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# White hot history: the review of the National Museum of Australia

**GUY HANSEN**

The representation of the past contained within the walls of the National Museum of Australia (NMA), and the debates surrounding them, provide a unique meeting ground of popular and academic views of Australian history. Tracing these debates is a difficult task with the ground constantly shifting. In July 2003, however, the Government released *The review of the National Museum of Australia: exhibitions and programs*. This is a fascinating artefact because it crystallises many of the current debates about public history in a single document. Reading the review raises a number of fundamental questions about the practice of history in public institutions. What is the role of a national museum? What influence should a government have over the type of history presented by that institution? What happens when professional practice clashes with governmental expectations? Is it possible, or even desirable, to provide an authoritative account of national history? Is the social and cultural history approach that has been championed by history museums over the last thirty years unable to engage with providing a history of the nation state? Is it even possible to do critical history in a context of a national museum?

As a curator who has worked at the NMA since 1991, I feel these questions are of central importance. Over the last twelve years I have experienced the struggle of attempting to turn the idea of a museum, originally articulated in the Pigott Report (1975) and then mandated in the National Museum of Australia Act (1980), into a working institution. During this time I have contributed to a wide range of exhibitions and collection projects. Most importantly, I worked as the lead curator on the *Nation: symbols of Australia* exhibition, one of the semi-permanent exhibitions produced for the opening of the NMA in 2001. Reading the Review and following the debates surrounding it has provided an opportunity to reflect on this process and to reassess my professional practice as a history curator.

To understand how the Review of the museum came about it is necessary to go back to the first few days of this new institution. On 11 March 2001 Prime Minister John Howard officiated at the opening of the NMA. While politely thanking all who had participated in the museum project the Prime Minister's speech was understated. Describing the Museum as 'un museum like'

he warned his audience that the museum approached Australia's national history in a 'somewhat different way'. Perhaps hinting at his own dissatisfaction with the museum's content, he predicted there would be a debate about how the NMA presented Australian history. He concluded, 'the support that the Government has given to this great flagship project is support that is very much committed to a deeper and better understanding of the nature and history of the Australian story and the experience of the Australian people in that story'. Following the formalities, the doors were officially opened and somewhere in the vicinity of 20 000 visitors queued to view the galleries, eager to be amongst the first to explore this new addition to Australia's cultural landscape.<sup>1</sup>

The opening of the NMA not only marked the arrival of a new cultural institution but also rang the commencement bell for another round in the ongoing history wars. Previous battles had included debates over the bicentenary, political correctness, reconciliation and the report on the stolen children. The NMA proved to be ideal territory for these arguments to be rehearsed once again. Conservative newspaper columnist Miranda Devine fired off an early salvo with a column entitled 'A nation trivialised'. Devine described the underlying message of the museum as 'one of sneering ridicule for white Australia. It is as if non-Aboriginal culture is a joke, all upside down Hills Hoists and tongue-in-cheek Victrola lawn mowers'. After decrying what she saw as the lack of celebration and pride in the exhibits Devine concluded, 'the whole museum is a lie. To find the national identity you'd be better off going to the porn museum which also opened yesterday, just around the corner'.<sup>2</sup>

The tone and tenor of Devine's article was picked up by talkback radio host Alan Jones. On his high rating morning program on Sydney radio station 2UE Jones quoted Devine's article at length saying that the Museum's message was disgraceful.<sup>3</sup> Piers Ackerman, writing in the *Sunday Telegraph* also criticised the Museum. Perceiving an inherent bias, he described the displays as paying 'more than a nod to this politically correct position'. Ackerman, however, pulled back from complete condemnation of the museum encouraging readers to find out for themselves, conceding that they 'probably won't be disappointed by the experience'.<sup>4</sup>

This conservative attack on the NMA in the popular media paralleled an internal struggle within the museum over the presentation of Australian history. Documents obtained by *The Sydney Morning Herald* via a Freedom of Information request revealed how David Barnett, a museum council member, attempted to intervene in the development of content for the museum's exhibitions. Barnett, a former Liberal party staffer and author of the authorised biography of Prime Minister John Howard, sent a memo deriding draft exhibition label text to Tony Staley, the Chair of the NMA Council, in October 2000. Barnett was alarmed by what he saw as a systematic bias in the museum's displays. 'The museum should not be a contributor to the reworking of Australian history into political correctness, which, as we saw at the

