and write up.
It was a valuation that would never happen.



Rae Desmond Jones

In Memorium

Clara Elizabeth Lampe was not married to my grandfather,

I found this from her death certificate 30 years after she fell backwards
Into my mother's arms while putting a jar of vegemite into an ice safe.

She slept in my room for 6 months each year, a snoring
Farting belching hump in the centre of an old iron bed:
At night the ghosts in the corner whispered her name,
& I hid beneath the sheets & folded myself into the dark silence.

When I hit the spoiled son of the local stock & station agent with a stone
His parents came in their suits, confident & sure of their punitive power.
God was with me, or rather Clara Lampe, whose name meant lamb
But she was a lion with a broom so they retreated & never returned.

On Sundays she never went to church but took me walking
So I followed her expansive buttocks out past the iron mosque.
As we climbed the hills she swiped the air to break the spider webs.
We sat on the white rocks chewing cold dumplings & staring down the sneering crows.

When she was around, my mother had a migraine & my father stayed out,
While my sister remained in her room or sought escape at the movies.
When her body lurched onto the train to travel to my aunt in Sydney,
They suppressed a cheer because I was there & she would be back.

When she died I was the last person left on earth who loved her
But I was not allowed to grieve the cold weight of her remains.
At school I watched the light glide around the empty sky.
Today the light danced again & I write now for her nameless grave.

from *Blow Out* (Island Press, 2009)



Paul Armstrong

CHARLIES BILLABONG

On a dry and sandy selection, in the western back blocks,
A line is drawn, of singlets and tattered old socks,
Showing a mans wealth, after a days work he would deliver,
living in the outback, along the Darling River.

Under the shade of a giant gum tree,
sits an old wanderer called Charlie Jones and me.
On the dusty bank of an ancient Billabong,
he tells a story, in a long forgotten song.

Telling yarns about his youth, when he was young and bold,
his toothless smile, hides the yearning for those days of old.
When he sat with his mates around the crackling fire,
He thoughtfully stoked the crimson embers, as we made ready to retire.

His eyes twinkled , reflecting the fires orange light,
near the midnight hour of this cool autumn night,
Somewhere he goes, quite now , in his memories so deep,
as we await the slumber , of our late evening sleep.

Occasionally, a smile cracks his weather beaten face,
is his memory of home, or of his wife dressed in Irish lace.
I can only dream, of the journeys he has done,
sometimes there is a tear, for his loved ones in the memories that come.

He opened his swag of hardships and life,
tells of no money, no food to give to his wife.
Jobs were so rare he had to wave them goodbye,
telling me how it really was, as he heard his children cry.

Years went past no letters anymore,
“ain’t no reason to go home no more”.
“Probably all grown up”, he sadly said,
as he slowly lay down his weary head.

He tapped the side of the Billy, covered in charcoal black,
“Looking forward to a brew in the morning” he said, “with the sun on my back”.

As we lay under our swags, by the fires dancing light,
I watched the embers burning and bid him a goodnight.

In the mist of the evening, the moon had past us by,
Nary a sound was heard, except for a bird's plaintive cry.
Charlies journey had come to its end, he had sung his final song,
Under a giant Gum tree, on the banks of an ancient Billabong.



photo by **Grant Colhoun**





Tom Thompson

Bob Bottom and the Capsicum

All through these school dilemmas my father worked hard trying to join Broken Hill by bitumen road to the outside world. West to Adelaide, east to Sydney and south to Mildura. This last was his biggest problem, the road south over the ever-moving Kudgi sandhills. After achieving this by what I thought was elastic road, he was interviewed by the local paper, the *Barrier Daily Truth*.

The truth was a proud and efficient rag that went to every unionist. It had a good staff (one of whom was soon to be me!) Which included Bob Bottom, who provided my first example of the impeccable dress sense of investigative journalists. I remember, chiefly, because it was also on the day on which I discovered the capsicum.

Having been raised in a vegetable patch, grazing on shallots on the outskirts of Parkes, finding a new vegetable was a particularly unnerving moment for me. Why had my parents kept me from the joys of the capsicum, it's shiny and provocative greenness, it's totally addictive quality? Because up till then it hadn't been growing in our vicinity. The Italian gardener at my father's office had brought him this rare fruit. The shining pepper! I had dropped in after sport (running away from the ball) that afternoon and was sitting in the office listening to my father talk to Bob Bottom about roads over moving sand, admiring them both in the vegetable glare. I carefully aligned the stalk of the "cappo" in line with my father's nose and the other end with Bob's chin, before I ate it. A hymn of praise filled me for the Italians for cultivating such a gem.



Ramon Ware

Hill's Angel

Shortly after arriving in Broken Hill I was offered a cheap, 125cc BSA Bantam motorcycle.

I found the Bantam to be a handy economic commuter. The drab appearance of little bike belied its sparkling performance. A quick tweak of the throttle put the little demon on its back wheel racing down the road like a thoroughbred. It was so much fun I was loath to part with this little gem so kept it long after I had traded its larger stable mate for a car.

The crunch came when I was about to be married and needed more cash. Reluctantly I placed an ad in the local paper.

The first couple of days I received no replies to the add but on Sunday morning a solitary man arrived. He introduced himself as Sid Jones. Said he had walked from his home near the Hospitable. About three miles. It's further these days of course—five kilometres. He was a wiry little man about 150cms tall and looked rather old to be buying a motorcycle! But his firm handshake and his ability to walk, indicated he was very fit for his age.

I wheeled out the Bantam for inspection and while looking over the motorcycle he told me,

“I've got an autocycle, but now that I'm 80 the hills are a bit of a battle.”

For the benefit of those people who haven't experienced an autocycle, it's a heavy duty bicycle fitted with a small motor. It has a clutch but no gears. The throttle has only two positions. Stop and flat out! To start the motor, the rider pedals briskly before dropping the clutch. Provided the fuel tap is on and the throttle open, the motor should start. The rider can then stop pedalling and let the motor do the work, as long the road is flat or down hill. Up hill the rider has to pedal, sometimes vigorously, to assist the feeble power plant.

“How do you work it?” he asked, referring to the Bantam. I showed him the throttle, clutch, gears, brakes, horn and lights and gave a demonstration of starting, pointing out the fuel tap, choke, kickstart and engine kill switch.

“How much do you want for it?” he asked. I mentioned the price.

He replied by handing me the money.

Stuffing the papers into his pocket as he shook my hand, Sid then tossed a leg over his latest acquisition, settling onto the seat and getting a feel of the handlebars and its associated controls.

We were at the back of the house with the Bantam facing up the drive towards Ryan Street.

Balancing on his left leg Sid gave the kickstart a quick dab with his right foot. The engine sprang into life. He sat down, flicked the throttle a couple of times to gauge the response, pulled in the

clutch and deftly flicked it into first gear, just like a pro'. I was impressed. (Then, just as now, young people didn't expect oldies to have that sort of skill.)

