

***Dunera Lives:***  
***A Visual History* (Monash University Publishing)**  
**by Ken Inglis, Seumas Spark and Jay Winter with Carol Bunyan**  
**Launch Speech, National Library of Australia, 4 July 2018**

**Frank Bongiorno**

Good evening. I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Ngunnawal people, and pay my respects to their elders, past and present. And, of course, I acknowledge members of the Inglis, Turner and *Dunera* families.

*Dunera Lives: A Visual History* is a result of the historical project to which Professor Ken Inglis devoted the last years of a long and fruitful life as a historian. It is also the product of a great friendship between the co-authors; between Ken and Jay Winter, stretching back many decades, and between Ken, Jay and Seumas Spark, one of more recent vintage, but the bond between Ken and Seumas more like kinship than friendship in Ken's final years.

It is testament to Ken's own gift of friendship that he was able to bring together these fine scholars to research and write *Dunera Lives* and, with the help of the excellent Monash University Publishing, to see it through to completion. And as explained in the general introduction, the book has benefited enormously from the continuing research of Carol Bunyan on the *Dunera* internees. I'm sure you will agree, one you've had a chance to see it and, I hope, to buy a copy, that *Dunera Lives: A Visual History* is a remarkably beautiful volume. Less obvious, until you've had a chance to begin reading it, will be that it is also both meticulous and humane in its scholarship.

There are clues in this book about why Ken might have become interested in this subject. We only need to read a few pages before we encounter Franz Philipp, an art historian, who was listed in bureaucratic records as a 'farm labourer'. There is a reason for that; he had been a farm labourer in Britain. But before that, he had attended the University of Vienna, studied art history, and worked on a doctoral dissertation before his expulsion for being a Jew. After internment at Hay and Tatura, he joined the army and began studying history at the University of Melbourne. He topped his honours class in 1946 and was appointed a senior tutor at the university. *Dunera Lives* refers to him as 'a legendary teacher, helping to bring the fruits of Viennese scholarship on art history to a generation of Australian students'.

But we might also encounter a discussion of Franz Philipp in the incomparable oral history collections of the National Library of Australia, notably in an interview conducted with Ken Inglis in the mid-1980s. When Ken was a second-year history student, he wrote an essay on Machiavelli for Philipp. Ken could not decipher the marker's comments, which were in German script. But the student gained more than clarification when he met with Philipp. 'Have you ever thought of being an academic?', his tutor asked him. 'And that was just a golden moment in my life', Ken recalled. 'Because I had never dared to think of it until then.' If Philipp had contributed nothing else to Australian intellectual and cultural life – and, in fact,

he contributed much, such as his scholarship on Arthur Boyd – we should still be as grateful for that moment as a lanky teenager from Preston was.

We gain a glimpse of young Ken on page 401 on *Dunera Lives*, there among a group of eight residents of Queen's College at the University of Melbourne who achieved first-class results in their examinations. The photo is in the book because it also includes George Nadel, a *Dunera* migrant and a historian; in the same picture, there is the economist, Max Corden, another refugee from Nazi Germany, but not on the *Dunera*. Ken's college, Queen's, appears in the story at other moments, too; it is where the polymath ethnologist, Leonhard Adam, took up residence when he went to work at the University of Melbourne. And there is a pencil and watercolour drawing of the college on page 370. Another *Dunera* internee, Georg Duerrheim, also lived at Queen's. His medical studies, almost complete at the University of Vienna when the *Anschluss* intervened, were resumed at the University of Melbourne. *Dunera Lives* explains: 'Duerrheim was a Roman Catholic, classified Jewish by the Nazis, living in a Methodist institution'. Here is the kind of irony that Ken loved – those layers and patterns of human experience that defy the effort to render the past tidy and predictable.

In the global scheme of things, the incarceration of the roughly 2500 men and boys of the *Dunera* – and the 265 of the *Queen Mary* whose stories are also told here – might have been at the more benign end of the World War Two experience on incarceration. But we don't even begin to understand that experience if we stop there. For one thing, these men share, with others who experienced more brutal forms of incarceration during the Second World War and at other times in the twentieth century, its fundamental irrationality. 'What was their crime?', the authors of this book ask at the outset. Their 'crime', in short, was that they had found themselves 'enemy aliens' in Britain in 1940. Up to the time war broke out, they were 'refugees' from a regime, Nazi Germany, that was widely acknowledged as behaving brutally towards its enemies. The Nazis treated Jews as their most hated enemy, but, contrary to the popular perception, not all of those on the *Dunera* would have been considered Jewish under Nazi law: more like four in five.

Conditions on the journey itself were appalling, a 'gratuitous exercise in brutality', as the authors describe their treatment. Authorities treated the internees' protests with contempt. A later enquiry settled for a while on the possibility that an Englishman named Gannef might have been responsible – until it was realised that this was the Yiddish word for 'thief'. The internees were not told where they were going, but were soon enough able to work out that it was not Canada. They were at constant risk of being torpedoed, as had happened to another ship not long before the *Dunera* departed. Indeed, some of those on the latter were survivors from the former.

After these humiliations, life in the camps at Hay, Tatura and Orange was perhaps more boring and frustrating than humiliating, but the internees created a rich life for themselves behind the wire. They already had a constitution, which they had written in German on toilet paper during the voyage. Toilet paper also came in handy for Hans Lindau, the future geography teacher, who committed his study of the botany of Australia to 2500 sheets. In camp, the men read and they studied, they wrote poems and – as this book shows

in a quite astonishing way – they painted and they drew. They ran camp newspapers, and they played sport. At Tatura, they organised a university, the *Collegium Taturense*. Learning mattered to these mainly middle-class central European men. There were concerts and performances. Snow White was popular, with the story given a modern complexion; in a performance mounted in Melbourne after release from camp, Snow White has been put ‘in a concentration camp because of the doubtful Aryan origin of her creators, Brothers Grimm’. In the script, Hitler was ‘Shitler’.

