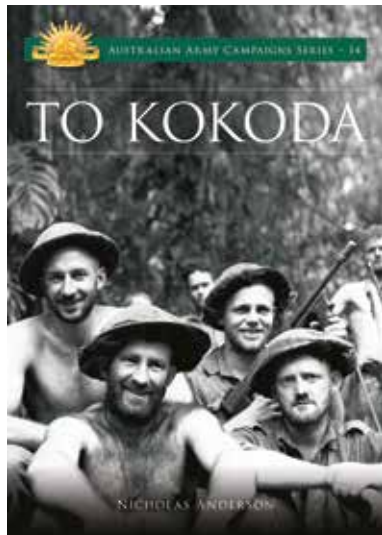


Reviews



To Kokoda

Nicholas Anderson

BIG SKY PUBLISHING, 2014

Kokoda has a special place in Australian history and folklore, perhaps surpassed only by Gallipoli in terms of its national significance. Symbolically, it represents a crossroads moment in Australia's twentieth-century experience: with the bulk of Australia's military engaged abroad, the experiences of the hastily assembled militia forces and their New Guinean allies in thwarting the Japanese push south proved crucial in turning the tide of war. The elements of bravery and resilience in tough terrain are now renowned and celebrated, yet the finer details of the event, as well as the historical context in which it occurred, are often far less well known. Nicholas Anderson's *To Kokoda*, part of the Army History's Australian Army Campaigns series, is a valuable reference for such detail.

To Kokoda incorporates an impressive array of source material, including historical and modern photographs, alongside

maps, annotated charts and chain-of-command diagrams. Anderson guides the reader through the events of Kokoda in a narrative style that is deliberately accessible to a broad audience, without overt emotion and musty academic prose.

The events of Kokoda, including those that preceded it, are clearly presented in chronological order, introducing key locations, individuals and weaponry as they become immediately relevant. The detail provided has been drawn from a variety of sources, both primary and secondary, including material from the Australian War Memorial and official Japanese archives. Anderson has seamlessly blended the Kokoda experiences of Australian soldiers and, at times, the Japanese, alongside the broader narrative and varied evidence. The constant use of specifics, supported by maps and other visuals, is one of the book's real strengths.

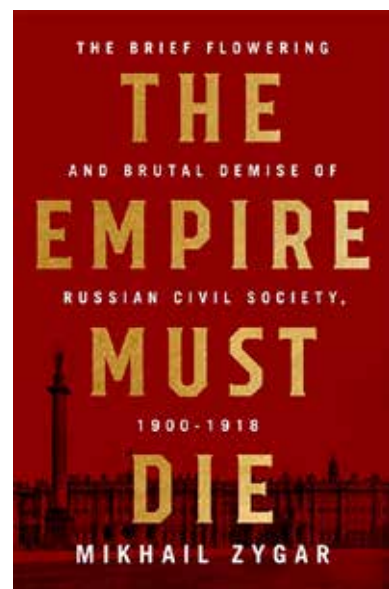
As a reference text, *To Kokoda* is a valuable addition for learning more about a significant event in depth. Given its immediate relevance to the Year 10 Victorian Curriculum, there is much for students to gain from this text, although some of the language may present new higher-order vocabulary.

While the prelude provided offers a clear context for the events of the Kokoda Trail, the content is not broad enough for *To Kokoda* to serve as a standalone text. That said, for the teacher this is an essential text for expanding one's content knowledge and informing teaching in this area. Additionally, further detail about political and social change in Australia at the time could have made the text quite relevant for VCE Units 3 and 4 Australian History (although

this is beyond the scope of the text's original purpose).

Anderson has done real justice to this topic, using evidence very well to create a fascinating narrative. There is certainly a place for this text on the shelf of all teachers of Twentieth Century Australian History.