But then the autocycle reflex took over as he screwed the throttle wide open and dropped the clutch with a clunk. The front wheel leapt into the air as the little demon rocketed up the driveway with Sid 'Motor Mouse,' Jones, hanging on for dear life. Jaw clamped tight and arms four feet long as he struggled to regain control.

The front wheel came to ground near the front gate and with the gutsy little motor subdued, he wheeled to the right onto the road and headed homeward.

The last memory of my favourite Bantam is the sight of a diminutive eighty year old Hill's Angel low flying in Ryan Street.

He must have enjoyed the bike because he never came back!

* * * * *

A few years after I sold the Bantam, I learned it had been tuned and raced by a local motor cycle identity. He put it back in street clothes to sell, showing that you can take the motorcycle out of the race but you can't take the race out of the motorcycle.

But most important; I had unknowingly sold the poor old chap a racing motorcycle!!



photo by **Eileen Braybrook**



LODE



photo by **Colin Tuckerman**



WAGE SLASHING IN THE MINES

Since the miserable surrender of the mine is at Xmas time, the Boss on the line of load has taken his cue from that victory and introduced the well-known policy of wage slashing on the rates of the contract miners. Right from the very first day of the surrender, the hired foreman of the companies filled their role as hirelings of the boss and introduced the pruning knife on all contractors. In the case of those parties whose contracts expired two days after the resumption of work, no allowance was made for the shortness of time and the impossibility of the parties getting any tonnage; they were all set as contractors for the two days and the result was that they were all in that delightful state on pay day known as on the min. In a number of cases parties were told at the South Mine that they would be given one more chance to pull over the minimum, failing that they would be tramped. Such has been the rate of speed up that a number of miners have pulled out rather than accept the scab wages they were in receipt of, and the majority of those remaining are working like merry hell for the mine. Now on top of all this the mine owners have issued an ultimatum to the effect that they will be compelled to close their mines within a certain period of time.

Miners: why should you wait until the greedy parasite has made all preparations for closing down? So why should we honour them? TO HELL WITH ALL THE AGREEMENTS! THE BOSS BREAKS THEM AS HE LIKES, SO WHY SHOULD WE HONOUR THEM? Everywhere in the Commonwealth one may hear the talk of a general strike. This arises out of the conditions of the workers in all industries. FALL IN LINE AND ORGANISE FOR THE GENERAL STRIKE! Don't wait for anyone else to declare it for you! Set up your rank and file committees and take action against the scab terms of the boss RIGHT NOW. ORGANISE FOR THE "ALL IN" STRIKE ON THE "ALL OUT" POLICY.

From *The Plod* (volume 1, number 15, 1931 –
Broken Hill Section of the Communist Party of Australia)



From the Outback Archives Broken Hill City Library



Mark O'Flynn

SKIMP DUMP

The monument on the skimp dump tells us
there are more than 800 ways for a miner
to die beneath the hollowed earth of Broken Hill.
Some of them:

Overcome by gas
Fell down winze
Head crushed in rock fall
Suffocated in slimes
Unknown
Fell into open cut
Skull split by iron bar
Rock fall
Unknown
Rock fall
Crushed between boggers
Unknown

More than 800 ways.
Once in a blue moon when it rains
the mullock heap runs silver
a sudden river flooding down Sulphide St.
draining into the desert at the red edge of town.





photo by **Mr Union**



photo by **Mark Fischer**



James Waller

Upon Beds Of Lead and Silver

In memory of Carmela and Serafino Attard

A concert of solar shadows
Wings
Across the garden of our grief,
Caressing the silent stones
Of marble
Laid by lovers
Under the spell
Of the violent sun

An eye of fire
Lost in the cerulean haze
Pounds the memory
Of Maltese miners
Groping in the depths
Of the blasted earth

Endless rows of names
Are etched into the stones
And solarise the granite
Of their aching song.
Azzopardi beams
With Attard from the dust
Along with all their kin
Shipped from Miellieha's thirsting Bay.

Their voices awaken
From the marrow
Of their silence,
From the pit
Of their timeless fear
Into flowers of radiant loss
Scattered upon the wind.

Here they rest
Upon beds of lead and silver,
The quiet men of Malta
Having dug their way
Through solid rock and fire,
Their tongues laced
With whisky and despair;

Their eyes alight with lust and love,

Their coarse hands holding soft-skinned babes
Their exhaustion flowing
In endless rivers
Of work soldered to their spines,
Of liquor quickening their livers
And of heat bursting through their hearts.

Above the Bay of Dust we stand,
Above the garden of a thousand griefs,
Surveying the past with wistful eyes
As the current of Now
Pulses
Its empty name.



Photo: [Rae Desmond Jones](#)



Roger Britton

A Miner's Lot

Good grief, Gough Whitlam dismissed as Prime Minister! Why weren't we told? What is going on? Who is Malcolm Fraser? I sat in disbelief watching the news. The rest of Australia had known this for two days! The TV- presenter was having trouble reading his script and looked furtive as if he shouldn't be telling us about this unimaginable situation.

It was Broken Hill in 1975, a staunch Labor and union run town. Our news came in 300 miles away from Adelaide, a Labor state. I suspected that this news had been withheld until the Union could come to terms with it. I turned off the TV with its endless analysis of what had gone wrong with the government. I had liked Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and thought many of his ideas were like a breath of fresh air. Now, it seemed, we had a caretaker government, something I had never experienced.

I wandered outside and sat on the back step. I looked up into the vast night sky with all its brilliance of desert stars and, like them, reflected on Broken Hill...

Angela, my wife, and I had been amazed by this isolated and fiercely independent mining town. The populace had a unique culture and history with unusual language idioms inherited from mainly Welsh mining families. Families who had spent years fighting mining bosses, and the New South Wales government and, for whom Sydney was a city of foreigners, with little or no understanding of mining people.

Not being a local I was known as a 'blow-fly': one who blew into town, stayed a short while and blew out again. Policemen and teachers were typical of this genre. Being a teacher I soon came to grief with local expressions. When I saw sparrows they saw spoggies; while I spooned sugar they spooned skips; and they never asked where someone was, but always: 'where's he to?' I smiled wanly when I remembered how I had spent 15 minutes trying to convince my class that they didn't need 'to' on the end of a question: they could simply say... 'Where is he?'

I thought I had convinced them when there was a knock on my classroom door and I was surprised to see the local bank manager.

'Excuse me teacher, where's the Principal to?' he asked.

The class burst into laughter, leaving me and the bank manager nonplussed. Later, I learnt it was a peculiar Welsh custom and it should be left alone, supported as a geographical idiosyncrasy.