as I plod through all this I will come across people who served their country, sacrificed themselves for it, made it a better place, or even what it is today'. He was horrified to find that the museum included people such as the anti-nuclear demonstrator Benny Zable and Lenin Peace Prize recipient William Morrow in exhibits. 'These people are not my heroes' he wrote. 'Why Benny Zable and not Hugh Morgan, who created wealth for Australians and jobs for Australians? ...What about H.R. Nicholls and Charles Copeman for the Hall of Fame...what about Chris Corrigan?' Barnett concluded: 'I would have thought a National Museum in the national capital might have managed interesting exhibits dealing with the founding fathers and telling us who past prime ministers have been and something about them without being egregious'.<sup>5</sup>

These criticisms of the NMA reflect two basic concerns. Firstly there is the claim that the NMA's content is 'politically correct' or biased. Barnett argues that this is part of a larger reworking of Australian history currently underway by forces unnamed. Secondly there is the allegation that the Museum does not celebrate Australian achievement. In Barnett's case this is reflected in a call for entrepreneurs to be recognised in a 'hall of fame' and for interesting exhibits about the 'founding fathers'. One suspects that underlying the desire for achievement to be recognised is a strong yearning for the 'great men' of Australian history to be reinstated in the national story.

After receiving Barnett's memo Staley instituted a review of label text. At the recommendation of eminent historian Geoffrey Blainey, Professor Graeme Davison of Monash University was approached to provide a second opinion. Davison reviewed the text and, while finding some minor errors, determined the exhibits were based on sound scholarship. Furthermore, Davison completely rejected Barnett's allegation of any systematic bias in the label text. He expressed the view that, 'while individual items may express interpretations that David might read as PC, they are not preponderant'. In an interview with *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Joyce Morgan, Davison concluded: 'The thrust of Barnett's interventions was, in a sense, ideological'.<sup>6</sup>

Following Davison's rebuttal of Barnett's critique, the Museum's Council did not intervene in the content development process and the majority of exhibits went ahead unchanged. The struggle for the type of history that would be presented in the museum, however, was only just beginning. The next broadside was delivered by revisionist historian Keith Windschuttle. In an article entitled 'How not to run a museum: people's history at the post-modern museum', Windschuttle took the Museum to task over a number of its exhibits, particularly those relating to frontier conflict, and set out to demolish the intellectual underpinnings of the NMA. Carrying on where Barnett left off, Windschuttle outlined his own views on how national history should be presented:

Any attempt to tell a national history, in either a book or a museum, is obliged to explain these major influences on the lives of all the nation's members. This means

focussing on the major structures of the society and its culture, and the key decision-makers who brought them into being or changed their direction.<sup>7</sup>

Underlying Windschuttle's argument is a set of key assumptions about the practice of history. In an earlier work entitled *The killing of history* Windschuttle outlined his argument that the discipline of history is being undermined by an influx of ideas from literary and social theory. In place of the rationalist model of history as developed in the nineteenth century, contemporary historical practice has been contaminated by a belief that it is impossible to arrive at any objective truth about the past. Within this theoretical framework historical knowledge is inevitably contingent and subjective. For Windschuttle this approach is anathema. For him, 'history can be studied in an objective way and that there are no philosophical obstacles to the pursuit of truth and knowledge about the human world.'<sup>8</sup>

Windschuttle argues that the NMA's problems stem from its adherence to a social history approach to the past. Social history, he claims, fractures history into smaller categories rather than providing a causal narrative:

By abandoning the traditional approach of history based on a narrative of major events and their causes, in favour of equal time for every identifiable sexual and ethnic group, history loses its explanatory power and degenerates into a tasteless blanchmange of worthy sentiment. There is no integrated story that links political, legal, cultural economic, military and technological events into an intelligible framework.<sup>9</sup>

Windschuttle concluded that the museum is, 'a profound intellectual mistake as well as a great waste of public money. Indeed, the museum is already a museum piece itself—an expensive relic of post-modern theory.'<sup>10</sup>

When reading Windschuttle's review one is struck by the circularity of his argument. In the terms that he describes the NMA you could not help but agree that it fails to provide a useful model for understanding the past. His description, however, is more of a caricature than an honest attempt to outline the museum's exhibitions. He is very selective in the examples that he chooses to quote and, one suspects, his analysis is driven by his larger project of discrediting contemporary historical practice. In this context the Museum is canon fodder for his argument that Australian historians have lost their way. The possibility that the museum has its own specific intellectual pedigree dating back to the Pigott inquiry is not raised.

