

Tenth Australiana Virtual Show and Tell Report

February 2021

All reports are on line: <https://www.australiana.org.au/news>

Hoping to keep Australiana active

The VS&T is intended to entertain members and offer an opportunity to share, inform, discuss and ask questions about items they hold in their private collections.

In viewing the reports please bear in mind that there are limitations to identification when only seeing photographs, so these are, in some cases a “best guess” although other responses have had considerable expertise applied to them.

New items to australiana.queensland@gmail.com or the Secretary please.

Any members who believe that they have better or additional information or alternative hypotheses than those recorded in the reports are invited to please provide them by email to the above address.

At this stage, as will be seen by the small number of items received in the last two months, it appears that interest in the VS&T is flagging. Any future editions will therefore be intermittent at best.

Future editions of the Virtual Show and Tell are entirely dependent on items being provided by members.

When sending items for inclusion please send good quality photographs of items standing upright and preferably on a white base and white background. Images sent as attachments to emails, rather than imbedded in the body of the email, will be better quality. JPEG image files should be between 1 and 3 MB to give good reproduction. Dimensions: height, width and depth in cm please.

Yvonne Barber and David Bedford, editors, 18 February 2021

1. Late 19th Century Australian Blackwood metamorphic/Library chair- 1890-1900

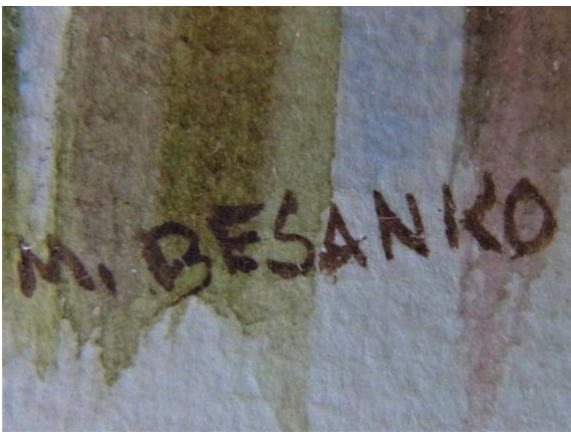


Size: 87 x 41 x 36 cm (open)

Metamorphic library chairs are very desirable because they are multi-purpose and also show off a chair-maker's skill. Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) is a strong timber and therefore ideally suited to pieces requiring structural strength like this one. However, this editor has seen other examples in Australian Cedar.

This example was purchased from a dealer who used it in his own home for about 20 years.

2 & 3. Watercolour and gouache paintings of Australian birds by M. Besanko



Artists signature (on item 2)



2.



3.

2. Male variegated fairywren (*Malurus lamberti*), watercolour and gouache. Size 24.2 x 18.7 cm

3. Female forest Kingfisher (*Todiramphus macleayi*), watercolour and gouache (unsigned). Size 24.2 x 18.7 cm

Two of a group of five paintings of bird species native to Australia bought by the owner in 2006. According to the auctioneer selling the paintings the artist had been commissioned by Australia Post to design some ornithological themed stamps. However, so far, the owner has not been able to trace the artist or a matching stamp issue. It may be that the paintings represent submissions to a competition but were not selected.

It is an interesting facet of artistic work that illustrators do not seem to be listed as artists and therefore may not be as easily researched. We have not been able to find any information that definitely identifies this M Besanko. Any assistance that a member may be able to provide in this regard would be appreciated by the owner.

“Stamp printing facilities in Australia in the early 1950’s were limited to one-colour intaglio printing. In 1956, two of the stamps issued as part of the XVIth Olympiad Melbourne stamp issue were printed in multi-colour overseas. Work began on the 1964–65 ‘definitives’ at the beginning of 1959, when Betty Temple Watts (1901-1992) produced a series of paintings to test out different compositions for producing multi-coloured designs following the purchase of new photogravure equipment.

The next Australian philatelic ‘first’ involving bird-themed stamps occurred in 1978, with the release of the first in a series Australian Birds definitive issues (1978–80), designed by Kay Breedon Williams, a highly regarded Australian wildlife artist and co-author and illustrator of seven books on Australian wildlife.

This was the first decimal stamp issue with denominations ranging from 1c to \$1. They were (in order of issue): 5c Hooded Dotterel; 20c Little Grebe; 25c Spurwing Plover; 30c Pied Oystercatcher; 55c Lotus-bird; 1c Zebra Finch; 2c Crimson Finch; 15c Forest Kingfisher; 20c Eastern Yellow Robin; 40c Lovely Wren; 50c Flame Robin; 22c White Tailed Kingfisher; 28c

Rainbow Bird; 60c King Parrot; 10c Golden Shouldered Parrot; 35c Regent Bower Bird; 45c Masked Woodswallow; 80c Rainbow Pitta; \$1 Western Magpie; and 18c Spotted Catbird.”