I also noted that when I travelled to work, I was accompanied by thousands of men driving cars, yet during the rest of the day, I rarely saw a male... they had all disappeared underground.

They told me that there was a virtual city down there. I resolved to see it.

John Gawen, a Safety Officer for the North Mine, agreed to take me underground. He said all that I needed to bring was a towel and change of socks. After school, I drove to John's house. In the car, I took off my shirt and footwear and, carrying the spare pair of socks, I wrapped the towel around my shorts, and then knocked on his door.

"Oh, my God!" John exclaimed when he saw me.

"Well, you said just a towel and socks!" I laughed as I removed my towel to reveal that I was dressed. Fortunately, John had a sense of humour and delighted in telling all his mates how the school-teacher turned up at his house.

We kitted up in the Change Room of the North Mine where I was given a helmet; a fully-charged safety lamp which, I was assured, was guaranteed to burn for 8 hours; a clean pair of overalls and some steel-capped boots. I almost felt like a genuine miner until I noticed that my helmet was a yellow and lacked the rude stickers of the other white helmets.

I followed John to the cage. It was a huge elevator with a steel floor surrounded by steel mesh. We entered through a stable door. I stood there while twenty men crowded in. I hoped the floor would hold as John had mentioned that it was a mile straight down the shaft! Suddenly I saw more miners coming – surely they couldn't fit! They began walking up a set of steps beside our cage and then I could hear them walking onto our roof. I looked at John in alarm. He read my mind.

"It's a double-decker cage. They are loading into the top compartment. They're not riding on the roof, you twit!"

Abruptly the cage began to descend. The winder driver dropped us down at a phenomenal rate and several men turned on their lamps. A signal bell sounded and we slowed to stop at an underground tunnel. A miner signalled back to the winder driver that we had arrived and the cage was safely secured. He then opened the door and called:

'Plat 18. All about one!' And those who were getting out, moved forward while the remainder moved back. "Plat 18" I learnt was platform or level 18. We were descending to the 24th level. Several stops later, we arrived.

"These tunnels or what we call drives, are 33 feet high and go on until we reach the end of the lode." John indicated. "What I do is work my way along these drives and check that everyone is ok and doing things safely."

The drive was lit by florescent lights with wires running along the roof of the tunnel reminding me of the overhead electric tram wires in Ballarat. Twinkling reflections from the silver, lead and zinc, bounced back from the walls and ceilings. It was like Fairy Land, with millions of tiny lanterns blinking from the deep darkness beyond the range of the lights. I shone my helmet light upwards delighted at the spectacle of legions of lights.

"Keep left." John waved me in behind him.

"John, are they railway lines?"

"Yep, we have a little ore train, or loco, carrying the ore to a chute. We'll wait here a sec and watch one come through."

Suddenly a headlight and clacking and rumbling advanced from further along the tunnel. I watched amazed as the little loco run up alongside of us and, one by one, the carriages hit a lever and tilted over spewing their broken pieces of ore down a hole.

“All the ore is tipped down a chute and it eventually gets to the bottom of the mine where it is loaded into a cage and then the winder driver pulls it to the top.”

“Oh, Ok,” I said not really understanding the process.

“We’ll follow this drive through to the stopes...the rock-face, where the miners are drilling and the wagoners are scooping up the ore.”

I trudged on after John and was surprised to see huge puddles of water, up to 30 metres long, covering the floor. I was glad I was wearing steel-toed rubber boots.

“These puddles come from the hoses that we use to spray on the drills. It keeps the dust down and the drills cool.”

“Oh, right.”

“And, those square things up there bolted to the ceiling are roof-bolts. They hold up anything that is likely to fall down on our heads.”

“Oh, right.”

I was alarmed to see so many of them...were there many cave-ins I wondered?

The railway tracks stopped but the noise didn’t. Further along I could hear some sort of heavy machinery being used. Suddenly, snorting in the darkness, came two yellow eyes of a huge machine. Instantly we stepped to one side as this monstrous loader scooped up piles of ore. Its wheels were taller than me and a whole football team could have stood in its scoop. How did they get such a massive machine down here? John seemed to read my thoughts:

“They pull it apart and bring it down in pieces underneath the cage. Then they reassemble it down here in the drive. When the drive ends, so does the life of the ‘Wagoner’. They leave it here and walk out because they have backfilled the drive with sand and cement slurry.”

“Oh, right.” I was beginning to sound like a parrot. Everything down here was unusual. Finally, we came upon some miners working at the ore face. One was holding a powerful hose directed at a drill used by a second miner. I couldn’t help thinking of my dentist! From time to time the hose was directed at the ore as well. Everything was kept wet and dust free. With lead, I guessed, you don’t want to suck in any dust.

“All these men work together as a team on their shift. Their lives depend upon each other. Generally, they stay together as a team for their whole working life. They socialize together at weekends and become a family. They look out for each other. That’s why our accident rate is so low.”

I looked at these miners with new respect. They seldom talked because of the constant noise but each knew where the others were in the semi-darkness and, what they were doing, automatically backing them up, from the loco driver to the driller.

John picked up a piece of ore and passed it to me. It was about half the size of my head and heavy as lead – it was lead!

“It’s about 93% pure. Those shiny species are silver. Stick it in your pocket. And don’t say: Oh, right!”

I grinned back. These miners were a dry lot.

Today, I still have that piece of ore and, when I hold it, my mind wanders back down that shaft, and along those dark drives with their legion of little lights, and I hear the sounds of gigantic machinery burrowing through the bowels of the earth. And, once again, I see those miners with their serious faces and hear their unique dialogue, and I thank God I am not there!



Photo: Ronald Fitch



Myra King

mining's token

A hill that's broken
mining's token
the landscape cut
lead out
and open
in silver and zinc



photo by **Grant Colhoun**



George Cole

Ghosts and Stopes

The Ghost Gum branches spread gaunt and tall,
Sway in tune with the howling monsoon gale.
Lightning flashes, thunder roars, black clouds envelope all,
As the thunderbolt rolls down the endless trail.
Gentle and grey, short of sight, sparse of hair,
He stares through the mist of a rain streaked window pane.
Huddled in a chair where old folks go, in a room barren and bare,
Swathed in a red checked robe, battling the odds of time and pain.
There's no more crib humpy jokes or unwanted tears,
Just old workmates in sodden dungarees arid steel capped boots,
And the wracking cough and the ringing in his ears,
From the dusty firings in the back breaking timber-stopos.
Thunder and lightning crashes, the timber-stopos explode.
The tortured backs scream and shriek in vain,
As the square set timber takes the strain of the lead streaked load.
And the old hard rock miner writhes and twists in pain.
For he's seen his mates fly bye in the blinding sky,
Down their lonely drives into their ghostly stopos.
Shrouded in leaded dust from firings long gone bye.
Entombed in a stope of broken ore and tangled scraper ropes.
The thunder storm played out passed over St Anne's.
The Ghost Gum leaves, dripping with tears, gently sway,
As the phantom shift pay host to the last timber-stope man.
Can you hear the bells ringing? As the cage is lowered to carry the old miner away.



