

ALONG THE SNOWY RIVER

John Hyett

While searching through *Trove*, the digitised Australian newspaper resource at the National Library of Australia (NLA),¹ I came across the report below from the *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 23 July 1908. The lecturer, Mr John Flynn, had been working as a Presbyterian Bush Missionary in the East Gippsland area of Victoria earlier but at the time of the lecture was studying to be a Doctor of Divinity at Melbourne University. Graduating at the end of 1910 he was appointed to a remote area in South Australia, some 500km north of the capital Adelaide. Here he saw and experienced the hardship of living in the outback and in 1912 presented a report to the Presbyterian Church on the issues that he had seen. He was then appointed head of a new organisation, the Australian Inland Mission (AIM) to minister to the spiritual, social and medical needs of the people of the remote outback. By vision, perseverance and hard work the first 'flying doctor' service was established in 1928 and in 1929 the pedal radio was developed and distributed throughout the region to provide rapid communication in times of need.²

Throughout his life the Rev. John Flynn OBE, 'Flynn of the Inland', lectured and campaigned for the AIM, often using lantern slides to illustrate his lectures. The NLA holds over 3,000 of his slides along with diaries, notes, letters and newspaper cuttings and so I thought it might be interesting to see how many of these I could match with the few described in the report below (it would appear from reading the report that the lecture contained around 150 slides). Titles of the slides illustrating this article were derived from accompanying paperwork by the cataloguer at the NLA. The slides that have been hand coloured were all done by T.W. Cameron, 110 Lygon St, Carlton, a retired Methodist minister who ran a successful slide-making business.³

The following newspaper item contains words and phrases that are considered sexist or racially offensive today. It is a historical document from a different time with different standards and does not represent modern thinking nor the views of the current author or publisher.

LECTURE BY MR J. FLYNN

St Andrews schoolroom was filled with a most interested and appreciative audience on Tuesday evening, when Mr J. Flynn delivered a pictorial lecture on Snowy River scenery. Mr Flynn's knowledge of his subject was gained when he was engaged as Presbyterian home missionary in the Buchan and Gelantipy district over which, to its remotest parts, accompanied by his camera, he travelled extensively. Mr Flynn possesses a most refreshing descriptive style, and this, combined with his intimate acquaintanceship of the beautiful scenes depicted on the screen, most of

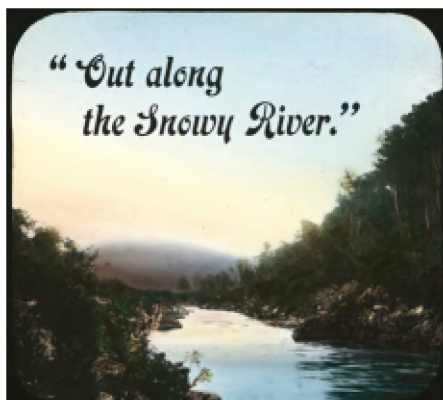
them superbly colored, was the last thing needed to make such a lecture unusually charming and instructive.

Mr F. Lloyd, president of the Bairnsdale Tourist Association, presided in the absence of Mr Jas. Cameron, MLA, who, in a letter of apology, regretted that he was compelled to be at Mallacoota that evening.

Mr Flynn, at the outset, expressed his pleasure at being given an opportunity of bringing before a Bairnsdale audience some glimpses of the scenery to be found along the Snowy River [Fig.1]. He felt some difficulty though, for he supposed that many in the audience know as much about the subject as he did, and these must excuse him if he talked to them as if they were new chums. If he proceeded on that assumption he would take the safest course. In the first place, he had to acknowledge his indebtedness to Mr Bulmer,⁴ who had lent him one-third (50) of the best slides that would be shown that evening, whilst a number of others were from the collection of Sir Thomas Bent.⁵