*Reviewed by Phillip O'Brien,
McKinnon Secondary College*



The Empire Must Die: The Brief Flowering and Brutal Demise of Russian Civil Society, 1900-1918

Mikhail Zygar

HACHETTE, 2017

Mikhail Zygar opens his Preface with: 'I am not a historian, but a journalist' (ix). He continues:

This book was written according to the rules of journalism: as if the characters were alive and I had been able to interview them.

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Zygar states that his 'primary objective was to view the world through contemporary eyes.' I appreciate that he is frank about his credentials and intentions, and I was intrigued to read a version of this period of Russian history that relied primarily on 'diaries, letters, memoirs and public statements' treated as sources by a journalist, rather than a historian. If nothing else this should create a story *written* in a different style, if not revealing new and startling information. Although Zygar also admits that the book 'is certainly not an academic work' (xi), it is generally well written. It is not, however, the book I might have hoped for from a Russian on the centenary of the Russian revolutions.

Perhaps the most interesting thing that Zygar does is provide some cultural and intellectual context to the 1900–17 period in Russia. His study looks at people like Leo Tolstoy, Sergei Diaghilev, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Zinaida Gippius, and various other members of the (broadly defined) artistic set in Russia.

I presume this is how Zygar aims to explore 'the history of Russian society... [and] what it strove for' (xi) because there is very little discussion of anybody other than elites, in one sense or another, throughout this volume. For all his claim that 'Russian history, in my view, already concentrates too heavily on the state, or rather on the Sovereign, in whatever guise' (x), there is necessarily an emphasis on Nicholas II and his ministers, and then the Provisional Government, throughout the book. As the book treats the subject of 'why the empire must die' and focuses on written artefacts, this emphasis is unsurprising, but it does make for a top-heavy history

that to me doesn't really fit with a lot of modern historiography.

There are other problems with this book. On a functional level, each chapter is sub-divided by headings, but many of these are at best obscure and at worst unhelpful. Within the chapters, there is some leaping about in time and place that is not justified by the narrative being presented, which is confusing and would be even more so for a reader unfamiliar with the events being discussed.

Additionally, something that consistently annoyed me was footnotes making comparisons to modern Russian politics. For example, at the point when the Provisional Government is discussing whether Lenin and the Bolsheviks are German spies and if this should be reported in newspapers, there is a footnote that begins: 'The way authorities spread accusations against Bolsheviks in the press is very similar to the persecution of the Russian opposition in the early twenty-first century' (474). I have no problem with these sorts of comparisons being made, if that is the point of the book and if it's a consistent treatment. But occasional and seemingly haphazard parallels being drawn in footnotes are simply frustrating.

For me, though, the greatest failing of this book is the treatment of women within these pages. Women do appear – as wives, mistresses and daughters. They rarely appear as historical actors with agency. Yekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya, 'a legendary dissident of the previous generation' (66), features occasionally, but her role seems reduced to being inspirational early in the century and then being released from Siberian exile in 1917. Zinaida Gippius does appear to

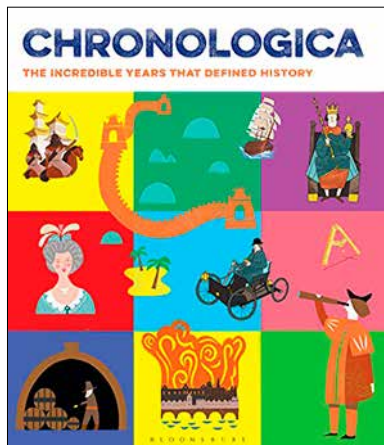
have some genuine involvement in the art and literary scene. However, I wonder whether she would be mentioned as often were she not part of the 'brotherhood of three' that included herself, her husband Dmitry Merezhkovsky and Dima Filosofov, who was, as Zygar constantly reminds the reader, Diaghilev's 'cousin and former male lover' (207). Alexandra Kollontai appears only once, as Lenin's 'friend' (429); Nadezhda Krupskaya twice. Most egregious, however, is this description of the beginning of the February Revolution: 'On 23 February riots break out in Petrograd due to bread shortages' (389). There is no mention of the involvement of women at any point – just the striking workers. This omission is bizarre.