Sam Deed

Only One of the Toilers.

Only another victim, mangled and crushed below,
Only another fall of ground -- no one to blame you know;
Only one more to swell the roll of cruel Death's victims here,
Only one of the toilers, but husband and father dear.

Still it's the same old inquest, still it's the same old tale,
Still it's the same old verdict where Truth and Justice fail;
Those who should speak are silent, a silence that's born of fear
For the truth they dare not utter when they think of their children dear.

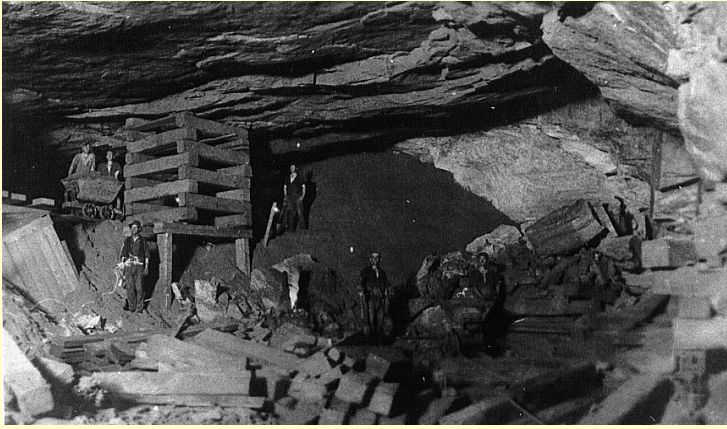
Only a weeping mother, with her infant closely pressed,
Waiting to follow that mangled form to its long and silent rest.
Away to the grave out yonder, where many lay side by side,
Victims of negligence and greed, yet their comrades the truth will hide.

Only a lonely cottage: only a vacant chair,
And brokenhearted woman down on her knees in prayer.
Some kind friends they will pity and try their best to sooth,
But are too poor to help her make life's rugged pathway smooth.

Oh, that the wealthy owners could see what the greed of gold
Has brought to the homes of toilers, the toilers whose rights are sold.
Of the cruel desolation, the hunger, the want, the care,
The curse of our newborn nation are the burdens the poor must bear.

published in *Whims and Fancies of a Savage Dreamer* (Truth Print, 1907)







From the Outback Archives Broken Hill City Library



Richard Tipping

Patterns

Wood patterns, hand-made
for casting wheels and cogs and bars.
Their shadows are stacked by number
in long tin sheds at the far-
flung end of a bitter yard
half the size of Newcastle.

It's the end of the industrial age
maybe. Or the smoke's just gone elsewhere.

You know where you can put your words
tight as cooling steel
when the factory's closing.

To be a BHP worker, that was something
you had to work for, and keep on working for
to get your keep - there was some
considerable pride.

Remember that old sign, **Broken ill**?
The H was missing like Joey's front tooth that time
he ran into his girlfriend's ex
who wasn't,

or that bloke with his boots strapped on
to thick wood flats to stop his feet
from melting, went up anyway

in a tower of stink
dropping little fangs of grit
over all the washinglines of Carrington.

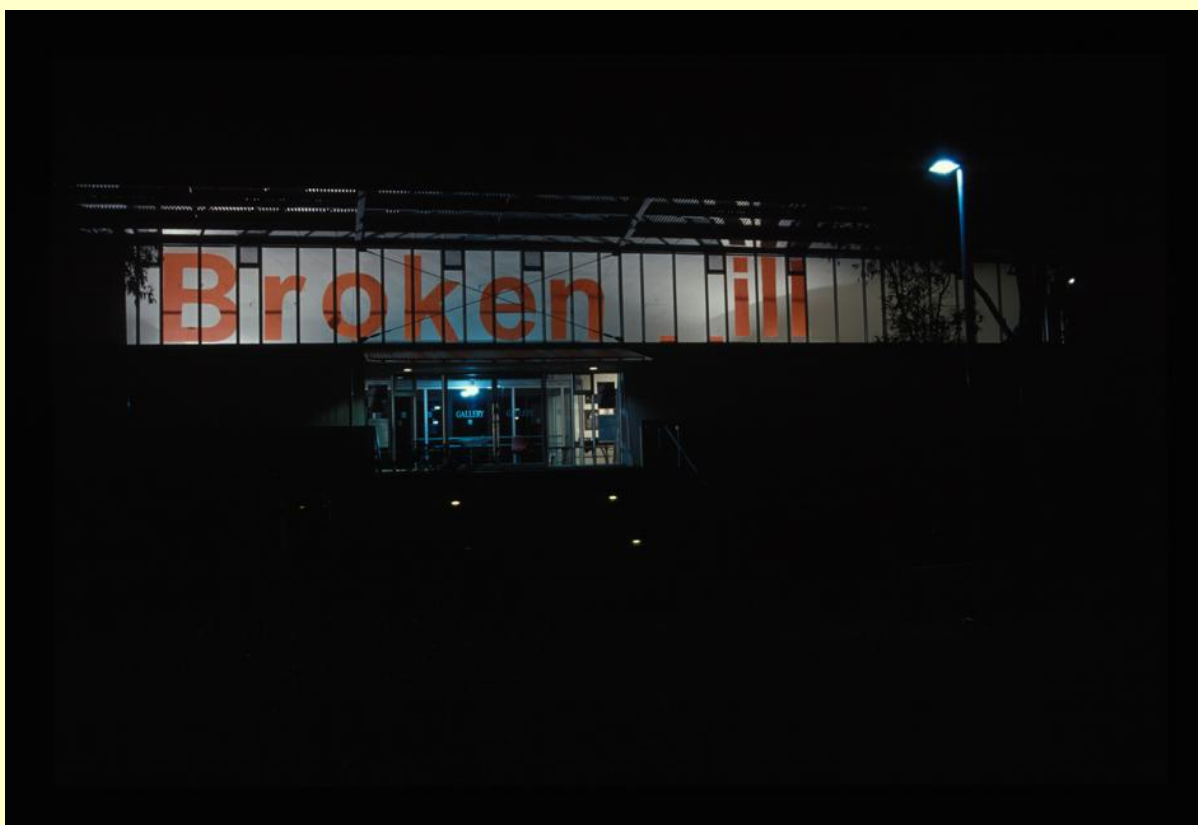
That kind of stuff happened heaps
but you wouldn't hear about it
except down the pub.