The condemnation that the NMA received was balanced by considerable positive media coverage. Indeed, the vast majority of reviews and news stories celebrated the museum's opening and welcomed its contribution to Australia's cultural landscape.<sup>11</sup> Visitor reaction to the museum, as gauged by an ongoing survey program, found that over 90% of visitors were highly satisfied with their visit.<sup>12</sup> Attendance numbers in the opening year of the museum also suggested that the Museum was a success. By the time the first birthday cake was wheeled in, over 900 000 people had visited the NMA. Positive media coverage and visitor support, however, were not enough to

assuage some members of the NMA's Council. Within one month of the museum opening the Council agreed to institute a review into its exhibitions and public programs. Details of the review were not made public until January 2003 when the Chair of the museum's Council, Tony Staley, announced that a four-member panel had been appointed to conduct the review. The panel members were Dr John Carroll, Reader in Sociology, La Trobe University (Chair of the panel); Mr Richard Longes, Director, Investec Australia Ltd; Dr Philip Jones, Senior Curator of Anthropology, South Australian Museum; and Dr Patricia Vickers-Rich, Director, Monash Science Centre.

The terms of reference for the review were:

1. Examine the aims and content of the Museum's exhibitions, both permanent and temporary, and schools and public programs. The examination will include the following:
  - (i) whether the Museum has complied with its role and functions as set out in the National Museum of Australia Act 1980, its Charter and other relevant documents; and
  - (ii) whether the Government's vision in approving funding for the development of the Museum has been realised.
2. Consider and make recommendations on the future priorities to be addressed by the Museum, including the continuing relevance of its Act, in the development of permanent and temporary exhibitions and schools and public programs.<sup>13</sup>

The announcement of the inquiry was met with suspicion by a number of professional and community groups. David Carment, President of the Australian Historical Association, criticised the composition of the review panel for not having a historian. Highlighting his suspicions as to why this was the case, he argued that it is 'completely incorrect to assume that almost all academic historians in Australia are committed to a leftist orthodoxy'.<sup>14</sup> The Friends of the National Museum also condemned the Review for providing insufficient time for submissions and questioned whether a review was necessary given the museum's high visitor approval rating.<sup>15</sup> In Senate Estimates hearings held on 11 February 2003 and 28 May 2003 Labor senators grilled the Minister for Arts over the establishment of the Review. Senator Faulkner obtained confirmation from Minister Kemp that Dr Carroll had been appointed on his recommendation. Faulkner concluded that the 'fix' had gone in at the ministerial level, an allegation strenuously denied by the Minister.<sup>16</sup>

The Review's methodology was straightforward. A call for submissions was made in advertisements in *The Australian* on 15, 19 and 21 February 2003. The closing date for submissions was 7 March, a three week turn-around. In addition, the review conducted interviews with a range of experts and social commentators. In total the Review received over 105 submissions and conducted 40 interviews.<sup>17</sup> While a list of the individuals and organisations who participated in the Review is included in the report the actual submissions were not published in the Review. All interviews were conducted in private and no transcripts were made available. At the museum's instigation

the majority of submissions were later published on the NMA web site. The initial lack of transparency in the Review was unfortunate, particularly given that many of the Review's findings and assertions are substantiated by reference to submissions.

The Review's report was released to the public on 14 July 2003. The immediate media response to the Review's findings focussed on the question of political bias and the Gallery of First Australians. These issues were the main focus of the earlier Davison review of exhibition text. Consistent with Davison's findings, the Review found that, 'political or cultural bias is not a systemic problem at the NMA. Rather, it exists in pockets, which may be fairly easily remedied.'<sup>18</sup> The Review details a number of practical suggestions for the NMA including comments on public programs, acoustics, signage and the amenity of the Acton building. It also provides commentary on the Museum's collection and research policies and the landscape design in the controversial Garden of Australian Dreams. At its heart, however, the Review concentrates on the museum's exhibitions.

