

GREETINGS FROM
SYDNEY



Sydney Australia, 1926

Backless Betty from Bondi



A family gathering, the Wheel House, Potts Point, June 1926. Left to right: Mr Posso Seaton, Miss Bettie Brook, Mr Terrance Brook, Miss Merrin Brook, Mr Cyrus Browne of Sydney Towne, the poet.

THE SIGHTS OF SYDNEY

The City

Beyond the Harbour, key sites to visit in Sydney include the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Taronga Zoo (a brief ferry ride from Circular Quay), Royal Botanic Garden, and the Domain, where soap box orators entertain the crowds each weekend. Sydney's shopping is superb, it's dining rather less so. Many exclusive arcades can be found throughout the city, centred about Castlereagh and Pitt Streets. Lavish new 'department stores' offer the latest products from across the nation and overseas, including Marcus Clarke's at Railway Square and Mark Foy's' Italianate extravaganza at the corner of Hyde Park.

Night Life

Theatres and picture palaces abound around the city. Six o'clock closing restricts other (legal) opportunities for entertainment. Posso suggests the King's Cross Theatre for moving pictures, and the Black Star for refreshment and society (of course). Bettie also favours Ciro's at the top of William Street or Maxim's in Darlinghurst Road for dancing and cabaret. Darlinghurst Road between Victoria Street and Macleay Street is seen (a little optimistically) as Sydney's answer to the West End of London. More stylish venues now feature the new jazz, with bands both local (Frank Coughlan and the Sydney Sharps) and on tour from America (Ray Tellier's San Francisco Orchestra).

Live theatre is concentrated in the city. The magnificent Her Majesty's in Pitt Street has a two thousand seat auditorium. Also in Pitt Street, the Criterion Theatre features the latest West End comedies, while the Hoyts Lyceum is now a picture palace. The National Amphitheatre (popularly known as the 'Nash'), in Castlereagh Street features mainly local performers in light theatre, though its program also includes boxing and short films. Vaudeville is the staple of the Theatre Royal and the Tivoli (the 'Tiv'), both on Castlereagh Street. The Majestic in Newtown is the place to indulge in Shakespeare. The Newtown Stadium always has something to offer as well; a circus, boxing exhibitions, fetes, or a religious mission.

Ferry to Manly

'Seven miles from Sydney and a thousand miles from care', Manly is a sleepy hamlet by the Harbour's North Head, with a superb beach on the

Pacific ocean. The half hour ferry ride from Circular Key is a wonderful way of taking in the Harbour. The Manly wharf features an aquarium and a fun fair.

The Beach

Sydney's ocean beaches are among the best in the world, and are patrolled by the world's first surf life saving clubs. Laws overturning sea swimming during daylight were relaxed in 1905, and Sydney's beach culture proliferated. Baths and swimming pools are still segregated, but mixed ocean bathing is the norm. Cafes and turkish baths proliferate along the shore. Surfing with 10 foot boards is already common, especially at Manly and Cronulla. Segregated harbourside swimming baths are also popular, and there are several on the western edge of Woolloomooloo Bay. Bettie swims there regularly.

A day at the Races

Horse racing is second only to betting itself as an Australian passion. Having a flutter on the nags is a great way for punters to spend a Saturday (or Wednesday, or Friday). The turf at Randwick is superb and betting is legal there. (Off-course betting is even more popular, but illegal. Posso can help you there.) Randwick has a dedicated tram loop from the city!

Footy!

Rugby is fast, fluid and brutal. Eight teams from across the city compete in the 1926 New South Wales Rugby Football League. The introduction of a final series has bought a new sense of excitement to the league this year—any team in the final four has a chance to take the premiership! Most folk in Razorhurst follow the South Sydney Rabbitohs (who are having a cracker of a season) or the Newtown Bluebags. The Brook sisters follow the unpopular (but strongly performing) 'Varsity.

The North Shore

The Harbour's North Shore is sparsely populated in comparison with the southern shore, but it is worth taking the punt vehicle ferry from Circular Quay to observe the new Harbour Bridge construction up close. Much of the North Shore is Military Reserve, wild bushland with spectacular harbourside walks.

The Blue Mountains

The Blue Mountains west of Sydney make for a pleasant day or weekend trip by rail or motor car. The mountains contain natural wonders such as the Three Sisters and Jenolan Caves. Exclusive hotels such as The Carrington and Hydro Majestic are where Sydney's elite relax and play.