Those wood patterns you were talking about
got dumped at Kooragang,

a mountain of kauri, cedar and white pine -
fifty years of carpentry all trashed
by graders, buried or burned.

The history's gone, mate. Forget it.
Newcastle'll be better off without the bloody place.

Previously published *Ribbons of Steel: poems & stories*,
Paula Morrow editor (Hunter Writers Centre 1999)



Broken ill
Installation in the windows of the University of Newcastle Gallery, circa 1999
Artwork and photograph by **Richard Tipping**



Marvis Sofield

Broken Hill III.

the skimp dump
lords it over town
like a fat coal boss
seated at an older place
on edge
yet to pay
the final dividend

here in the desert
its just a god forsaken shareholder
forty days before the flood
squatting on the wallet
waits to float
the next inundation
buy a piece of
foreshore with foresight

down below
salt bush
greys and curls its
leaf towards the zenith
not begging
nor praying
just digging
heels in
for the long haul



SILVER CITY



Photo by **Brian Tonkin**



photo by: [Greg Kendall](#)

Exit Sign

our silhouette
the length of road trains

a funeral parlor notice:
no more balloons are to be released

this town
smells like the last town

in Goondiwindi
the men eat anything that moves

the only rain
spit on the sidewalk

day or night
cats own the street

Warwick in winter
the statues wear scarves

in Wilcannia
a river full of air

a woman laughs
clouds disappear like rabbits

in Moree
the shops jail cells

we set off a fire alarm
in an attempt to stay warm

this bread roll
could be used to kill crows

in Nyngan
the TV has no off button

by the cotton field
you are a child once more

the dogs next door
talk of another moon

in Broken Hill
child kissing my breath

without a condom
we come apart in silence

at sunset the cameras
shoot anyone on site

at the motor inn
killers in the carpet

when you drive in
make sure you drive out

when you drive in
make sure you drive out

exit signs the horizon
one red arrow

Previously published in *The Broadkill Review* (2008);
And the Ringmaster Said... (Small Change Press, 2008).



From the Outback Archives Broken Hill City Library



Barbara De Franceschi

Committed

If I were to re-imagine this place,
panel-beat the town into a new shape,
the common lingo of Silver City skimp dust,
mineral named streets,
dog snuffed ovals,
would thwart every effort.

I share these remake delusions
with outlying hills that rise and dip –
heartbeats on an outback monitor.
Bush flies explore my sap, they know about sting,
wings fold on a tee-shirt runway – smooth landings
revoke any reason for change.

Scruffy breeze hikes a dry creek bed,
there is absolution here, sharp anointment,
as eucalypts uncoil their summer oil.
Old stumps are the elegies of youth – carved hearts fade
the initials of adolescence
who now romance poker machines or nursing homes.

From desert surrounds
I look back at the urban outline,
it takes on the form of goanna,
head raised, hefty tail wound through the corridors
between ore lodes,
supermarket convoys.

Emotions I cannot express
assemble beneath chest bone.
Purple mixes with ochre,
twilight is clamped
over landscape
too big to fill my eyes.



photo by **Andrew Wallace**



Tom Black

Begging for Work at Broken Hill

Denied employment on the line of lode, I applied to the council but with little success. After much time and trouble I at length obtained a job at stonebreaking. This was insecure, and often I was not permitted to make more than half-wage. In brief time even this was denied, and I was cast adrift - and no one to care what became of me.

The town hall blushed to hear the tale,
But blushes were of no avail;
The aldermen all callous stood
As if they had been made of wood,
Or some material that had grown
Less sensitive than wood or stone.
Justice and truth bade them adieu,
E'en commonsense departed to,
And Mercy, as she passed them by,
Did shudder as with anxious eye
She marked upon each stolid face
No sign of feeling - not a trace.
Poor honest toil saw at a glance
That starving merit had no chance -
Low cringers, and those least in need,
And on the town hall saw a stain
Which, while the town lasts, shall remain.



Frankie Mills

Our Obelisk

A broken topped column pierces the dry air
Ten thousand miles away a broken ship lies on a seabed
Fish haunt its rusted tunnels of disconnected metal
Lichen clusters on detritus
fragments, no longer recognisable lie on the mighty ocean floor.
Occasional movement stir remnants of past greatness.
There is no sound now of music.

The newspapers of the day proclaim,
"The Titanic Hits an Iceberg. Huge Loss of Life,"
" Two Few Lifeboats, The Bandsmen remained and Continued to Play
As the Boat Sank."
Their fortitude and bravery as they faced certain death touched many.
Broken Hill Bandsmen decided to honour their fellow bandsmen
Today beside the memorial column gum trees rustle and whisper soft music
Perhaps, it is, as those Bandsmen had played.
" Nearer My God to Thee".



Rae Desmond Jones

Edith Piaf on the silver city comet night shift, 1961

At 5 when the sun
Had his fingers just over the horizon
The tea bubbled in the can on the fire & we sat
On the splintered sleepers.

Ratso the Slav put a radio on the ground & twiddled the dial
& through the tobacco smoke & the static
There was Edith Piaf.

It was the first time any of us heard
Such a voice
Through the cold half night

Ratso stopped talking about women
& no one farted
For at least two minutes.

That morning I rode my bike
Through the rutted lanes with one hand,
Conducting in a rotten French accent 'Milord',
Not knowing what it meant but knowing
What it felt



George Garnett

from A Barrier Bride

The drinks were disposed of, and someone suggested a song; but the chairman ruled against the melody as not being in keeping with the solemnity of the occasion. Meanwhile Tony had beckoned to one of the men whom he knew, and asked him what was going on.

"Oh," said the man, "this is just another of Dutchy's little games. The poor fellow in the box there came in from a station near the Queensland border with a £50 cheque the other day, and started to knock it down. But he didn't have the satisfaction of drinking more'n a couple of quid when he pegged out - had been suffering from an old internal complaint - tumour on the liver, or something like that, they call it. The boys put together a rough coffin, and we decided to plant him tomorrow, after we get lead from the 'traps' at Broken Hill, who have been sent word. But Dutchy, who was minding his check, had no mind to give it up to the coppers. He says the chap came here to knock it down and he believes in respecting the intentions of the deceased. So he has been ordering rounds of drinks for all hands in the name of the dead'un and reckons he will get through the cheque by morning."

" But what is the glass put on the coffin for?" Said Roger.

"Oh, they just empty it out beside the Coffin as soon as another round as ordered. Dutchy is very particular about the deceased getting his fair doos, I can tell you.

From A Barrier Bride (George Robertson, 1898)



Phillip A. Ellis

The World as Willed and Idea

At first I was confused; this could not be
the Broken Hill I was familiar with,
the streets askew, the buildings, all of them, multiplied
past my unhurried eye. I could not see,
at first, beyond the discontinuities
and seachange, something new and newly grown
out of my thoughts, and into dream, like pearl
around a grit of words that scrapes the tongue.