If there was a competition for the design, this is probably the one to which M Besanko entered these fine bird illustrations (see 15c and 40c stamps).

4. Engraved Fijian Tabua



A whale's tooth on a coconut/cocoanut fibre cord chain inscribed: To Thomas Edward/ MULLINS/ RAN 1606/ FOR Service in the/ action between/ H.M.A.S. SYDNEY/ and the German/ Cruiser S.M.S EMDEN/ Nov 9th, 1914. Size: L. 13. 5 cm W 6. 0 cm approx. 300g

The owner states “there is a layer of lacquer or similar all over the tooth. The suspension cord (110 cm long approx.) is of a box type shape and attached to the tooth via string, which is threaded through a drilled hole each end.” The vendor did not vouch for the tooth's genuineness when the owner bought it some 15+ years ago. However, the owner has since had it confirmed as a genuine whale's tooth.

HMAS *Sydney's* victory over the SMS *Emden* was very significant for Australia in the First World War. The safety of Australian troops being transported to the conflict in Europe and in North Africa was uppermost in importance, as was maintaining Australia's communication lines with our allies. The SMS *Emden* had proven very effective in disrupting and sinking allied shipping all the way from India to China, so was being actively hunted. *Emden's* commander decided to try to destroy the Australian telegraph station on the Cocos Islands, which linked Australia to the rest of the world. They attacked using a deception – they

disguised the funnel arrangement on their ship - but the station saw through it and managed to get out a distress signal. HMAS *Sydney* was sent to investigate and came under fire from the Emden, suffering casualties and some damage. However, Captain Glossop moved out of range of the Emden's 4-inch guns and caused enormous damage to the Emden with HMAS *Sydney*'s heavier, longer range 6-inch guns. The Emden caught fire and was forced to beach itself to save the remainder of its crew.

On the National Archives of Australia records there are two different entries on the digitized RAN service cards for Mullins:

[MULLINS THOMAS EDWARD : Date of birth - 15 May 1882 : Service Number: 1606](#)
[Place of birth - LEICESTER ENGLAND : Place of enlistment - SYDNEY : Next of Kin - MULLINS EDITH](#)

Mullins received a Long Service & Good Conduct medal for 12 years' service in May 1924 and later the 1935 Jubilee medal. There is no detailed mention of the Sydney/Emden conflict on his service card, but he did receive "Prize Money £20".

Scrimshaw Expert's response: Your whale's tooth is a Fijian Tabua on a cocoanut fibre cord chain. It is a raw/unpolished tooth. Most teeth were scraped and shaved smooth before being used. Fijian chiefs wore these Tabua around their neck as a sign of office. The darker colouration came from being worn against the skin of the owner. Tabua were not usually inscribed, or else inscribed very basically with only a few words at most.

That leaves some questions: Why would a Fijian Tabua be engraved to someone in the RAN? Also, why a Fijian Tabua when the HMAS *Sydney*'s success over the Emden was at the Cocos Keeling Islands north-west of Australia and Fiji is far to the east of Australia?

Our research editor has found the following information to answer those questions.

"The gifting of *tabua* was traditionally a great ceremonial event in Fiji. They were given as offerings for war or peace, as tokens to symbolise marriage or as payment of bride price. As the gifting and exchange of *tabua* was a serious business, they were traditionally possessions of chiefs and other renowned individuals. Even today, *tabua* continue to be valued by Fijians, and are still ritually exchanged at a range of events and ceremonies."

Thomas Edward Mullins, a china repairer, age 18 signed on for a 12-year period in the Royal Navy in 1900, though his final service was August 1906. He married Edith Florence Thompson in Leicester in 1905 and they emigrated to Brisbane at the end of 1909. Their son Colin was born in Preston, Victoria 19 January 1911. Thomas joined the Royal Australian Navy in 1912 and was based at HMAS *Cerberus* on Western Port Bay Victoria. Mullins later served on HMAS *Sydney* arriving in Suva, Fiji 16 October 1914, which was most likely when the Tabua was acquired or gifted (though not necessarily to Mullins at that stage). After coaling they proceeded to Sydney to dock and overhaul generally and then left for Western Australia to take on additional crew.

HMAS *Sydney* came under fire from SMS *Emden* near the Cocos Islands 9 November 1914. Perhaps Mullins had played some special part in the defeat of the *Emden* and was given the engraved Tabua?