The Review's critique of the Museum starts from the assumption that the primary objective of the NMA is to tell 'the Australian story'—that is, a narrative which provides a coherent story of national progress. The review specifically rejects a model of presenting a pluralist or contingent view of the past. Responding to a submission from Professor Graeme Davison, the Review asserts a unitary view of national identity:

...the Panel is inclined to read more consensus than plurality at the core of the national collective conscience. The concept of nations as 'imagined communities', which is drawn from Benedict Anderson's book of that title, implies that national character is a sort of fictitious construct, fluid and subject to rapid change, and therefore ephemeral. This view underestimates the deeper continuities in culture—for instance, the degree to which the portrait of the courageous warrior hero developed in Homer's Iliad three millennia ago has shaped later images and stories, including, in the 20th century, both the Australian Anzac legend and the American Western film genre.<sup>19</sup>

This quote is significant for its interpretation of Anderson and its assertion of the significance of classical tropes in Western civilisation. Firstly, in relation to Anderson, they assert that he views national character as 'fictitious'. Anderson, however, argues that national character exists as a historical construct that evolves over time. It is 'imagined' in that it is actively shared across a community even though the members of that community never know most of their fellow members. It is partial and changing in that different members bring different perspectives to what that collective identity is. The power of nation as a concept derives from the way disparate elements can actively identify with a community of shared interest. For Anderson a sense of nation is invented but not fabricated.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to Davison's and Anderson's understanding of national identity the Review asserts there is a unitary Australian national identity. Rather than present a plurality of voices on the question of what does it mean to be Australian, the Review argues that

the challenge to a museum here is more in the nature of art than science: to present the ordinary and the everyday in order to open up and reveal the national trait.'<sup>21</sup>

The impulse for this assertion, that the NMA should reveal the nation's identity through a grand narrative of Australian history, appears to come from Carroll's own writings on the importance of narrative and its absence in Western society.<sup>22</sup> In his book, *The Western Dreaming*, Carroll argues that 'a culture is its sacred stories. In each case, it has one or two, perhaps three major channels, which in turn are diffused through myriad tributaries forming the beliefs of a society.' For Carroll these stories are not being celebrated by our key institutions. Referring to Churches and Universities Carroll says 'these institutions founder in metaphysical emptiness, their words as dead leaves, all the texts and icons are there in their midst, waiting to have life to be breathed back into them'.<sup>23</sup> Museums also have a role to play by providing 'the rocks that do not move, the sacred site where, in the beginning it was given.'<sup>24</sup>

The desire for a grand narrative also builds on Windschuttle's argument that the history of a nation should necessarily provide a causal narrative of major events and institutions.

While the museum's curatorial staff and expert advisors rejected the notion of providing a grand narrative of Australian history early in the content development process, the Review panel argues that this is precisely what is missing from the museum's exhibitions. The Review refers to this as 'the Australian story'. The use of the singular story rather than plural stories is deliberate. The central theme of this Australian story is achievement. In the words of the Review, one of the main objectives of the Museum should be to present 'the primary themes and narratives of Australia since the arrival of the British, through the building of the nation to the country's place in the contemporary world. This includes evoking national character traits; detailing exemplary individual, group and institutional achievements; and charting the singular qualities of the nation.'<sup>25</sup>

The Review's call for a narrative based on achievement echoes the Prime Minister's own views on Australian history. In his 1996 Menzies Lecture Howard articulated his vision of Australia's past. Rejecting what he described as the 'black arm band' view of Australian history he called for the past to be understood in terms of 'heroic achievement.' Australians, he argued, 'have much more as a nation of which we can be proud than of which we should be ashamed.' He pointed to Australia's economic development, the transition to a successful modern democracy, the rule of law, mateship, innovation and common sense as exemplifying the success of the Australian nation. While acknowledging that history should not be a source 'of smug delusions or comfortable superiority' Howard emphasised that it should not be a basis for obsessive and consuming national guilt and shame. He concluded that we 'need to recognise that our history is also the story of a great Australian achievement in which we can, and should, take great pride.'<sup>26</sup>

Having outlined its vision for the museum, the Review proceeds to argue that the central galleries of the NMA should be devoted to a chronological story of Australian achievement. This begins with Australia's 'discovery' by Captain Cook, a term used with no sense of irony by the Review's author, followed by the exploration and settlement of the continent leading inevitably to the development of a successful modern democracy. While some of the galleries receive a tick, the Review recommends three major exhibits should be reworked to provide this chronological story of Australian national progress. These exhibits—Circa, Horizons and Nation—are criticised for failing to provide compelling narratives illustrating the Australian story.