It is fashionable today to bemoan the ways in which our understanding of Australian history has been constricted by nationally-bounded ways of seeing. *Dunera Lives* shows that skilled historians can present powerful stories that are at once local, national and transnational. What a treat it is to see the Good Soldier Schwejk, in paintings by internee Fritz Schönbach, transferred to Tatura. And surely he does belong in Australia as much as in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, for he belongs wherever one finds war-fuelled futility.

In this book’s illustrations, we encounter a group of Europeans, not for the first time, coming to terms with the Australian environment. It was not just the dust storm that greeted them at Hay, but also the light, the colour, and those gum trees that can seem so strange to untutored eyes, the kind that lined Nardoo Crescent here in Canberra, where Ken, Amirah and their family spent years of their lives. The authors note the fascination of *Dunera* artists with eucalypts, which they painted frequently. There are some stunningly beautiful illustrations in this book, and they are not merely decorative; they help tell the story, but their existence is also part of the story. There were trained and talented artists among the *Dunera* internees, such as Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, who went on to teach art at Geelong Grammar. This book assembles a visual record of astonishing richness, beautifully presented by authors and publisher.

There is another *Dunera* volume planned; a narrative and interpretation to complement this visual history. I expect it will be powerful, and it will need to be, if it is going to match the force of the book that we celebrate here tonight. We are all familiar with the eloquence of the picture. For that reason, I hesitate to try to describe the extraordinary photograph on page 16 of this book. It is 14 December 1938, and Gerd Bernstein, now Bren Brent – a couple of days away from his sixteenth birthday – is raising a glass to his father, mother and grandmother. The youth’s picture is visible on the wall. There are flowers and other things on the table that look like gifts, perhaps from the boy to his family. It is impossible to miss the anxiety, and the sadness, on the faces of this Jewish family, just a month after *Kristallnacht*, as they bid their son farewell. He would leave the next day on the *Kindertransport* for Britain. As the book’s conclusion says, here is an apparently ordinary cultural setting in a Jewish family that acquires an extraordinary set of meanings from our knowledge of its context.

So, in these pages we have some stories of a group of people who were at once victims of Hitler and Churchill. The later stages of this book evoke the many things they did with their lives during and after the war. Fewer than 700 were living in Australia by 1950, but the authors trace the lives of many who left to live overseas. In some cases, that’s not so very hard, such

as in the case of the artist Hein Heckroth who won the 1948 Academy Award for best art design in *The Red Shoes*. A particular favourite of mine is Sigurd Lohde who, as Sydney Loder, won a part in the postwar Ealing production of the film *Eureka Stockade*. To act alongside Chips Rafferty and Peter Finch in a film about the Ballarat goldfield rebellion; if that's not assimilation, there's no such thing, but Lohde soon left for West Berlin where he opened a tavern and continued to act in minor film and television roles. Did he take much of Australia back with him? Well, he did call his tavern 'Das Känguruh'.

Fred Schonbach, who provides so much of the rich visual record found in these pages, became a distinguished illustrator and artist in Argentina and the United States after leaving Australia. Erwin Fabian worked in the same field as Schonbach in London, but returned to Australia where, among other things, he sculpted in heavy metals. Post-war Australian academia benefited from the contributions of Fred Gruen in economics, Peter Herbst in Philosophy, Henry Mayer and Hugo Wolfsohn in political science, and Rainer Radok in mathematics and oceanography. In sport, there was Franz Stampfl, that great athletics coach who, among other distinctions, helped Ralph Doubell to his gold medal in Mexico City in 1968. *Dunera* graduates – and the word seems apt – went on to distinguished careers in education, journalism, business and law. But as the authors point out, perhaps the greatest achievement of the *Dunera* internees as a group is that they did not seemingly allow the manner in which they had been treated by the authorities during the war define their postwar lives.

Like quite a great deal of Australian history, the *Dunera* episode entered national consciousness in the 1980s, in large part via our television screens. In this telling, these were 'the *Dunera* boys'. The internees were mainly 'grown men', but the surviving internees often embraced their affectionate characterisation as 'the *Dunera* boys'. The later stages of this book demonstrate how a community of memory has been created and maintained around *Dunera*, by the internees themselves, as well as by their families as the internees' ranks thin. This history is, among other things, a contribution to the maintenance of that community.

The camp – especially the concentration camp – is one of the most vivid symbols of what Eric Hobsbawm called 'the Age of Extremes', the short twentieth century between 1914 and 1991. But we still live in a world of refugees, and of governments that punish them because they are refugees. In an era when the modern state unleashed the full force of its new technologies of killing, such people were treated as a nuisance at best and, at worst, as a threat to the very foundations of the nation. If these ideas seem familiar, it is because they are still with us.

My congratulations to everyone involved – *Dunera* families, to Ken, Seumas, Jay and Carol, to Nathan Hollier and Sarah Cannon at Monash University Publishing. With great pleasure, I declare *Dunera Lives: A Visual History*, launched here in Canberra.

[Frank Bongiorno](#) is Professor of History and Head of the School of History at the Australian National University, Canberra. He is president of *Honest History* and of the Canberra and Region Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History.