BACKLESS BETTY FROM BONDI

The beach is not entirely free,
The sands are far from trackless,
When Betty dances to the sea,
So rapturously backless;
By this, we don't impute a lack
In one whose back is peerless--
For who,
Possessing such a back,
Could be described
As rearless?

And oh, the Euclid of her spine,
The trills, divine and deathless,
That ripple down a magic line
And leave a watcher breathless!
A thousand feet her feet pursue,
With hopeless tread and tireless --
Her back is full
Of Pooh-for-you,
Her eyes are full
Of wireless!



You aldermen who thunder out
Damnation for the Backless,
Your waists, no doubt, are rather stout,
Which makes you somewhat tactless;
And you, arch-bulldogs of the sand,
So big and brown and artless
Who put the bellow
In the banned --
Inspectors,
Don't be heartless!

Oh, make the great Pacific dry,
And drive the council speechless,
Remove the breakers from Bondi -
The beach, and leave us beach-less,
The fair, the bare, the naked-backed
The beer, the pier, the jetty -
Take anything at all,
In fact,
But leave,
Oh leave us Betty!

Verse by Kenneth Slessor, inspired by original illustration by Virgil Reilly. (*Smith's Weekly* 1928).

THE PHOENIX INCIDENT

The enigma of the *Phoenix* remains one of the greatest mysteries in the annals of Australian maritime history.

Just before dawn on the morning of July 25 1907, a large smouldering wreck was reported floating in Sydney Harbour. The fire tug *Morpeth* was despatched and intercepted a ship some quarter of a mile NNE of Garden Island, guided by a nascent cloud of rising smoke and steam. The unidentified vessel, now burnt to the waterline, had a beam of over fifteen feet, and a length estimated to be near one hundred feet.

The tug boat crew reported evidence of an intense conflagration and boiler explosion, with fragments of melted metal splayed amidst the flotsam. The vessel sank beneath the Harbour within minutes of it being encountered by the *Morpeth*.

Three bodies, horribly burned beyond any trace of identification, were later pulled from the Harbour.

The mysterious ship was dubbed the *Phoenix*. Its mystery is twofold. In the midst of one of the world's busiest harbours, in a waterway visible from thousands of houses, and within half a mile or so of a major Royal Australian Navy base at Garden Island, there was not a single witness to the burning of the ship, nor the explosion of its boiler. And despite a search effort that extended along Australia's entire eastern and southern seaboard, no missing ship or crew was ever identified.

JOSEPH 'CUTTER' ELKIN, THE DARLINGHURST REAPER

The Cutter. The Black Reaper. The Bastard from the Bush. Little is known of Joe Elkin in life or in death. But nearly twenty years on, his monstrous deeds still cast a dark shadow over inner Sydney.

The Cutter murdered seventeen innocents on the streets of Razorhurst in a brutal three month outbreak of bloody terror. Silent, invisible, and utterly ruthless, he chose only the most wretched and friendless denizens of the gutter as his victims.

Elkin was born to rural poverty in northern NSW, the son of an Aboriginal servant woman. At age thirteen he joined a rail gang working out of Moree, acquiring the prescient nickname of 'Cutter'. By 1906 he was working at the Redfern rail yards in inner Sydney. Always a heavy drinker, in the Big Smoke Elkin grew increasingly isolated and depressed, given to solitary vices. Losing his job, he became another homeless transient on the streets of the Cross.

Over three months in 1907, Elkin murdered some thirteen men and four women on the streets of Razorhurst, firstly on nights of the full moon, and then over a final blood-soaked week in late July.

He despatched his victims using a long, razor-sharp blade. There were no witnesses to the murders, and tragically, few of the victims were ever formally identified. Police stated they were foreign seamen, isolated prostitutes, or homeless itinerants.

Fear came to Sydney. The fear of a parent for a child overdue, the fear of a lonely walk on a deserted street. The scale of the obscenity was monstrous. The press and public railed against police incompetence and endemic corruption. Razorhurst residents formed neighbourhood patrols and prayer vigils.

The Cutter was arrested by a citizens watch on the night of 25 July 1907. Soaked in blood and screaming obscenities, he was apprehended just minutes after the discovery of the final victim.

According to official reports, he committed suicide that night in the cells of Darlinghurst Police Station. Joe Elkin took his grisly secrets to the grave.