It's not until the Epilogue that Zygar's opinion of this period is fully stated. He writes: 'The Russian Revolution was an event on a planetary scale. It was a tectonic shift that plunged a vast, highly developed civilization into the depths of Hades. ... This disaster was not an act of God, but anthropogenic. I do not consider it much of an exaggeration to describe it as the biggest manmade catastrophe in history' (517). I would have preferred to read that in the Prologue, as such an opinion necessarily has a bearing on the author's presentation of events.

I would not recommend this book as a primer on this period of Russian history. For a teacher looking for some additional source material to use with students, it has the advantage of coming from quite a different perspective compared to Fitzpatrick or Pipes or Figs and could be useful for that reason in the classroom.

*Reviewed by Alexandra Pierce,
Brunswick Secondary College*

Reviews



Chronologica: The Incredible Years That Defined History

Bloomsbury Yearbooks

BLOOMSBURY, 2016

Chronologica: The Incredible Years That Defined History is a fun and informative book, written and compiled by the team behind *Whitaker's Almanack*. Published in 2016 by Bloomsbury Publishing, it looks at over 250 historical events, from the 'Foundation of Rome' in 735 BCE to the 'Invention of the Internet' by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989. The events featured range from scientific discoveries such as James Watt's invention of the steam engine all the way to The Beatles' last public performance. With such a diverse number of topics, *Chronologica* is sure to have a little something for everyone's interests.

Aesthetically the book is very colourful and inviting. It is likely to be most appealing to those between the ages of eleven and fourteen, as older readers would probably consider the numerous cartoon drawings to be too childish. Interestingly, the use of the word *Chronologica* in the title also hints at the target age group as

the authors appear to have mixed together the English and Spanish words for 'chronological' to create a more fun title for a younger audience. The bright colours and large text, both on the exterior and interior of the book, also lend themselves to the attentions of a younger audience.

In terms of reading levels, *Chronologica* could very easily be read independently by an inquisitive child or with the assistance of an older person. The language used is clear and creates a narrative that delivers information in a style that engages with the interests of a younger audience.

The content of the book itself is well structured. Each page holds one event, with a running timeline at the bottom of the page that informs the reader when in History the event occurred. This visual representation of time is a great way to get readers thinking about each event's place within the greater context of history.

The book doesn't just provide readers with information; it also asks them to think for themselves and does not shy away from controversial questions. For instance, the Elgin Marble entry asks, 'But how did the marble sculptures from Athens come to be housed in the most popular visitor attraction in the United Kingdom and why do some people think they should be returned to Greece?' (171). This encourages the readers to think like historians. *Chronologica* is very precise in its details. Readers can garner enough information to carry out further research about the event and related content.

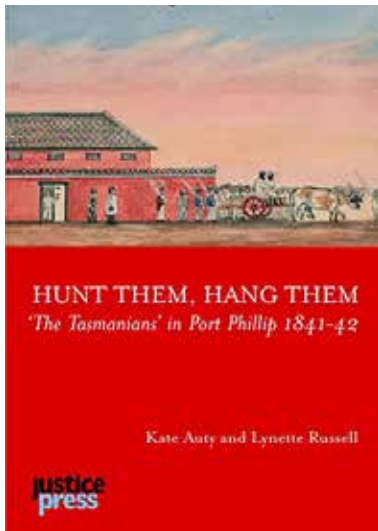
This book would probably not be used in a classroom other than as an option for extra reading for the aspiring historian. This

is because it is a book that easily sparks interest in a variety of areas due to its varied content but does not explain each event in enough detail for it to be used as a source.

In terms of limitations, for practicality the book had to be selective about its content and chosen events. This means that, except for a select few entries, the events are chosen primarily from the Western sphere of history, science and pop culture. Another possible limitation is the size and weight of the book. At 28mm × 231mm and weighing 1.2kg, it is not something you would be able to carry around and read when you have a spare moment. In look and feel, it could best be described as a coffee table book for young readers. Essentially it is a wonderful book for young aspiring historians who want to learn the broad strokes of history before they develop a particular interest or affinity for an era. Its clarity, precision and inviting format make it an appealing book to read.

