

Stewart Bessant, *Oakbank: Over the Fallen Log*. Peacock Publications, Adelaide, 1983. Illus., pp.136. \$9.95.

This book presents a chronological account, mainly from newspaper sources, of the development of the Onkaparinga Racing Club and its establishment of the Oakbank races, Australia's most famous picnic meeting associated with, of course, the Great Eastern Steeplechase. It is excellently produced and lavishly illustrated with almost one hundred photographs which clearly depict changing fashions, both sartorial and transportive. Some interesting information has been unearthed: the failure of Oakbank meetings held outside the Easter period; the illegal use of the totalisator in 1887 by Mr. Von Doussa, the Club Secretary; the self-imposed restriction as to where committee members might reside; and the fact that the 1944 and 1945 meetings were held at Victoria Park and Norphettville respectively because Oakbank was under military occupation.

There are, however, some unfortunate deficiencies, most notably in that what is supposed to be an annual chronicle has no mention of the Great Eastern winner for 1929, 1933, 1956, 1974 and 1975. The commitment to a year-by-year approach means that the opportunity to develop themes is lost, although sufficient material is there for the interested reader to investigate such topics as the physical dangers of steeplechase racing and the relationship of betting to the horseracing industry. Sometimes the author seems to ignore events outside of racing as when he claims record prizemoney but without taking cognisance of inflation. On other occasions knowledge is assumed about the vagaries of South Australian gambling legislation and South Australian Jockey Club regulations. A similar need for elaboration occurs when a horse, a race, or a decision is simply described as 'controversial', a frustrating experience for the unknowledgable reader. A final criticism is that we are told nothing about the author or his qualifications for writing this history.

All in all a good purchase for the racing fan or for the journalist requiring colour for his copy, but the sports historian will find it more useful as a data source than as an analytical stimulus.

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