

Andrew Lemon, with Harold Freedman (artist), *The History of Australian Thoroughbred Racing: Volume 1 - The Beginnings to the First Melbourne Cup*. Classic Reproductions, Melbourne, 1987. Bibliog., index, illus. pp.256 \$65, leather bound limited edition \$210. Available from Mitty's, Queens Street, Melbourne, 3000.

This superbly produced book emanates from a project initiated by the Victorian Racing Club to install a seven-panel mural on the ceiling of the Hill Grandstand at Flemington racecourse which would depict the history of Australian thoroughbred racing. Harold Freedman, one-time state artist for Victoria, was commissioned to paint the mural and Andrew Lemon to research racing's history and to write what will be a three volumed study.

This volume traces the development of the Australian turf from the initial match races and that first official race meeting in Hyde Park in 1810 to the successful inauguration of the Melbourne Cup in 1861; from the days of heats, hacks and hurry skurries to the beginnings of commercialised racing. En route we learn that the great *Archer*, winner of the first two Melbourne Cups, was unplaced in his first race; that streets on the site of the old The barton racecourse in South Australia bear the names in nineteenth century racehorses; and that in 1858 a Victorian Jockeys' Association was established, though as a benefit society not a union and, a sad commentary on the professionalism of the riders, that any member who may meet with a casualty when in the state of intoxication' would not be assisted. Substantial research has been undertaken to reveal the political rivalries and jealousies within and between racing clubs; the changing structure of racing in each Australian colony, including New Zealand; the sexist and class-ridden nature of racing; the sponsorship of early racing by the alcohol trade; and the, perhaps related, misbehaviour by spectators. Moreover, it is a sports history set firmly in its economic, social and political environment.

Lemon has written an exemplary work. There are some rivetting digressions from the main themes but these are set apart from the

main text so that the narrative flows along in a readable, un-muddled style. Such marginalia include biographies of racing personalities, both equine and human, and brief histories of racecourses, racing clubs and significant races.

The book is lavishly presented with over 175 illustrations, including extracts from Freedman's mural, paintings and drawings from several galleries, newspaper cuttings, racecards, maps and even an early photograph of racing in Hobart. Lemon's commentaries on each illustration provide a vital historical corrective to artistic licence: who would have suspected that the mature winning rider depicted in Freedman's painting of *Flying Buck's* triumph in the first Australian Champion Sweepstakes was actually only thirteen years old?

There is an unfortunate proofing error on the first page of chapter one and a footnote reference missing further into the book. But these are aberrations. The overall standard of production is excellent. This magnificent volume is a delight to read, a joy to behold but, above all, it is good history.

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