Thus we have outlined a story of triumphal progress which illustrates the national character. The end-point is defined as a successful, prosperous and democratic society in which the ethos of the 'fair go' rules. The NMA's core job, according to the Review, is to tell this story. The success of the Circa, Nation and Horizon galleries is judged in terms of this vision. Not surprisingly these programs, which were all developed with a pluralist and inclusive approach to Australian history, fail to realise this vision. The Review does not judge these galleries within the framework in which they were developed but rather by the Review's own vision of a history of achievement. As with all straw man arguments, the Review has no trouble in setting fire to the Museum's interpretation of Australian history.

Significantly the Review's major recommendation that the Museum reorganise its galleries to produce a chronological history of Australia was not supported by one of the members of the Review panel. Dr Philip Jones, the only museum curator on the panel, dissented from this finding. While noting the concerns of the other panel members, Dr Jones concludes that it 'would be a pity for the museum to return to a more constrained approach in this area.'<sup>27</sup> More recently, Dr Jones has distanced himself even further from the Review's major findings:

The review is, in a way, incoherent... I felt the final shape was a little different to the substance of our discussions as a group. At the very last moment it crystallised in a very conservative and unnecessary way.<sup>28</sup>

As one of the curators who worked on the development of the NMA's exhibitions I find the Review's arguments very challenging. They go to the heart of what a national museum should be and how to explore national history. The most important finding of the Review is its rejection of a pluralist model of understanding the past. The Review argues that multiple narratives confuse visitors. For example, from the Review's perspective, the exhibits dealing with Victoria lawn mowers and Hills hoists lack a larger contextual story. I would argue that this is based on a very simplistic understanding of visitor experience and material culture. It underestimates the knowledge that visitors bring with them. There is no sense that the framing of popular culture objects in a museum allows visitors to reflect on their own lived

experience. Rather, the Review puts forward a model in which a predetermined narrative dictates how objects should be understood. This transforms objects from evidence that can generate multiple associations for visitors to props which are used to illustrate a story that has already been written. I believe that this devalues the objects and reduces the freedom of the visitor experience.

Leaving aside for the moment the issue of whether it is desirable for the NMA to provide a unitary narrative, I wonder whether the authors of the Review fully understand how difficult it is to construct a narrative in a museum environment. Visiting an exhibition is fundamentally different to reading a book or seeing a film. You have no assurance that visitor will start at the beginning and proceed in a predetermined fashion through the galleries. Motivation of visitors varies considerably: they may have come to see the exhibit, they may be breaking a long car journey, they may be using the museum as back drop for a first date or it may be as simple an urge as to find a public toilet or a cup of coffee. Once in an exhibition gallery visitors can move in unpredictable ways. They meander between displays pausing in some areas and ignoring others. This behaviour is very different to the more directed attention that is manifest in the reading of a book.

These constraints make it very difficult to build a narrative in the traditional sense where information is delivered in linear fashion as part of a larger story. In the physical world of the exhibition space, the only way to do this is to create a single circulation route or tunnel from which the visitor cannot depart. This has been done in museums such as the Holocaust Museum in Washington where visitors move through the display's chronological path. It is not possible to deviate from the story line. While this is an effective strategy for exploring the holocaust, it is not well suited for exploring the history of the Australian nation. There is no consensus within the academic or broader community of a single story of national development. Rather than Australian history being a river on which you can travel through time, it is more like a river catchment with thousands of tributaries contributing to the present.

In addition to the methodological problems of constructing a single narrative, the museum faced physical constraints that prohibited a single circulation route detailing a grand narrative. The way the galleries are designed allows visitors to enter or leave at any number of points throughout the museum disrupting any attempt to outline a predetermined narrative. For this reason the museum organised exhibits using a modular design which allows individual displays to make sense in their own right rather than necessarily being part of a larger narrative. The model in mind here is more akin to web surfing than reading a book. A visitor can browse on a variety of exhibits as they encounter them; stopping for a detailed examination in some areas and ignoring others. From the Review's perspective the lack of a larger narrative undermines the stories that the museum can tell. From my perspective

the variety of exhibits is a strength allowing very different audiences to find something of interest.

Another worrying aspect of the move away from a pluralist approach to Australian history is the possibility that a history of Australian achievement will exclude large sections of Australian society from 'the Australian story'. Suggested exhibits provided by the Review include Captain Cook, Burke and Wills, Ned Kelly and Essington Lewis. While these figures are significant, and indeed already represented in museum displays, there is a definite sense of a white male dominance of the exhibitions. The place of women and ethnic minorities is less assured. Significantly, the Horizons exhibition, which deals with migrant stories, has been targeted for replacement with exhibits exploring Cook's 'discovery' of Australia and the Burke and Wills expedition.