Reviewed by Rachel Parsonage, pre-service teacher, University of Melbourne

Reviews



Hunt Them, Hang Them: 'The Tasmanians' in Port Phillip 1841-1842

Kate Auty and Lynette Russell

MELBOURNE JUSTICE PRESS, 2016

This book looks at the unpleasant end to the extraordinary story of a group of Tasmanian Aboriginals, two of whom – Maulboyheenner and Tunnerminnerwait – were convicted of murder and hanged at Melbourne's first execution in 1842. In 2015, the City of Melbourne commemorated the men with a public artwork near the side entrance of Old Melbourne Gaol, in the vicinity of their hanging.

As children, Maulboyheenner and Tunnerminnerwait were captured, along with several others, by a Tasmanian bounty party, and taken to Melbourne. They later became active in the black resistance movement. Their lives took a dramatic turn when, along with three women from the original group of captives – Truganini, Pytarruner and Planobeena – they stole two rifles and attacked properties in

the Dandenong and Western Port districts. In October 1841 they allegedly murdered two whalers.

The five accused were tried by Judge Willis, who acquitted the women but condemned the two men to be hanged. The notorious Judge Redmond Barry tried to defend them on the grounds that, not being British citizens, they could not be tried by British law. The jury begged for mercy, all three local newspapers, to varying degrees, were critical of the punishment but the Governor-in-Council ordered the sentence to be carried out. The two men were hanged in public near the half-completed Melbourne Gaol in January 1842.

The trial and execution of these men raise many questions: were they aggrieved Indigenous people, common criminals, 'black bushrangers' or heroes of the Black Resistance? And did they receive a fair trial?

Professor Kate Auty (an expert in environmental law at La Trobe University) and Professor Lynette Russell (Director of Monash Indigenous Studies Centre) provide a searing insight into a trial that would never have proceeded in the present day. The authors acknowledge that 'it is probable that some members of the group did kill the two whalers' (9) but question whether the victims received a fair trial, given the many opacities and lacunae that stand out so clearly to the modern eye. For example, the accused were not allowed to give their own evidence while testimonies of the white participants were hopelessly confused and contradictory. Amazingly, there was not even a post-mortem to determine the exact cause of the whalers' deaths. One important independent

witness, the Assistant Aboriginal Protector, William Thomas, was inexplicably excluded from the one-day trial. Above all, there was no firm evidence of a motive, beyond nebulous testimony that the two men might have been trying to kill a coal miner named Watson, hinting that their actions might have been prompted by Watson's mistreatment of Indigenous people.

Auty and Russell's work can usefully be compared with the contrary views of historians Marie Fels, David Clark and Rene White, who have argued that the two men were neither victims nor heroes, and should not have been commemorated by the City of Melbourne. In their article, 'Mistaken Identity, Not Aboriginal Heroes', published in *Quadrant* (October 2014), they contend that:

Our research, based only on primary sources, demonstrates conclusively that they were *not* resistance fighters: on their own personal testimony, they shot and killed two whalers by mistake.

However, Auty and Russell argue that the 'personal testimony' must refer to the men's confessions made at some time after capture, which have no legal weight because the accused never had the chance to formally voice them in court. No Aboriginal prisoner – or even an Aboriginal witness – was allowed to speak in court. Indigenous people were helpless witnesses in a judicial machine whose hearings would not ever literally hear them. Needless to say, these diametric views provide a real analytical challenge to our students and may well provoke both sustained reflection and lively debate.