5. Australian Department of Defence Female Relative Badge



Sterling silver and enamel. Size: 3.8 x 2.9 cm

Two different versions of Female Relative Badges were issued in Australia during the First World War. One was issued to the nearest female relative of soldiers, airmen, nurses, and masseuses who left Australia for active service abroad.

The badge is silver with blue enamelled background, silver raised lettering "Issued by Dept. of Defence to Women of Australia for Duty Done".

The cutwork centre is 'A.I.F.' There is a number stamped on the back to identify the recipient. In this example stamped '145078' it was for Lillian Beatrice Cutler whose husband Charles Edward Cutler served with the 34th and 35th Battalion in France. The reverse is also stamped with the manufacturer 'Stokes & Sons' 'Melb' 'Stg sil'.

In other examples of the badge (represented in the Australian War Memorial REL/11143) a bar was suspended below the badge to indicate additional relatives involved in the war effort.

Another badge was to the nearest female relative of members of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) who had enlisted for general naval sea service for at least a period of the war, and who performed service outside Australian waters (Australian War Memorial REL/18508).

During WWI, Stokes and Sons produced the many badges and insignia and other personal items for outfitting of the Australian and New Zealand armed forces. The well-equipped factory was later engaged in defence production for the Ministry of Munitions.

A report in the Sunday Times Sydney 15 June 1919 p.16 indicated the badges promised in 1917 had not yet been provided in the quantity required.

"There is no decoration more justly earned nor more proudly worn than the silver and blue enamel badge which the Defence Department issues to the nearest female relative of an Australian soldier. Unfortunately the badges are being issued in a very tardy fashion. The department which deals with them is housed in a few huts at the Hyde Park Recruiting Depot. Enquiry there elicited the information that, owing to delay in delivery by the contractors, only a very few badges are on hand, and consequently they are for the present issuing only on personal application. Be this as it may, we are fully in accord with a correspondent who asks: 'Why should the Government spend so much on medals for little children while we mothers are waiting for the badges promised us long ago?'"

6. NSW Gould League Badge



Metal and enamel. Size: 2 x 3.3 cm

The white-throated robin-chat or white-throated robin (*Cossypha humeralis*) illustrated on the badge is a species of bird endemic to Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. Its natural habitats are dry savannah and subtropical or tropical dry shrubland. It eats mainly insects but also eats small vertebrates and some plant material. Its diet includes beetles, termites, ants, crickets, caterpillars, spiders and millipedes.

The NSW Gould League was founded in 1909 to encourage the love and protection of Australian native birds. That makes it strange that this does not illustrate an example of an Australian native bird. Perhaps a league member could enlighten us? The name honours the work of the English couple Elizabeth and John Gould who spent two years in Australia from 1838, collecting in Tasmania, New South Wales and South Australia. Elizabeth was an excellent artist who prepared the plates for 84 of the illustrations in *Birds of Australia*. Her husband John was a prominent naturalist and publisher.

The badges were made by A J Parkes. Parkes was an experienced die sinker from the Royal Mint, London. He founded his business at 3 Gregory Terrace, Brisbane, in 1896, producing medallions, medalets and uniform buttons and badges for the armed forces and Government departments. His work was of high quality, and he increased the business to produce a wide range of medallic products. The growing business moved to Lower George Street, Brisbane. Parkes retired in 1941, selling the business to Eric Faux. The business moved back to Gregory Terrace, but remained there for only 11 years, moving to their current complex in Salisbury in 1961. Eric's sons Edgar and Clive joined the firm, eventually becoming CEO and Production Manager respectively.

7. Small stoneware jug with brown-black glaze



An attractive ribbed glaze jug, base impressed “Stoneware Old Ballarat Pottery Australia” with a kangaroo. Size: 11 x 11 cm, base 5.5 cm

The Old Ballarat Pottery was set up by John Gilbert as part of the Old Ballarat Village, opposite Sovereign Hill. Gilbert had established the Edinburgh Pottery at Sovereign Hill in 1972 to enable visitors to see traditional trades at work.

John Gilbert's career peaked during the 60s and 70s exhibiting nationally and internationally. He was responsible for one of the largest production potteries in Australia at the time with the formation of the Old Ballarat Pottery (a registered company from 1984-1994); Large numbers of potters were trained during its operational period. At its peak this pottery employed over forty throwers and an almost equal number of glazers, kiln loaders and general pottery hands. They produced items for sale through department stores and on party plan via Faberware as well as through the village. Early works looked as though they may have been made in the 1850s, with unturned bases, crude marks and dark treacle-like glazes.

