The Follies of Australia #2


The Havlik Castle on Rum Jungle Road, Batchelor, Northern Territories

The response to our first look at Australian follies has been a positive one, and already brought a number of additional suggestions. For example, Eric Denig kindly told me of a vast wall made from bottles set in a cement paste at the town of Northcliffe in Western Australia (mentioned in his article 'Muren van Verbeelding' in the winter 2008 edition of *PorteFolly 3*). He also reminded me that he featured Bernard **Havlik's Folly Castle** in the summer 1996 edition of our *Follies* magazine.

Havlik was a Czechoslovakian who worked in the Rum Jungle Uranium Mines near the town of Batchelor in the Northern Territories. After retiring, he found himself feeling increasingly homesick so in 1974 he set about creating a miniature replica of Karlstein Castle near Prague, as a reminder of his

original home. He built his folly castle from cement paste and took four years to complete the task. After being restored in 2002, the folly is now a local tourist attraction.
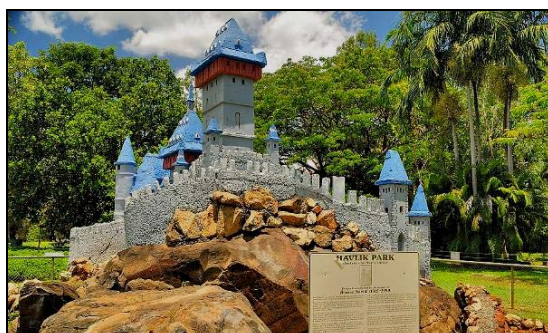
Victoria:

Rickett's Grotto, Melbourne

William Ricketts was an artist who had a deep and abiding admiration of the natural environment and believed that man was merely a custodian of the Earth. He had a special admiration for the way that Aborigines connected with the land, and many of his sculptures reflect his high opinion of them, with Aboriginal figures and animals emerging from rocks or appearing beneath ferns. At his sanctuary in the Dandenong Ranges near Melbourne, there is a collection of more than 90 of his sculptures, including a **bushland grotto**.
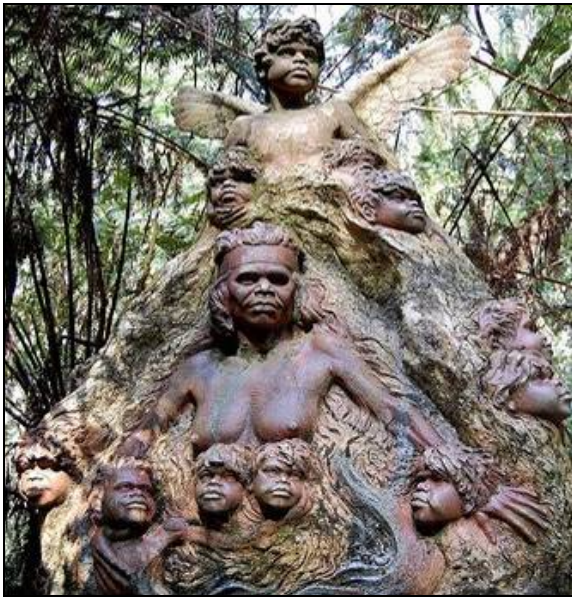
Ricketts was born in Richmond in 1898 and settled at Mount Dandenong in 1934. He was not formally trained but his gift was to show how a modern Australia could adapt and embrace the spirituality of the Aborigines and their respect for the natural world. He had a huge public following, which encouraged the Victorian Government to buy the sanctuary in the 1960's and open it as a public park. Ricketts himself worked continuously on the project until his death in the park in 1993.

Walter Lindrum's Grave, Melbourne

Walter Lindrum was probably the greatest player of billiards that the world has ever seen, chalking up some 57 world records, many of which remain unbroken. Writing in the *Melbourne General Cemetery Guide*, where he is buried, Don Chambers says that "so dominant was Lindrum in the international world of billiards that the rules of the game were amended to give his opponents a sporting chance."

Lindrum was born in the Western Australian town of Kalgoorlie on 29 August 1898, and died on 30 July 1960. When news of his death spread the nation mourned and newspapers across Australia called him the "Bradman of Billiards." He was buried in Melbourne's General Cemetery in an appropriately shaped tomb.

A Question of Time

London has one at Greenwich, Edinburgh has another on Calton Hill, and since they are an essential aid to celestial navigation, it is not surprising that Australia should have a couple as well. I am, of course, talking balls – time balls.

Long before the GPS was imagined, sailors navigated the oceans with marine chronometers. These were portable time-keepers that provided a time standard and helped to determine longitude by assessing the position of the sun, moon and stars. The device was perfected by John Harrison in 1761, and its success was partly due to its simplicity and partly the fact that it could easily be set. In the beginning this setting process was done by checking it against a heavy ball that fell at a specific time of day, but was later replaced with a shot fired from a canon at a specific time of day, usually noon and 6pm.

The best of Australia's time balls was built on Gellibrand's Point near Melbourne, in 1840. It began life as a lighthouse with lighted beacon set atop a timber skeleton built on a bluestone base, and was capable of being seen up to 5 leagues (15 miles) out at sea. In 1848 a competition was launched to build a more permanent structure on the site. The winner was James Linacre who managed to build the new tower and keeper's quarters by the end of the following year for only £925. His tower remained in operation for a decade after which it was replaced by a floating lightship anchored off the point.

Since Melbourne was the site of the first permanent settlement in Victoria, it has traditionally provided the datum for all Australian land surveys: datum is the tide gauge at Gellibrand's Point. It is where Mr R Ellery (the first Government Astronomer) established accurate local mean time in 1853, which he did through a time ball allowing all chronometers to be checked "at the fall of the ball" at exactly 1pm each day.