Pictures of Bairnsdale and Cunninghame⁶ scenery were first shown and admired [Fig. 2]. Next followed scenes dealing with Lake Tyers [Fig. 3], which were greeted with applause. Some of these were highly amusing when a 'bit of life' was introduced. Then the first view of the Snowy as it flowed between the high and shadowy mountains, appeared, and received an ovation. The lecturer said that the Snowy River owed much to Banjo Paterson, and he forthwith proceeded to recite the poet's masterpiece to the accompaniment of ever-changing scenes of the Snowy heights, which simply transported the audience [Fig. 4].⁷ Having thus got his listeners into a most impressionable mood, Mr Flynn proceeded to take them right through the country, beginning from Mount Turnback [Fig. 5], describing with pictures and in language some magnificent views of rugged mountain scenery, in which the silver of the Snowy often appeared. For himself, he said he preferred the wide open sweep of the country, such as could be obtained from the Gelantipy look-out rock, from which the view was very fine indeed. Whilst gazing at the Snowy River in those precipitous regions he had sometimes indulged in 'electric dreams' and saw Bairnsdale supplied with electricity generated from there, and the train driven between Bairnsdale and Melbourne in a shade under eight hours (laughter).⁸ At Butcher's Creek, not far from Mr McRae's residence at Gelantipy, many waterfalls were to be seen. The lecturer pointed to a spot on one of the pictures [Fig. 6] where Mr Jas. Cameron had selected a run where the aspect was most lonely, but where, however, Mr Flynn said "the scenery was good," and what more was wanted. The settlers out there had no neighbors to quarrel with or make friends with either. He then came to the bluffs in the country they called New Guinea, and which were composed of all manner of colors, and looking up at their towering heights, with the blue sky above, there was nothing wanting to complete the magnificence of the picture.

Getting nearer to Buchan a fine view just opposite Slocombes Cave [Fig. 7] was shown. Then came one of the meeting of the waters of the



1. Out along the Snowy River
(John Flynn, National Library of Australia,
nla.obj-142473686)



2. Lakes Entrance, Gippsland
(John Flynn, National Library of Australia,
nla.obj-142280691)



3. Sylvia Bay, Lake Tyers
(John Flynn, National Library of Australia,
nla.obj-142473040)



4. All the cracks had gathered to the fray (John Flynn, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142468843)



5. View of landscape with mountains in the background [from Turnback] (John Flynn, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142407851)



6. Cameron's property in the bush (John Flynn, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142280938)



7. Slocombes Cave, Buchan (John Flynn, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142423802)



8. Snowy River Bridge, Orbost, Victoria (Howard Bulmer, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142366902)



9. Frank Moon lying underneath some stalactites, Buchan Cave, Victoria (Howard Bulmer, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142372957)

Buchan and Snowy Rivers, one of the most picturesque of the evening, and no one disagreed with the speaker when he said the original was "worth going a long way to see". The Buchan River flowed through rough country, from Mount Dawson, which mounted guard over the township of Buchan. Of course, caves were to be found under every bush at Buchan, the speaker remarked parenthetically. Further views of Buchan and its environments were depicted. The Buchan River was noted for being erratic. Some people said it was more erratic than a woman. Certainly it was more dangerous than a woman. One night when a bridge that was being built was half finished, the river swept round to the other side of it, and the bridge was so broken hearted that it never went any further. The law of the river was that if it changed its course and scooped away a few acres of a man's land, the loser could get it back – if he could (laughter). The place the river left was the people's – which was a very good law – and gave Buchan its recreation reserve.

The bluffs on the Buchan River, and which formed the subject of a splendid picture, were magnificent, with their many hues and general surroundings and a cave called the Mabel Cave (he would not guess why)

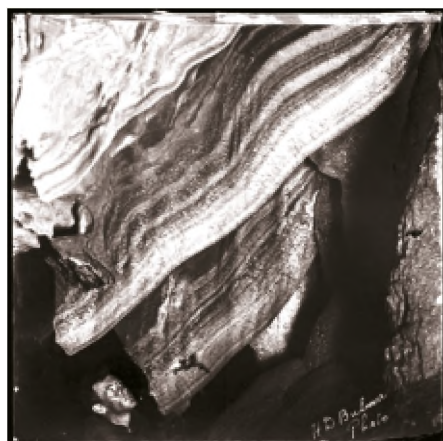
was in the immediate vicinity. Reverting to the Snowy again, the lecturer said the motto of that stream was one long race from start to finish, and a succession of impressive views as it hurried along in its picturesque course brought the audience down from the Snowy heights to the Snowy flats, and they paused on the Orbost bridge [Fig. 8] awhile, before bidding it farewell at a spot where it appeared in its most gentle mood, fringed with the softer foliage of the willow trees.