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Teaching suggestions for this book

ADDING THE MEMORIAL TO 'INDIGENOUS MELBOURNE' CLASS EXCURSIONS

For teachers planning a class excursion to sites of Indigenous significance in Melbourne, this site is an essential – albeit sobering – place at which to pay respects, and to acknowledge the true nature of the experience of Indigenous people during early colonial settlement. The state of Tasmania has its uncomfortable common consciousness of its Black Wars, but Melbourne is not without its own dark tragedies.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: TAKING SIDES IN THE ETHICAL DEBATE

Teachers of Australian History or Indigenous Studies could also use this case for a mock trial during class time. They might use the system of inviting students to consider the evidence and to then position themselves in one of the four corners of the classroom, each corner defending one of four fundamental points of view.

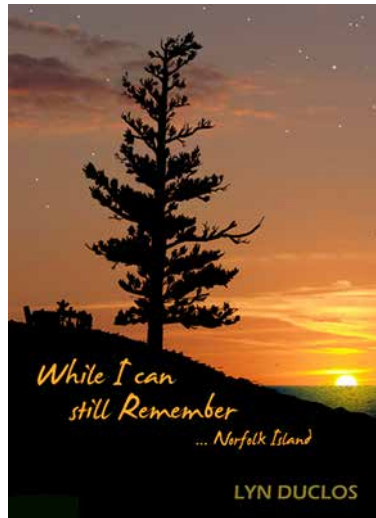
Viewpoint 1: The executions were justifiable because the victims had allegedly committed murder of two whalers.

Viewpoint 2: The victims might have taken revenge because of direct ill-treatment by a white settler and deserved a mitigated sentence.

Viewpoint 3: The victims were merely responding to the common practice of bush-ranging in a quite lawless colonial society.

Viewpoint 4: The victims should be seen as freedom fighters and heroes of the Black Resistance and commemorated as such.

*Reviewed by Michael Adcock,
Melbourne Grammar School*



While I Can Still Remember ... Norfolk Island

Lyn Duclos

PILAND PRESS, 2015

While I Can Still Remember ... Norfolk Island by Lyn Duclos is a historical fiction narrative that tells socio-cultural, political and ecological history through the memories of a tree called Lone Pine, a Norfolk Pine dating from the mid-1300s. The narrative shifts from the present (2015) to the past as the dying Lone Pine must give his memories to a sapling, Piali, so the Norfolk Pines can survive. The concept of memory and oral history is at the heart of this novel.

The structure of *While I Can Still Remember* shifts from present to past. History moves forward in chronological order, highlighting Polynesian history, Captain Cook, the Third Settlement with the Pitcairners and other key moments in colonial history. Lone Pine's memories focus on key events and key figures in Norfolk Island history, relating them to key figures and events

in New Zealand and Australian history. The various historical events are not discussed in great detail but the book does provide a general understanding. The start of each chapter features illustrations by Zozie Brown that depict the historical setting, people and environment, helping to situate students historically. The book also includes a present-day map and maps from history to help students with historical understanding.

Within the classroom, this text would be best suited to be read alongside Australian and New Zealand colonial history. The greatest strength of *While I Can Still Remember* is that it allows teachers to examine issues about history outside traditional texts and illustrates historical empathy and the idea of oral history and memory. This could allow for discussion about the importance of oral history, prompting projects on interviewing family members and older community members in relation to local histories.

The key conflict of this narrative is the survival of the Norfolk Pines. Their survival is dependent on the oldest pine, Lone Pine, sharing the history of the island with the sapling, Piali. As Lone Pine begins dying and forgetting his memories, other animals including starlings and sea turtles help by telling stories that were passed down to them by their families. Lone Pine transfers his memories through the 'old root [that] felt its way towards Piali's roots. It was a passage used long ago instinct reading rather than remembering' (5). Thus, this sharing of memories has been happening for centuries.

