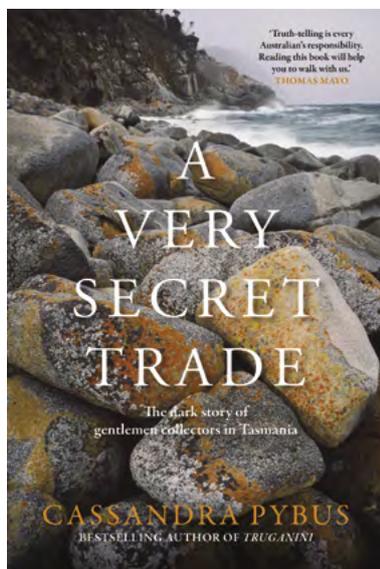


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A Very Secret Trade

By Cassandra Pybus

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Reviewed by Elizabeth Morgan,
Janison Assessments

Cassandra Pybus' *A Very Secret Trade* is a meticulously researched and profoundly unsettling exploration of one of the darkest chapters in Australian colonial history. While being a deeply uncomfortable text, it is also an essential read for anyone interested in Australian history, colonialism, and the ongoing struggle for Indigenous rights. Further, *A Very Secret Trade* offers a sobering reminder of the lengths colonial powers went to assert their dominance. It is a must-read for History teachers who wish to give their students a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on Australia's colonial past.

Pybus, a distinguished historian, delves into the clandestine network of colonial men who, under the guise of scientific inquiry, engaged in the macabre trade of Aboriginal remains. Pybus' narrative is both compelling and disturbing, as she uncovers the motivations and actions of key figures involved in this grim trade.

The book exposes how these individuals, motivated by personal ambition and a desire to gain favour with European collectors and institutions, systematically desecrated graves and trafficked human remains. Driven by the belief that the original inhabitants were a unique race on the brink of extinction, these men sought exotic specimens, including human remains. This demand created a network of colonial men in Tasmania who exploited their status and used deceit to acquire and ship these remains to Europe.

Notable figures involved included William Crowther, a surgeon and founding member of the Royal Society of Tasmania, who removed the head of Billy Lanne, an Aboriginal man, intending to send it to the Royal College of Surgeons in London. Another prominent individual was Scottish surgeon Alexander Berry, who exhumed graves and sent numerous sets of remains overseas. Pybus' thorough examination of historical records reveals the vast scope of this trade, and highlights how esteemed institutions were involved in sustaining these injustices.

A Very Secret Trade is not just a historical account; it is a powerful piece of truth-telling that challenges readers to confront the brutal realities of colonialism. Pybus' research highlights the critical need to recognise and confront past injustices, and it connects historical events to contemporary acts of defiance, such as the toppling of statues of colonial figures like William Crowther.

This text offers educators a crucial tool to promote a more inclusive and truthful perspective of our history. For teachers, *A Very Secret Trade* provides an abundance of primary and secondary sources, in-depth profiles of historical figures, and a sophisticated exploration of the ethical dimensions of historical practices. Pybus' writing is scholarly and approachable, making intricate historical events comprehensible without losing depth and ensuring it remains engaging for a broader audience.