The time ball mechanism was placed on the tower at some time in 1860, and remained in use until 1926 when the last of the keepers fell ill and died. By then ships were using radio time-signals to maintain time, causing one newspaper of the day to observe that "when the time was turned off not one person in Melbourne even noticed!"

In 1934 the time ball was replaced by a 30 feet (10m) tall circular brick column that was covered with aluminium paint. A light was then added allowing the tower to be used as a lighthouse for the third time in its long history. That function continued until 1987 when the unsightly extension was taken down. Three years later the Point Gellibrand Rotary Club raised funds to put back a replica time ball and return a sense of dignity and elegance to the tower. Today, the time ball still falls at 1pm, but is controlled by computer rather than the traditional man with a pocket watch.
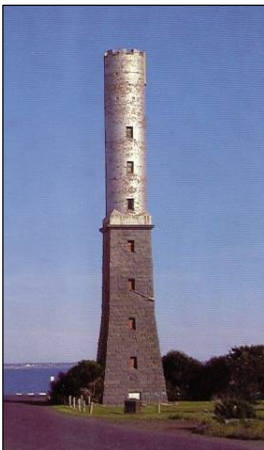
Time balls were set up at all major ports across Australia, including one on the roof of the Sydney Observatory, and another at Adelaide where it was set above a purpose-built tower in Adelaide (below).
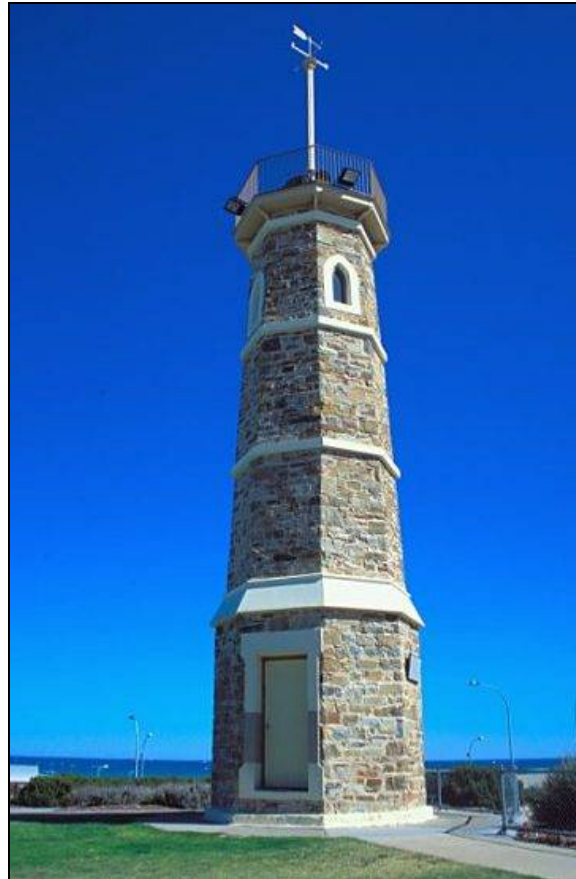
Arthur's Seat Belvedere at Mornington Peninsula

When **Lieutenant John Murray** entered Port Phillip aboard the Lady Nelson in January 1802, he was struck by the similarity of the hill to Arthur's Seat in his home City of Edinburgh, and decided to name it accordingly. Located about 75 km south-east of Melbourne on the Mornington Peninsula, the hill affords wonderful views over the surrounding landscape.

In 1896 a rough track was cut leading to the summit allowing James Chapman to become the

first person to establish a house there, among his orchards. Surprisingly, it was not until 1896 that a graded road was built allowing members of the public to climb it easily in their motor cars. To help them enjoy the view from the top, a concrete look-out tower was opened in 1934, but little more is known about it.

The Mystery Tower at the University of Melbourne

In the grounds of Melbourne University is a German-cum-Japanese looking octagonal tower that appears to have no obvious function other than articulate the gardens. If the university does write with more information about the tower and its history, I will add it to a later edition of the Bulletin.

John Bear's Folly at Yan Yean

John Bear was a pastoralist farmer who emigrated to Australia in 1841 and set up a livestock farm at Yan Yean, outside of what is now Whittlesea City. To help him run the farm he employed Mr Hannaford and Mr Edwards to work as shepherds, even though they had no previous farming experience and had been builder's mates back in Devon.

Pastoral farmers try to provide a relaxed and stress-free environment for their livestock, and it meant that Hannaford and Edwards had little to do during the day, something they found rather pleasant after a life of heavy toil back home. So, when John Bear was about to embark on a long trip away from the farm, the two men asked if there was anything they should do while he was away. Jokingly, Bear is believed to have said "Yes, build me a castle." As you might imagine, for two under-used and home-sick builders it was a request that they rejoiced at and took seriously, duly building a fort for their employer's return home.

Looking at the building today, it is possible to make out the basic shape of a castle, albeit one that is hidden beneath a low pyramidal roof. It has a plan area of 12 m² and was built using mud and stones laid in the same way as Devon cob walls, complete with a smooth outer coating to help shed rainwater and survive the worst of the Australian heat and termites.

To the bemused locals, the building quickly became known as **Bear's Folly**, a title that it still retains.

Although it was never used for defensive purposes, the building did serve as a lookout tower from which estate staff could monitor livestock and keep watch for bush fires. It also served briefly as a home to John Duffy (one of John Bear's estate managers) and his family who lived there in 1865.