Like human history, memories are connected to the roots of where a

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person comes from. The concept of blood memory draws on the importance of listening to elders in a community. A community can carry on existing as long as they understand their cultural, historical and social memories. If they know where they are from, they can exist as a living and vibrant people. Lone Pine could be symbolic of Indigenous Elders within Australian and New Zealand indigenous communities. At the end of the narrative, Piali stretches out his roots to nearby saplings and shares all the memories passed down by Lone Pine to all the trees on Norfolk Island. Lone Pine dies, but his memories of the island live on in each sapling. This theme could lead to family history projects where students interview family members and elders within their own communities on their own personal cultural and historical histories, thus, engaging in the concept of oral history and playing the role of the sapling. This text and projects relating to oral histories emphasises that history doesn't exist within a vacuum but is still alive and affecting us today.

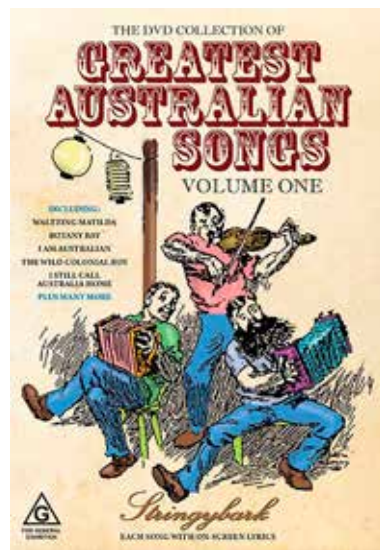
A limitation of *While I Can Still Remember* is that it does not go into great detail about any specific point in history. Without prior knowledge, students will not understand the key historical events or the key figures, thus a teacher would need to provide context and explain some historical events as students read the novel.

I would recommend this text for students in the later of primary and junior high school years. The writing style is approachable for students with lower literacy levels as well. The story line and characters would appeal

to younger students but may alienate older students as they may interpret it as too 'kiddy.'

Lyn Duclos' *While I Can Still Remember ... Norfolk Island* opens up an opportunity to explore the importance of history itself and why it needs to be studied. It is an ideal text to use as a jumping off point for further exploration of Norfolk Island, Australian and New Zealand history. However, it is the urgency of historical memory that makes this novel a significant and interesting text to examine within the classroom.

Reviewed by Julia Vogel, pre-service teacher, University of Melbourne



Greatest Australian Songs (vol. 1) (DVDs)

Stringybark Band

STRINGYBARK, 2015

Greatest Australian Songs performed by the Stringybark Band is a two-DVD collection with film clips of several well-known Australian songs. The clips are shown with the lyrics provided on-screen so people

can sing or read along. The band members, particularly Ross Hamilton, are usually the central focus of the film clips, which are filmed in iconic Australian locations such as farms, the bush, famous landmarks and old buildings. These filmed performances are also often accompanied by primary source images featuring the time periods, figures or locations described in the songs. These images are useful in several ways: they help understand what the song is about, provide a historical context (especially for those students who are less familiar with history), and stimulate discussion.

The mix of songs is varied, with some old bush ballads such as 'Click Go the Shears' and 'Waltzing Matilda' along with more recent songs including Peter Allen's 'I Still Call Australia Home' and The Seekers' 'Moringtown Ride.' Teachers who use these DVDs may need to research appropriate classroom uses for the songs before choosing them. If they are to be used for an exploration of Australian culture, then many of the songs may be appropriate but if students are studying a specific time period, then only certain songs may be applicable.

The inside flyleaf of the DVD gives details about the different songs, but it tends to focus more on the singers and images rather than on historical details, which history teachers would have appreciated. These DVDs are probably most valuable as resources in a primary school because, although they only provided limited historical detail, they are a useful introduction to Australian songs and do contain some interesting historical

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images. However, the DVDs may also be relevant at secondary school level if students are completing units on: Australian music history, music history or Year 9 History 'Making a Nation.' Sometimes the production quality, although high definition, does not

look as 'modern' as many students will expect, which depending on your audience may be important to take into consideration.

Overall, depending on the choice of song and the area being studied this collection may be a useful source for understanding how the

songs sounded when originally created. This also has potential for discussing how songs were a key element in the construction of our national identity.

*Reviewed by Rachel Towns,
St John's Regional College*

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