I would have dreamt the same, even with seeing
the town with own eyes entered from the east,
yet would I feel the same about the changes
I'd see? Affronted? Maybe more or less.
Ready with sonnet? Maybe more or less.
Ready with blank verse? Maybe more or less.



Madge Welsh

THE SIREN BLARED

The siren blared as we drove along Thomas Street, I must add, (many years ago).

I was in the ambulance and on my way to the hospital for an ECG. As we went along I tried to reassure the officer I was OK, but he insisted on completing his task.

The ambulance backed up to the casualty admittance doorway, he opened the double doors of the vehicle and as he released the wheels of the barouche they collapsed and I slid down on to the floor into the reception area.

"Is this the usual admittance procedure?" I asked him. We both laughed as he hastened to help me up.

A MAN OF ACTION

Years ago our phone was the only one in the district. When one of the neighbourhood kids came racing over shouting "Quick, ring for the Fire Brigade our house is on fire", my father sprang into action. While my mother rang the Brigade he ran as fast as he could (with 3 or 4 children) running with him to where the fire was.

The house was made of wood and iron, there was smoke coming from the roof, and already half a dozen people lined up at the water tank and the yard tap with containers, where there were 2 slow trickles of water.

One look at the situation, my father picked up the axe and put 3 large gashed in the water tank. Immediately there was enough water for everyone. It was passed quickly to the roof and the owner soon put out the flames, before the Brigade arrived.

While talking to my father afterwards the neighbour – Jack – said "Christ Bill, look what you've done to my tank!"

"Which would you rather, your bloody tank or your house?" my father replied.



Barbara De Franceschi

Sleepless in Yancowinna County

In siesta mode
he lies with his back to me.
My body curves against his crescent shape.
Outside a dust storm/
brutal,
heavy.
Daylight is sandblasted.
Poppet heads are barely visible,
betrayed by lead scum frisking the sky.
Erosion trenches gape
with toothless jaws
in terrain chomped by *El Nino*.
Saltwort gathers around water tanks –
stationary catchments for prickly moods,
uprooted promises for rain.
The air inside is a dry spit.
Ceiling fan plagues the heat,
cotton sheets ride bare skin
dabbed with extravagant deodorant.
I disentangle myself to latch a banging screen,
excitement transfers from the outer squall.
I breathe a hot wind onto his neck.



Amelia Walker

Cyber Tourist

Not long ago it was the stuff of science fiction and Believe It Or Not shows:
"if I focus I can escape my body, float up and out, over cities my feet never touched..."

Don't hear many of those stories now. Why bother? It's so easy to slide these wormholes
called computer screens, to swing down via satellite and explore unknowing lands.

At this distance you fit in my palm, might be a hunk of amethyst, a glassy blue eye
winking, chipped and misshapen, out of a worn and wrinkled face.

Brown earth severed by highways; black sawtooths, shadows of rivers
collapsed like veins in a body hollowed by surgeons, drained to its last glint of blood.

My mouse cursor is a small white hand. I click and the fingers grab hold,
haul you up, down, side to side and in circles as if following this dance

that I am leading. I am the surgeon now. I have you on my table: silent, unaware
my eyes, sterile knives, are hovering, undressing you one click at a time.

Closer: your jewel eye is cut into a frenzy of squares: the cat's cradle
of suburbia. Around it, minefields: grey ulcers, puckering into mouths

black with necrosis; reservoirs, sparkling shards of smashed glass; giddy whorls
of cut earth like a child's careless clay fingerprint or the innards of a tree.

Geography is a language and maps are stories. Humans are compulsive
scribblers, can't help but scratch ourselves into every blank slate.

I switch modes to learn the names of your streets: Chloride, Bromide, Sulphide,
a criss-crossing textbook of squares and roundabouts. Argent, Crystal, Kaolin...

these are the kings and queens, the threads of history from which you sew your now.
A planned city, built from equal-sized blocks, all right angles and infallible logic.

I grew up in a city like that: such sweet false faith in my sense of direction!
Choked me to learn that some squares are triangles, some straight lines swallow you

right back to the beginning like a serpent's salty tail. So cities build people
at the same time as people build cities. Communities shape and are shaped

by their surroundings. Whether ploughed fields or metal metropolis,
engineered lands for engineered bodies; engineered lands are engineered bodies

- cyborgs. Wherever possible, civilisation programs out discomfort:
the heat, the cold, the thoughts that stand in front of sleep - all correctible

with the flick of a switch or some other little white promise. But still
there are things that pulse beneath the broken apart soil, the stitched up skin...

even SecondLife craves the occasional spontaneity of violence
and Googling Earth is not walking it.



From the Outback Archives Broken Hill City Library



Les Wicks

Broken Hill

1. Coming Inside

Flags outside the Legion Club
are ricepaper.
Talk to **them** about the cool geography
of a won peace.
No rocks have it given freely
 & the four goths in this metal town
 are working up a thirst.

Broken Hill wears its collar up.
Loitering beside breath, cutting the eye,
the skimp dump is an Uluru of mining waste.
 You bend back your neck
 scrape a taste.

2. Down Argent St

Lives dyed poverty & something stronger.
The people here wear only
the nonsense **they** choose.
CHRISTMAS PAGEANT – the floats
from Distance Haulage, Pasminco & community teams,
the *simply there* tools that hold a life together.
 Flying guts & panadol white on flatbed - St John's Volunteers
 but now no Goat Girl to mascot the soccer team after all those years.
While here on the footpath - father, four kids stare astonished
at their woman's blasted fury -
come out of nowhere like a whirly, she
stood around too long, chose combustion over rust.

 Quandong pies, mine bosses' lies,
 history weighs.
Listen to the stories - from boxing, camel droving, fruit-picking.
I know nothing. A local points down, says
*Them ants **stop** massin' when it's gunna rain.* It may be a joke.

The range of front yards from TV dish in a handkerchief of desert
(hard as dole forms)

to imported tint bordering arduous lawn.
Then in a place
where the sweet are less displayed -
apricots splay under a fat peach sun.

Poets belong here... lead, zinc & silver
mined, then mined again
extracting from diminished grades.

3. Collecting News

Way down in Adelaide
swimmer lost at sea
two bodies found wrapped in plastic by a dry riverbed.
Newsreader promises another fine day at *the Hill* with a clerical certainty

100k east, beside Lake Menindee Sunset Strip holiday cottages
(improbable beach architecture, one lazy road)
pelicans water ski as
two crows argue in the shade.

Over iced Melbourne beer we talk about
Clydesdales wearing hard leather hats
strapped then lowered
for a nine day shift by candlelight.
Generations of miners, warrior wives –
their babies swaddled in lead dust.
Unions built with bloodshot brick & sweating mortar

Arts Centre - Paakantji Auntie fills an order
oil on board, red –
we discuss useless doctors,
bad knees.