The Buchan caves were dwelt upon interestingly. A full-size photo of the athletic and daring curator, Mr Frank Moon [Fig. 9], was shown, and was greeted with applause. The pictures of the caves were excellent and although they could not depict the dazzling brilliance of the formations, the tints in the 'Shawls' [Fig. 10] and 'Blankets' [Fig. 11] were very faithfully portrayed, and the lecturer supplied the rest.

Settlers' houses in the outback ranging from the more pretentious 'homestead' and further sylvan scenes took up the attention of the audience for a space. After showing a group of settlers and their numerous children gathered together for divine service [Fig. 12], the lecturer criticized the Government for refusing to provide schooling to



10. The Shawls, Fairy Cave, Buchan (John Flynn, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-136812584)



11. The Blankets, Fairy Cave, Buchan, Victoria (Howard Bulmer, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142371259)

these outback children, because it affirmed that there were not enough to be taught. It was time somebody rose up and taught the Education Department ('hear, hear'). A country school, built of bark, but resplendent with a roof of galvanized iron [Fig. 13], was next displayed, and which Mr Flynn said reminded him of King Billy of Lake Tyers dressed in the latest style, in a silk hat and a boot lace (laughter). The school was so beautifully simple below and so wretchedly twentieth-century on the top. The lecturer improved the occasion by reciting Lawson's lines on a bush school and "the old black horse that carried three or four". The old black horse was not in the running with the one that just at that moment made its appearance on the screen amidst much merriment and applause, and which was depicted as carrying no less than five [Fig. 14]. Some pathetic features of the settlers' life were pictured and



12. Church party
(John Flynn, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142269557)



13. Two children seated on bench next to school house (John Flynn, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142469842)



14. Five unidentified boys riding on a horse (John Flynn, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142457345)



15. Moonrise
(John Flynn, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142406959)



16. Interior of the lower hatchery, Clinton (John Flynn, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142258806)

these people labored were enormous in having to procure their fry all the way from the Geelong and Ballarat hatcheries, and to be able to start away from Bairnsdale with fine, fresh fry would confer a benefit on them which they would not be slow to take advantage of. Some views of hatcheries [Fig. 16] were shown during the course of the evening.

Songs were sung by Misses Sabeston and Chambers and Messrs F. and A. Lloyd. Miss Chambers also played an overture. Refreshments were served out, and the proceedings were then terminated with the singing of the National Anthem.

spoken on feelingly, and the lecture was then concluded with a few 'back door' views taken from the speaker's home whilst at Buchan, the final and most beautiful one being of the moon rising over the hills [Fig. 15], when "poetry floods the soul; and the tongue fails".

A very appreciative vote of thanks to Mr Flynn was carried with acclamation, on the motion of Mr W. R. Yeats. In responding, Mr Flynn, referring to the tourist association's efforts, said he hoped that Bairnsdale would work in unison with all the East Gippsland centres and Sale in a common attempt to attract tourists to the district. He made a special appeal on behalf of Gelantipy, and anyone who visited Buchan should not neglect to do the extra 20 miles to Gelantipy in order to view the rugged grandeur of the mountain scenery there. He also urged the establishment of fish hatcheries at Bairnsdale, which he said were simple to construct and easy and inexpensive to manage, and which would prove invaluable, not only to the town itself, but to the East Gippsland people who were endeavoring to stock their streams with trout. The disabilities under which

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. www.trove.nla.gov.au
2. www.flyingdoctor.org.au/about-the-rfds/history/john-flynn-bio/
3. For more on Cameron see John Hyett, 'In Search of T.W. Cameron Slide Specialist, *MLS Newsletter* 106, December 2011 pp.9-11
4. Howard Decimus Bulmer, 1883-1950, photographer, Bairnsdale
5. Sir Thomas Bent, land speculator, Premier and Treasurer of the State of Victoria from 1904 to February 1909, died September 1909 www.adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bent-sir-thomas-2978
6. Now renamed Lakes Entrance
7. A.B. ('Banjo') Paterson, 'The Man from Snowy River'
*There was movement at the station, for the word had passed around
That the colt from Old Regret had got away,
And had joined the wild bush horses – he was worth a thousand pound,
So all the cracks had gathered to the fray.
All the tried and noted riders from the stations near and far
Had mustered at the homestead overnight,
For the bushmen love hard riding where the wild bush horses are,
And the stock-horse snuffs the battle with delight.*
8. Today a four-hour rail journey