It is not hard to find other examples of the problem of the triumphal blindness inherent in the Review. In its critique of the Horizons Gallery, the Review argues that the exhibit plants, 'a sub-textual inference that Australians once in the country, have, via their institutions, concertedly made laws and erected barriers designed to keep others out.' The *Immigration Restriction Act* and Australia's extensive program of customs and quarantine regulations notwithstanding, the Review concludes that, 'the picture is unbalanced, especially given the presiding fact that Australia has been a successful migrant society, arguably without peer at reasonably tolerant and liberal assimilation, and especially in the period from 1945 till 1975.'<sup>29</sup> In this case the larger narrative of 'successful liberal assimilation' takes precedence over the historical record of the White Australia Policy and Australia's quarantine and censorship laws. It is telling to note that the Review does not challenge the facts of the exhibit but rather whether it is appropriate for them to be presented in a museum. While the Horizon's display features several exhibits of successful migration stories, this is insufficient for the purposes of the triumphal narrative. Any departure from the story of a successful migrant society is not to be tolerated.

To summarise then, the Australian story as proposed by the Review removes any sense of contingency from the past. The end-point is predetermined and events are outlined in a linear causal relationship. Material culture is not so much viewed as evidence but rather as props to be employed to illustrate a story that has already been written. Popular culture and social history virtually disappear within the narrative of national progress. This vision of a single Australian story, while perhaps reassuring and non-threatening, does not reflect the best of contemporary museum practice and historical scholarship.

Although the Review recognises that there are 'darker moments' in Australian history these are aberrations in a larger story of progress. This is a unitary vision of the Australia that asserts the centrality of Anglo-Celtic traditions and pays lip-service to indigenous and migrant experience. It's a vision of the past that smooths out the political, sectarian, class, race and gender ripples

evident in Australian history. It has no place for popular culture and views collections as raw material for a predetermined narrative. It constructs visitors as passive receptacles into which the Museum should pour an officially endorsed 'Australian story'.

The lasting significance of the Review stems from the way it crystallises recent debates about Australian history. A close reading reveals an ideological battlefield in which a unitary Australian story of achievement is being marshalled to defeat a pluralist understanding of the past. Using the filter of achievement, the Review advocates a vision where Australian history becomes a cohesive linear narrative. In the process the Museum's long held interest in popular culture and social history is discarded. At this time it is unclear what long-term impact the Review will have. It will, however, mark a major chapter in the history of the National Museum of Australia.

## FOOTNOTES

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# Public history and Raphael Samuel: a forgotten radical pedagogy?

HILDA KEAN

## Introduction

Some might argue that public history is thriving in Britain if public history is seen as engagement with the production (and consumption) of history in the present—particularly by those working outside universities—with an emphasis on accessibility. Certainly the term public history has been embraced by many working in the established areas of labour, oral and community history. This interest has been reflected in recent articles self-defined as discussing public history specifically in the *Labour History Review*, the journal of the Society of Labour History, and in *Oral History*, the journal of the Oral History Society founded by leading oral historian Paul Thompson. Topics in such publications have included the presentation of labour history at different museums and community-based projects employing oral history.<sup>1</sup> However, although the practice of 'history from below' might be said to owe much to the influence and energy of Raphael Samuel through the establishment of the History Workshop Movement in the 1970s and the *History Workshop Journal*, this strand of public history seems generally unexplored.

This absence is in contrast to the way that Raphael Samuel's work has been considered by some Australian historians. In discussing different concepts of public history, Malcolm MacLean has argued that 'People's history—associated with British radicals and the excellent *History Workshop Journal*—is the true public history: a democratised history'.<sup>2</sup> Graeme Davison too has acknowledged the influence of what he terms the 'British people's history movement associated with Ruskin College, Oxford' upon aspects of Australian public history practice.<sup>3</sup> In similar vein Tom Griffiths has linked public history in Britain explicitly to the work of Raphael Samuel and Ruskin College, the labour movement college for adult students where Samuel taught history for thirty years. Griffiths has suggested that such practice took pride 'in situating itself outside or on the fringes of institutions of higher education, and drew inspiration from working and trade union experience'.<sup>4</sup> (And, in the first collection to examine the rapidly growing field of public history in New Zealand there are frequent references to the positive influence of