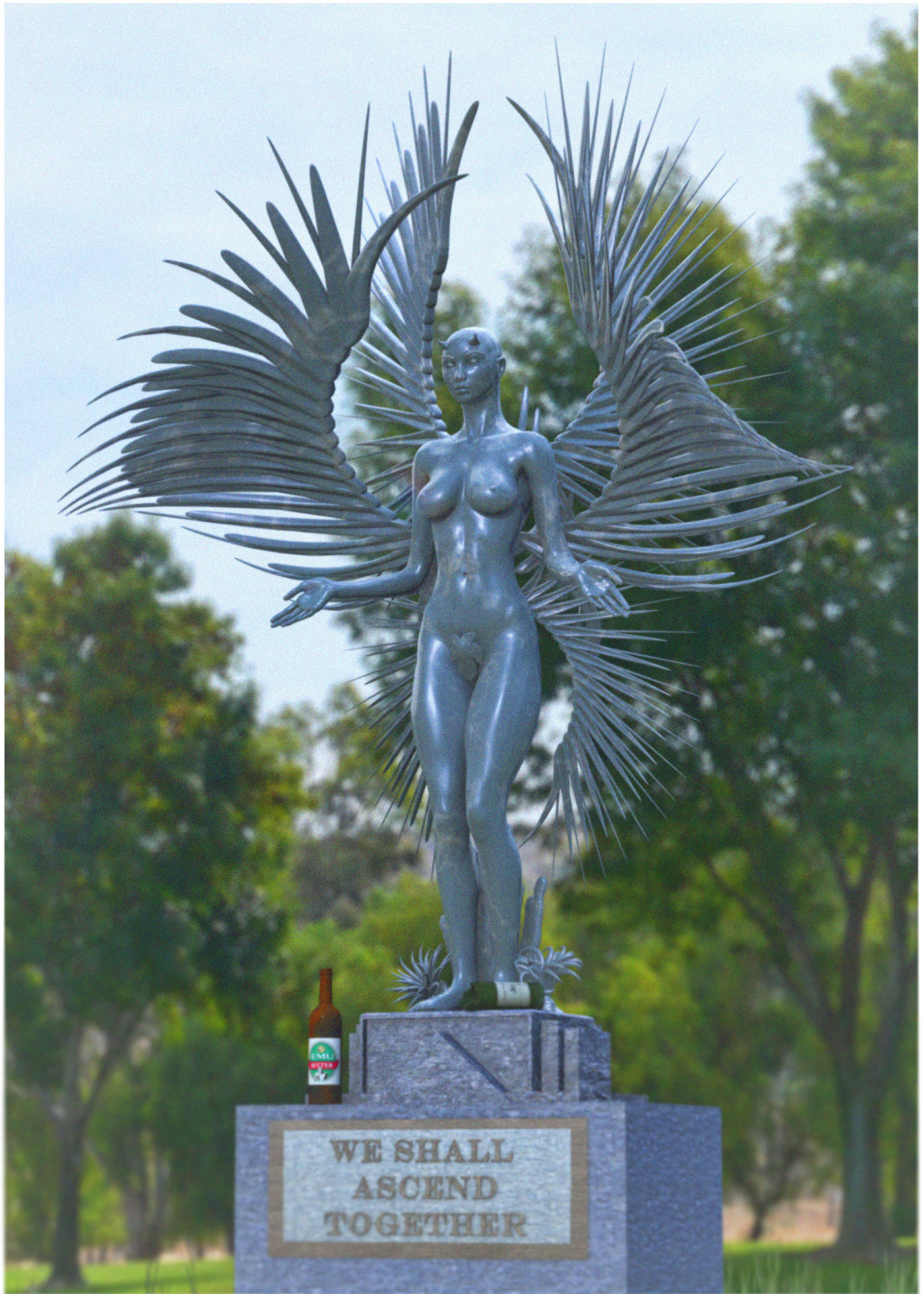
THE BLUE ANGEL



The Blue Angel is the secular guardian symbol of Sydney, decried by the established churches but embraced by artists and the poor. She is patron of the downtrodden and the happy-go-lucky, representing unfettered joy and open sensuality. Theosophists have named her Pacificus, the Guardian of the Harbour.

The Angel first appeared in poetry, sculpture and painting a few years before the Great War. She entered public consciousness with Erica Vandeerzee's famous Federation Park sculpture in Kings Cross, dedicated to the unidentified victims of the Darlinghurst Reaper. That sculpture bears the haunting inscription, 'We shall all ascend together'. It is carved from a unique blue marble raised from underwater outcrops off Western Australia's Kimberly coast.