Peter Pilven, one of Gilbert's students, worked there after graduating from the Ballarat College of Advanced Education, teaching pottery throwing to students like the potter John Ferguson, who was there from 1978-79. Potters were initially employed by Gilbert's company Pontresina Pty Ltd, registered in 1973. Early works are marked with an impressed long-tailed 'B', or an 'OB' on either side of a mine tower. A printed stamp also features a mine tower surrounded by the text 'Old Ballarat Pottery Made in Australia'. Later work such as this example is impressed 'Stoneware Old Ballarat Pottery Australia' with a kangaroo.

8. Silvered bronze medal commemorating 150 years of white settlement in 1938



Size: 6.3 x 6.3 cm

Presented to Tom Booth for his homing/racing pigeons. Medal made by Amor, Sydney in a mintage of 1000. The initials V.V. on the obverse (portrait side) is that of the Estonian artist/engraver Vanbola Veinberg who came to Australia and joined the firm of Amor. The initials C.E. on the reverse is that of the artist-designer Charles Eccles. This medal is illustrated and described in Les Carlisle's book Australian historical medals 1788-1988, self-published, Sydney 2008. Printer Ligar Book Printing, ref. 1938/7

A brief reference was made to the 150th anniversary medals in the Taree, NSW newspaper *The Northern Champion* 8 Jan 1939 p8.

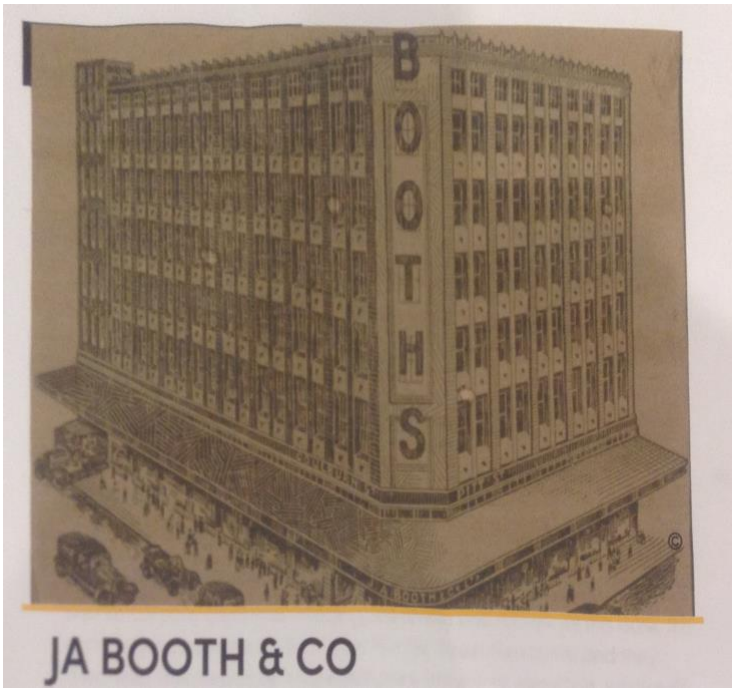


T. A. Booth holding Blue Cheq. Cock N.R.P. 67-7638. Winner of six 1st prizes and many others in three years years of racing, has also won 1st prize in Pools in four races this 1970 Season

T. A. Booth – born in Annandale in 1894 – d.1970 – Pigeon fancier and relative of a member. According to the *Pigeon Fancier Federation and Club News* magazine of August 1970 Tom's family moved to Concord NSW where Tom got to know a couple of junior flyers. Tom acquired a pair of pigeons known as Pied Squeakers and before long he 'had them flying regular tosses from Cleveland Street Sydney School.' Later he obtained 'some of the Barker---C Union Blood and the Tancred Barker Blood' from different breeders to develop his own strain of Booth's Barkers'.

Tom started racing in 1909 with the Western Suburbs Club which had a strong membership, in which his birds won many races. " In 1916 he imported 10 birds from Oliver Dix of 'Spangle' fame, these birds breeding some great racers, progeny from these imported birds flying the hard Mildura in 1917 and homing 3 out of 5 on the day..."

The writer of the article in the magazine said that he came to the conclusion that Tom was the greatest pigeon fancier Australia had, as not only did he win races with his birds but also other fanciers in other States won major races with Tom's birds or birds bred from them. 'In 1949 from Gympie, 533 miles, 2,000 birds were liberated , of which only 4 birds were home on the day – he owned three of these, clocking two in the one thimble to win 1st Haberfield club, 2nd Federation and the fourth pigeon, the Federation winner, was his blood also'.