Men read their poems in shorts.

4. Metal

Down baseline, the carwash throws
water like loose change on the heads
of late model 4WDs.
Next door a tin house so fractured
so *movie* with rings of dead automobiles
left from each decade snared
out of scarred blue sky.

There is nothing as frugal as shade
up here on the rise
at Block 10.

Hemmed by horizons of spat stones,
dunes of debris
cars buzz idly
in mockery of themselves.
A mineral town where earth is both

an easy touch & the Saturday night beating
when she *didn't do ANYTHING*..
Almost covert, words are done
from tree to tree, sips from a bottle.

Around the water tower
junk from men
seeps down the thirsts of ground below\\
light stuck grey of loose lost gneiss
heroic weeds & a red kangaroo.
Small desert birds amongst the gumnuts.

Then at the peak - burnt wood, cut rock.
We see it all corrode as eyes are led away
down the Mundi Mundi Plains... delicate dustflower whirlwinds
(true skyscrapers) march
toward their own collapse, exhausted dancers
lunged to drink.

Distant hills are their own making
& will not engage anything young.

Eyes dive in an improbable pond.
I leave the tired steel
of books & pen.

Our extremities always taper at crisp white screens.
Who is writing me?

5. Blood's Red Noise

By the verge – hit then harvested –
a tail-taken kangaroo. Highway 32's dead,
crash'n'carry.

Then, as you walk right out
beyond a desert town's bluster lawn & air-condition -
the squeeze of silence.
Your shoes crash land,
this macadam crack
on the dryland's thin skull.

One bird sounds like late-night TV
the breeze an argument in progress.

Empty gun air abrades a skin which no longer fits/
excavates the bladder.

Your clothes are a barbed wire fence
as fingers wriggle down towards the burrow.

You have mined the shrubs for moisture
built houses on remote hills of chance.

The sweaty truth you now have a need
to listen to yourself.

6. Then Someone Goes

Late arvo, the *Indian Pacific* grabs blue metal
rolls it like a cigarette.

My trip – feet/bags/
preposterous brochures talk of destination & rules.
The woman alongside, her eyes are a seismic fault.
I am another one leaving
as lives ferment into lines.

from *Stories of the Feet* (Five Islands, 2004)



From the Outback
Archives Broken Hill City Library



Matt Hetherington

Rooku

broken hill –
i only see
what's above the ground

no rain
but leaves
are falling

a week in broken hill my first fly!

union history –
even the earth
is red

broken hill –
are all these machines
putting you back together?

Rooku first appeared in "Angles of a Broken Hill", Broken Hill Regional Writers' Centre, 2008.



CONTRIBUTORS

Christine Adams was born in Broken Hill. She was awarded an Advanced Diploma in Applied and Local History by the University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales in 2002. Christine has published four books. *Sharing the Lode: The Broken Hill Migrant Story* records the oral history of persons with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds that made Broken Hill their home.

Paul Armstrong was born in Broken Hill in 1952. He writes a history column for the *Barrier Daily Truth*, and small broadcast of news items in history for ABC Radio. Enjoys writing short stories and poetry on occasions. Married to Vicki and has son called Adam.

Elaine Barker is an Adelaide poet. Her second collection of poetry is *The Day Lit By Memory* (Ginninderra Press, 2008).

Cathy Bray: In 1968 Cathy Bray made a two day train trip in the May holidays from boarding school in Sydney to her school friend's house at Broken Hill. It was drought-broken country all the way - with wildlife everywhere. She never forgot the terracotta earth, the sunset driving back from Menindee Lakes or Carol Skinner in the Broken Hill Repertory Company's production of "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll".

Eileen Braybrook lives in Broken Hill.

Tom Black worked as a labourer in the Broken Hill mines and the farmlands of South Australia. As a poet he wrote with sincerity about his experiences which accumulated in his work being published in 1916.

Roger Britton is a retired School Principal who taught in several outback areas of New South Wales. He is married to Angela and his six children are as scattered as his schools. He now lives in Toowoomba recording many of the families' adventures.

David Brooks teaches at the University of Sydney and is co-editor of *Southerly*. He visited Broken Hill as part of a Poets on Wheels tour in 2008, and returned in 2009. His latest book is a novel, *The Umbrella Club* (UQP, 2009).

Jane Carroll is a writer of children's fiction and a teacher of writing for both children and adults. A sense of place is important in her books so her life growing up on a farm in southern New South Wales, living for more than twenty years in Cooma at the foot of the Snowy Mountains, and her present sojourn in Broken Hill are all influential on her writing.

George Cole is a Broken Hill resident and writer of short stories and poetry. He writes from many of his experiences, he's been a professional boxer, hairdresser, miner & bookmaker. Book titles are *Drover's Horse*, *Silver City Racing Stories*, *Paddy of the Course* & *Poems of the West Darling*.

Steve Dagger is a 49 yr old IT specialist who has had an interest in photography for 30 years. He has a love of landscape & nature photography, but will pretty much shoot anything.

Barbara De Franceschi is a Broken Hill born poet. She has been published extensively throughout Australia and in five different countries. Barbara has two collections of poetry, *Lavender Blood*, 2004 and most recently *Strands* (Island, 2009).

Jennifer Dickerson has been writing for most of her life. Married to an artist, she lives in Sydney and the Shoalhaven and is an active organizer of poetry events. Her published poetry books are *Chiaroscuro* (QFA publishing) and *Tangents* (Kitchen Table Poets).

Phillip A. Ellis is a poet, and editor of AustralianReader.com, Melaleuca, and Calenture. He is also a freelance critic and scholar, and is planning on studying his Masters from 2010.

Ronald Fitch lived in Broken Hill from 1974 to 1978 and taught at the Willyama High School at that time before going to the Sacred Heart College in Geelong. He returned to the USA in 1980 and now lives in Arizona While in Broken Hill played bagpipes with the Cameron Pipe Band.

Matt Hetherington is a writer and musician based in Melbourne. He was editor of "Angles of a Broken Hill" as part of his role as Poet in Residence, 2007 Broken Hill Poetry Festival. His latest collection is "I Think We Have". <http://www.smallchangeexpress.com.au>

Ion L Idriess (1889-1979), born on 20 September 1889 at Waverley, Sydney. At Broken Hill he completed his education at the superior public school and the School of Mines and where he gained a job in the assay office of the Broken Hill Proprietary mine. Published 47 books.

Rae Desmond Jones was born & brought up in Broken Hill. He couldn't wait to get away & find out about sex & write books about it. He succeeded, then became an accidental politician, & had all sorts of adventures. Now he likes going back to Broken Hill, but doesn't get many opportunities. He believes that he belongs to Broken Hill in some mystical way, whether he, or the place, likes it or not.

