no-one fully understood him. It is therefore not surprising to read that McPhee spent years ‘oscillating between unalloyed admiration for Wright’s brilliance and dismay at his insensitivities’. McPhee succeeds, at least, in revealing the difficulty and reward inherent in any individual study, and not least of all in ‘Pansy’ Wright.

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The massive tome that is *Australia THROUGH TIME* had been providing a foil for snide postgraduate remarks about the merits of popular histories, particularly those of a pictorial nature, for almost a year prior to this review. This prevailing attitude is a shame, because *Australia THROUGH TIME* is the sort of publication which can attract broad interest in history. However the book is far from an unqualified success.

Despite a number of problems, *Australian THROUGH TIME* actually achieves its objective of providing a general overview of Australian society since 1868. It begins with a publisher’s note about the importance of companies who have fed, clothed and transported Australians throughout the period in question. The publishers in turn decided to express their gratitude by featuring the corporate logos of various sponsors throughout the book. For the most part this subliminal advertising is interesting, in that it provides an indication of how Australian attitudes to consumption have developed. The book suffers, however, from the overzealous promotion of sponsor products. This is particularly the case for coverage of 1989, where one is left thinking that the most important thing about Australian society that year was the Uncle Toby’s real fruit roll-up.

Aside from the avuncular, beaming face of Ray Martin staring out at the potential reader, the layout of the book is quite good, if antiquated. It resembles an annual from the 1960s, though this retro look seems to be more by fault than design. The picture researchers have gone to considerable effort to source quality images, but in most cases the pictures are too small to be effectively interpreted. Despite this there are a number of interesting images of entertainers, the best ones including Yothu Yindi, Barry Humphries and Rolf Harris. My only other criticism of the illustrations is they very rarely correlate with the text.

The text is presented in newspaper format with a tabloid level of journalistic criticism. Each article was chosen to give a feel for the period. Entries are approximately one hundred and fifty words in length and are designed to give a brief
précis of specific events. With a comprehensively compiled index, names and events are easy to find. The chronological format assisted by the ‘at a glance’ supplementary list also makes for accessible reading. So too does the ‘fact file’ section with its annual round up of developments in various areas of society for a particular year. This type of presentation means that only a very brief overview of historical events is presented to the reader. In this respect the book is a good example of the kind of ‘sound-bite journalism’ we regularly see on television. A problem is that it is easy to digest and can seem patronising and simplistic. Perhaps the editors who compiled Australia THROUGH TIME could have shown more faith in the attention span of their prospective audience.

Evidently this book is not one of serious academic achievement. Yet despite this, it is a very typical example of popular pictorial history. I suspect the book’s publishers would not be concerned with this criticism, as the book was designed to provide a lay view of history. Furthermore, I would suggest an appropriate response for those interested in providing such a view of history is to support the publication of general oriented histories. The term ‘pictorial’ should not be regarded as a euphemism for simplistic historical inquiry. Good images need not mean a dumbing down of Australian history. That said, the area of pictorial history requires more considered thought about the potential reading audience than it has been given by the editors of Australia THROUGH TIME.

A final aside is the fiercely nationalistic presentation of Australian icons that adorn the cover. It is interesting to note how many of those ‘dinky-di’ consumer staples are still Australian owned. In many ways this well meaning yet inconsistent message conveyed on the cover of Australia THROUGH TIME is applicable to the book in general.

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Anzacs, the Media and the Great War by John F. Williams, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1999. Pp. x + 288. $35.00 paper.

John F. Williams has conducted an impressive survey of media output during the Great War in Anzacs, the Media and the Great War, yet the priorities implied in the title tend to mask the key strengths of the book. Williams’ speculations about media shaping of the Anzac legend dominate a significant opportunity to analyse local and international attitudes towards key issues of the war.