

BOOK REVIEW

Mim Regan

Genealogical Society of the Northern Territory Inc

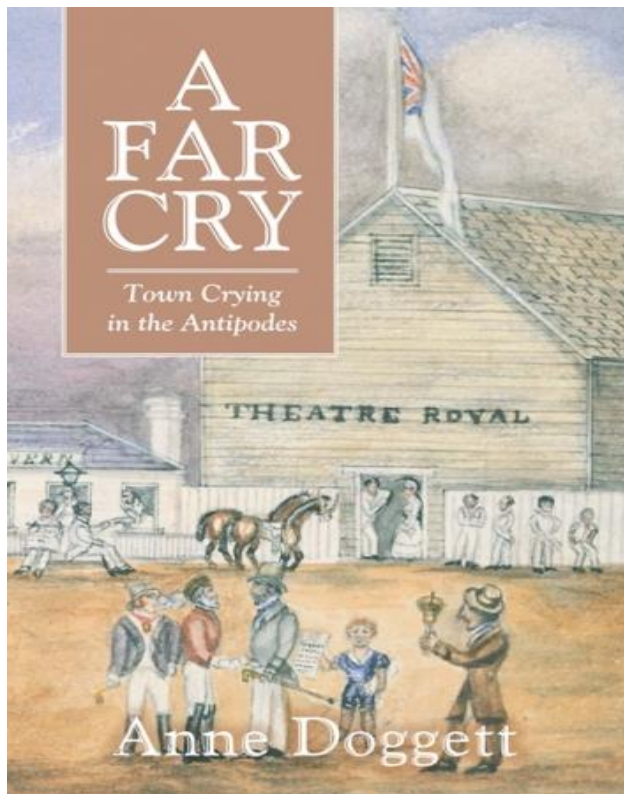
A FAR CRY

Town Crying in the Antipodes

By Anne Doggett

Published by Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd 2015

"Hear Yea, Hear Yea"



Who in their right mind would write a book of 130 pages about Town Criers? And who in their right mind would find it so fascinating? I was amazed that such an unusual topic could be so interesting, touching on so many aspects of life in Australia throughout the years, reflecting the social and cultural changes of life.

The book is structured to include the history and sights and sounds of town criers or Bellmen and their job of informing, protecting and entertaining, concluding with their role today. Put your hand up if you remember people outside shops in Casuarina with microphones, trying to get you and your money inside or the big bloke with the drum outside the boxing tent at the Show. Town Criers in our lifetime.

Anne continually mentions different town criers, just a giving a taste of their lives, motives, backgrounds and eventful demise. My favourites are James Frederick "Punch" Anthony of Castlemaine and John ...Call me Joseph...Chewass of Ballarat known as Joe the Bellman who doubled as an organ player, of some note. He may have entertained my colourful Irish relatives. These Bellmen were fascinating people Anne leaves you wanting to know more, even about 'Chequers' of Launceston who apparently sounded like a combination of a crow and a laughing jackass...really sounds inspiring. Many were extroverts displaying different degrees of drunkenness, vagrancy, petty crime, wit and abilities that included clowning, singing with a deep understanding of their communities.

I think I could have been a Town Crier. I am loud and nosey, all good characteristics. I even grew up in an old gold mining town, where the danger of mine shafts should have limited some of my more dangerous childhood games. What we needed was a Town crier who could have loudly warned of danger and, on occasion, found lost

kids. We would have really appreciated someone to yell out the time when we couldn't see that the street lights were on already.

This book is a great read. It includes 30 pages of terrific illustrations as an additional bonus. Now I know Town Criers do more than announce the time and royal babies. As Anne says " In representing our past they benefit and brighten our present.