

Meet-up Cogitamus

2 June 2018



Penrith MUSEUM of PRINTING

The Penrith Museum of Printing
presents recitation around
letters and printing

Presentation

1 The Romance of
Letterpress

Youthful
Impressions:
A printer's journey
across America,
1913

Meet-up Cogitamus (thinking) is a forum for people interested in graphic art, letters, books and design.

The Penrith Museum of Printing organises regular informative presentations, which will each highlight a single aspect within the target audience.

The presentations are set in the atmosphere of the museums 1940 letterpress print house.

Through a multitude of good visual content presentations it will provide the audience, food for thought and to consistently push the boundaries around one's own knowledge.



James Cryer

Youthful Impressions: A printer's journey across America, 1913

James Cryer

Owner of JDA PRINT Recruitment

Long-standing involvement in the printing industry in Sydney, going back four generations to 1903.

Early career spent in building the "family business" which was (from the 1960's to late 80's) Avery Label - Australia, and as such, we were the pioneers of self-adhesive label printing in this country.

Later (in the 1980's) I briefly ran Pemara Labels (NSW) another leader in self-adhesive technology.

I then set up my own "print and packaging consultancy" - Project Packaging - which again, was a pioneer in the concept of "print broking".

In the mid-1990's I moved into print recruitment, realising that there was a need for helpful and well-informed advice from someone from within the industry

I'm pleased to write the odd article for the printing industry trade-press especially print21, on issues which allow me to climb onto my occasional soapbox.

When not recruiting, ranting or writing, I run, mountain-bike ride and x/c ski.

The Romance of Letterpress

This is a discussion about how printing was starting to emerge out of the shadows, so to speak, and become a part of everyday life - in ways that many of us never realised.

I'm referring to the first few years of the 20th Century - up to the First World War.

This is not a technical dissertation, rather it's a genial wander through what life looked like in 1913 - not through the eyes of a boss or even an historian - but from someone who was actually there, viewing the world from the bottom-up, feet on the ground, trying to earn his living as a letterpress printer, as he worked his way across America, in the months before the outbreak of hostilities in Europe.

This was an interesting era as it was the crossover point between the demise of the old world and the emergence of the new.

Horses and motor-cars shared the roads. Square-rigged sailing ships and coal-fired ships shared the oceans. And technology was starting to intrude everywhere ... including printing.

The Linotype device had emerged as the first and most dramatic harbinger of doom, and its devastating impact on hand-compositing was just a foretaste of better - or was it worse? - things to come.

This duality, this ambivalence, where something which could antagonise unions and displace workers, but could also expand the horizons of the common man was a bewildering new conundrum.

Suddenly everyone could afford newspapers, send postcards, be tempted by travel posters to visit faraway places, shop in lavish emporiums (or penny-arcades) and be tantalised by advertisements and attractive packaging. This was also the emergence of "big pharma" and the rise of big corporations all of which fuelled the appetite of the rising middle-class. Or was it the other way round?

Like it or not, one can trace the rise of rampant consumerism - with all its embedded ambivalence - back to this era. My grandfather was part of this era, an unwitting participant if you like, as he stepped off the pier in San Francisco Bay into this maelstrom.

To continue this theme of "ambivalence" he had just come from a benign industrial regime (Australia had just passed the world's most enlightened IR laws) - into arguably the free world's most aggressive, unregulated economy where boss/employee relations could best be described as "dog-eat-dog"

Underpinning all these changes lay the printing industry. Like the frog being fried alive on the footpath, you never understand these changes at the time, but there the printing industry was, in the background both as driver and beneficiary. Pushing changes - and being pushed.

This is a story of how printing started to weave its way in and around our everyday lives, in ways that today we take for granted. Even the humble women's compact (and the important role it played!) does not escape our eagle-eyed scrutiny.

Penrith Museum of Printing

NEWS

UPCOMING EVENTS

- A Printer's journey across America, 1913
- Making a book at the Museum
- Printing in early Australia
- Gutenberg verses Coster



The Penrith Museum of Printing is located in the grounds of the Penrith Showground / Paceway, Ransley Street Penrith, NSW Australia.

www.printingmuseum.org.au
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