Myra King is a Member of Ballarat Writers and DLS. She was a winner in Ballarat's Pure Poetry Master Class 2008, a finalist in Secret Attic and commended in Doris Leadbetter - poetry competitions. Her poetry has been published in the UK, Australia and USA.

Mark Miller was born in Warren and grew up in western New South Wales. His first book of poems, *Conversing With Stones*, won the Anne Elder Award in 1989 and his second, *This Winter Beach*, was published in 1999. He currently lives on the south coast of New South Wales.

Mike Ladd is currently producer and presenter of ABC Radio National's poetry program, Poetica. He lives in Adelaide, South Australia. He has published six books of poetry, the most recent, *Transit*, was released by Five Islands Press in 2007. Mike has just returned from a three month writing residency at Rimbun Dahan, Malaysia.

Frankie Mills began writing six years ago when she first settled in Broken Hill. Frankie was born in New Zealand and has been lucky enough to travel extensively, especially in Australia. Broken Hill is now her home and she loves it.

Peter Middleton Strictly a hobby photographer but one who hopes to continually improve and learn. Current photography project include that of urban exploration and his son.

Mark O'Flynn has published 3 collections of poetry as well as 2 novels. His most recent collection is *What Can Be Proven* (Interactive Publications, 2007). He has also published short fiction and reviews. He visited Broken Hill in 2008 as part of the Poets-on-Wheels tour.

Teja Pribac moved to Australia in 2004 from Slovenia. She recently settled in the Blue Mountains, NSW, which provide her physical and psychological space to explore the issue of human centredness and its impact on the rest of the world, reflected both in her visual arts and written word.

Georgie Sharp is a part of the Curdnatta Art Group. www.sharpsmusic.on.net/Georgie.html

Amanda Slater is a retired Analytical Chemist from Coventry UK.

Marvis Sofield, daughter of an Australian war bride, was born in New York City. Returning with her mother to the Illawarra she **grew up** in a multicultural environment. As a public librarian Marvis has always worked with and had a passion for books. Her first collection of poetry, *Interstitial Journeys*, was published in 2008.

David Stavanger is a poet, publisher and performer. Both he – and his performance alter ego Ghostboy - have been published in the The Courier Mail, The Spoken Word Revolution (USA) and Going Down Swinging and have featured at various festivals including the Byron Bay Writers Festival, Brisbane Writers Festival, Broken Hill Poetry Festival, and the Tasmanian Poetry Festival. www.myspace.com/davidstavanger

Jen Thompson was born and raised in Broken Hill. Her writing is grounded in these early connections with the landscape and people of the Barrier Ranges. Jen lectures in literacy and children's literature at Charles Sturt University and is completing her Doctor of Creative Arts at the University of Technology Sydney.

Tom Thompson is a publisher and broadcaster in Sydney who lived in Broken Hill in the early 1960s, where he engaged with art, racing, cricket and tall stories from another age. His heart is still in the Centre.

Brian Tonkin has lived and worked in Broken Hill all his life. He spent some time as a miner but left the mines after an injury. He graduated with an undergraduate degree in Cultural Heritage from CSU and has since worked as the Broken Hill City Library's Archives Officer. He is passionate about local studies, Australian history and documenting life in Broken Hill through photography.

Richard Kelly Tipping grew up in Adelaide and studied humanities at Flinders University. He has published four or five books of poems, and is known as a sculptor and word-artist, represented in the Australian National Gallery in Canberra (www.printsandprintmaking.gov.au) and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He lectures in the School of Design, Communication and IT at the University of Newcastle and has three children. www.richardtipping.net

Arthur Upfield (1890 - 1964) is well known to lovers of crime fiction as the creator of Detective Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte (Bony) of the Queensland Police who appears in 29 novels, most set in outback Australia. He also wrote another six published novels, as well as a biography and numerous articles published in Australia and overseas. Upfield is now recognised as the first Australian writer of mystery stories. But his books were never critically acclaimed here during his lifetime, despite their popularity in the UK and the US where the mystery novel had become an established form of literature. His response was to write *An Author Bites the Dust*, published in 1948, an attack on the Australian literary establishment.

Amelia Walker recently published her second book, 'Just Your Everyday Apocalypse'. This poem was written prior to a stay in Broken Hill as Poet in Residence for the Broken Hill Poetry Festival 2008. www.freewebs.com/ameliawalker

Andrew Wallace currently lives in Hobart. His landscapes & semi-abstract photographs have been published in local newspapers, regional tourist guides and the Royal Auto magazine. His hand-made cards have been sent by loyal customers around the world and collected locally while his framed works hang on the walls of residences in Australia, France and England.

James Waller likes to dance: with words, colours, forms and feet. Artist & poet and current director of the Overload Poetry festival. Based in Melbourne.

Ramon Ware. Born in Perth WA during 'The Great Depression.' Initially grew up in the bush around Kalgoorlie. Educated in Adelaide SA. Passing through Broken Hill on my way to conquer the World, run out of money; got a job; then a wife and later a family. Yet to conquer the World.

Madge Welsh Born and raised in Broken Hill, nee Marjorie Boston she a competition highland dancer and started teaching dancing at 14 yrs old. She married Bob Welsh a local miner who retired as a Diamond Drill Foreman and had 4 children who all have had employment within the mining industry.

Les Wicks has toured widely and seen publication across 12 countries in 7 languages. His 8th book of poetry is *The Ambrosiacs* (Island, 2009). He has been lucky to be a guest at Broken Hill several times & something strange always happens. <http://leswicks.tripod.com/lw.htm>

Irene Wilkie has been published in many anthologies and journals including Blue Dog, Poetrix, Five Bells, Going Down Swinging, Idiom 23, fourWeighteen and Divan. She has recently won prizes in the Rolfe Boldrewood Liteary Awards and the Grenfell Henry Lawson Literary Awards. Her first book Love and Galactic Spiders was published by Ginninderra Press. Her second is ready to try its luck.

Frans de Wit - Is an electronics specialist and originally worked as an industrial adviser for the application of electronics parts and control processors. Frans is now working, as an IT manager, consultant and technology scout, in the Netherlands (www.profix-it.nl).

ABOUT

from this BROKEN HILL is an invitation to explore the people, landscapes, culture & history of this iconic desert city through poetry, prose & photography.

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Marvis Sofield & Les Wicks.

[contact](#)

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Australian Poetry Collaboration <http://leswicks.tripod.com/apc.htm>

Australian Reader <http://australianreader.com/index.php>

Blue Pepper <http://bluepepper.blogspot.com/>

Cordite www.cordite.org.au

Culturista <http://culturalista.org.au>

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[Top](#)