What may be of more interest to Australiana members is that Tom owned J.A. Booth & Co – a Sydney furniture and furnishing retailer for over 50 years, established by his father James Alfred Booth. Around 1931 J.A. Booth & Co moved to the Corner of Goulburn & Pitt Streets, Brickfield Hill. The 1933 catalogue featured a large volume of furniture, including a number of suites made of Queensland maple or walnut, as well as carpets, bedding, ice chests and radios. By this date they had established a regional branch in Hunter Street, Newcastle and described themselves as “manufacturers, importers, wholesale and retail furniture warehousemen and lounge suite specialists”. It remained in business until the 1970’s.

In the 1950’s people would come into the store and trade in their iron beds and cedar furniture for Formica! The trade ins were then taken to ‘Tempe Tip’, Sydney. For the information of interstate

members, Tempe Tip was then and remains a charity shop, run by the Salvation Army.

The thought of that mid-century modern furniture will tantalise some Australiana Society members, while others will wish that they had visited Tempe Tip for some 19th Century bargains!

9. Macadamia Nut Bowl and nutcracking mallet. Circa 1930



Made by Shott and Son, Launceston, Tasmania. Size: 5 cm x 24 cm diam. Mallet 27 cm long x 3.5 cm diam. x 6 cm

A turned, fiddleback-figured Blackwood bowl with centre chromed brass capped anvil and fiddleback-figured Blackwood mallet with chromed brass capped striking surfaces. Other examples similar to this have been seen by the owners.



Paper label “Shott & Son manufacturers Blackwood souvenirs 60 George St Launceston Tas” The wavy margin and serif font of the label may indicate an origin earlier in the history of the firm. It appears that later labels were sans serif font and smooth margined circular labels.

10. Macadamia Nut Bowl and nutcracking mallet in a casuarina-like timber



Circa 1930. Unknown maker. Bowl and mallet made from *Allocasuarina verticillata* (most probably) with copper sheet circles to the anvil and mallet face. Size 5.5 cm, 19 diam. cm, mallet 16 x 6.8 cm

A smaller nut bowl made from an interesting timber. This is the only example of the use of a casuarina timber in a nut bowl that the owner has seen. The casuarinas (genera *Allocasuarina* and *Casuarina*) usually, though not always, show the large medullary rays that give the distinctive figure. When the rays are a different colour to the remainder of the timber it gives these striking contrasted figures, seen best in radial cuts of the timber (from the outside to the centre of the trees).

11. Tazza, comport or fruit bowl, Northern Silky Oak



Early to mid C20th, Queensland origin. 17 x 27.5 diam. cm

The Merriam Webster dictionary online (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tazza>) illustrates a tazza. It notes that the first known use of the word was in 1824. It says the word is derived from Italian, for cup, tazza, and from Arabic *ṭassa*, *ṭass*, *ṭasht* basin, originally from the Persian word *tasht*.

The first one of these that the owner saw was Tasmanian and made of Musk (*Olearia argophylla*) but it proved elusive, so this Queensland example has had to serve. They make an attractive and useful centre-piece for a table and can also be used to serve fruit and delicacies.

12. Foot stool, Birds-eye Huon Pine veneered footstool with four flat bun feet



Tasmanian, circa 1840 or earlier. Upholstered in black diamond pattern haircloth. Size: 13.5 x 32 x 32 cm

As many previous examples of small stools on the VS&T have indicated, these were sometimes known as gout stools. But were also favoured by those of smaller stature needing assistance with comfort or access. The form of the stool is unexceptional but the timber, especially the birds-eye figure veneer lifts this one to a higher level.

It has been stated to the owner that such stools were often made by upholsterers rather than cabinetmakers. Some solid timber similar examples could possibly fit into that category, but this one would appear to be a cabinetmaker's example. It must also be remembered that in the C19th many cabinetmakers were also upholsterers and undertakers, so the distinction may not be as real as it first appears.

13. Fiddleback Blackwood trinket box. Circa 1930-40 (first half of C20th)



Tasmanian. Size: 8.5 x 30.5 x 14.5 cm

A beautifully figured, well-made trinket box with chamfer-edged lid in superb, all round fiddleback-figured Blackwood. The construction is unusual and takes advantage of the highly figurative timber to disguise the lapped-butt-joined corners. The front and rear faces are considerably rebated at the ends, so the sides butt join to a thin piece of the face. With the ornate figure and slight rounding to the corners the end-grain of the front and rear faces is almost invisible on the sides. This is most probably a machine-made, commercial product. The inner liner is also Blackwood and the box is polished and very clean inside with no signs of ever having had a drop-in tray or interior fittings. The hinges are inexpensive sheet metal and nailed/tacked in place. It is fairly typical of souvenir and gift ware items and would be unexceptional if not for the figuring of the timber, something for which Blackwood is renowned.