From the beginning, representations of the Angel have portrayed her with a benign, though featureless, face, naked or with a blue flowing robe, and with three pairs of wings.



CHOKER'S LANE

In Choker's Lane, the doors appear
Like black and shining coffin-lids,
Whose smell of flesh, long buried here,
Familiar visiting forbids.

But sometimes, when their bells are twirled
They'll show, like Hades, through the chink,
The green and watery gaslight world
Where girls have faces white as zinc.

And sometimes thieves go smoothly past,
Or pad by moonlight home again,
For even thieves come home at last,
Even the thieves of Choker's Lane.

And sometimes you can feel the breath
Of beasts decaying in their den—
The soft, unhurrying teeth of Death
With leather jaws come tasting men.

Then sunlight comes, the tradesmen-nod,
The pavement rings with careless feet,
And Choker's Lane—how very odd!—
Is just an ordinary street.



Verse by Kenneth Slessor, inspired by original illustration by Virgil Reilly. (*Smith's Weekly* 1928).

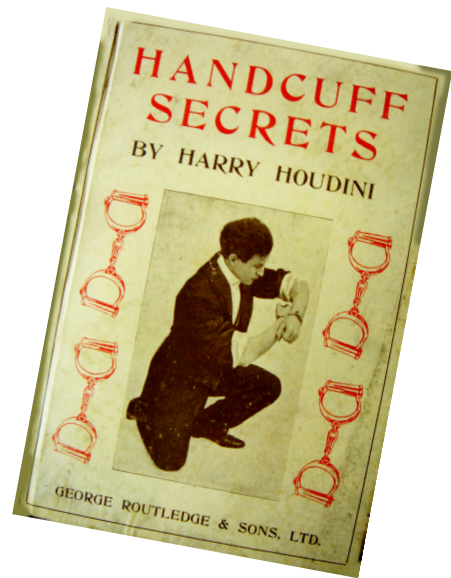
VOLUMES IN THE LIBRARY

Many of the volumes in the Wheel House library are first editions, purchased from speciality booksellers in London and San Francisco.

- ☞ *The Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* (volumes from 1910 to 1925). The journal contains reports of alleged psychic and paranormal events and abilities. The correspondence pages record endless debates between sceptics and spiritualists.
- ☞ *The Story of Atlantis and the Lost Lemuria* by W. Scott-Elliot (1925). A theosophical work justifying Charles Leadbeater's stories on Lemuria and Atlantis as received from the Hidden Masters by astral clairvoyance.



- ☞ *Australia and New Zealand as the Home of a New Sub-Race* by C. W. Leadbetter [sic] (no date). A theosophical pamphlet by Charles Leadbeater.
- ☞ *Initiation, Human and Solar* (Lucifer Trust, 1922) by Alice Bailey. Alice Bailey is a rebel New York theosophist who telepathically channels the Ascended Master known as 'The Tibetan' or Djwal Khul.
- ☞ *Handcuff Secrets* by Houdini. The great escapologist Harry Houdini describes various methods for freeing oneself from handcuffs, locks, and straight jackets.
- ☞ *Magic Rope Ties and Escapes* by Houdini. Harry Houdini shows how to perform rope ties and how to escape from bindings and shackles.



- ☞ *A Magician Among the Spirits* (1924) by Houdini. A devastating expose of fraud spiritualists, spirit photography, ectoplasm, clairvoyance, and other quackery and cons perpetrated on the gullible by fake mediums, this book created a sensation in the United States.
- ☞ *The Golden Bough A Study in Magic and Religion* (Twelve volumes, 1906-1915 edition) by Sir James George Frazer. A monumental cross-cultural study in comparative folklore, magic and religion centred on fertility cults and the ritual of the sacrificial king.
- ☞ *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921) by Margaret Murray. This historical examination of witch trials advances the thesis that European witches worshiped a horned god in a pagan religion surviving until at least the seventeenth century.
[One day, + 3 Folklore, - 2 Occult].
- ☞ 'The Unreality of Time' by John M.E. McTaggart, a pamphlet reprint of an article first published in the journal *Mind* in 1908. This is a difficult read.
- ☞ *Psychopathia Sexualis: eine Klinisch-Forensische Studie (Sexual Psychopathy: A Clinical-Forensic Study)* (1886, 1904 edition) by Richard Fridolin Joseph Freiherr Krafft von Festsberg auf Frohnberg, genannt von Ebing. A dry, difficult academic handbook in German (with some of the more explicit sections written in Latin) that discusses human sexuality and sexual pathology. There are no pictures.