



RECONNAISSANCE

Spring 2013

The Newsletter of the Military History Society of New South Wales Incorporated

PATRON: Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of New South Wales

PRESIDENT: Benjamin Howell – **SECRETARY:** John Twyford – **TREASURER:** Alan Kitchen

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome to the 'Spring 2013' edition of *Reconnaissance*.

I would like to discuss the following topics in my report for this edition:

- *Reconnaissance*
- Website and Society Social Media Presence
- 2014 Lecture Topics
- AGM & Membership Subscriptions

Reconnaissance

Firstly, I would like to apologise for this edition coming out a little later than usual. John has been waiting on my report for a few weeks now and I have been swamped due to a recent promotion at work and silly season activities in the lead up to Christmas.

John and the rest of the team do a great job in putting *Reconnaissance* together, but they need your help with contributions. It takes a great deal of time to read books for book reviews, perform research, etc. The more contributions that we have from our members, the more rich and diverse our newsletter will become. As the old adage goes: 'Many hands make light work'!

Website and Society Social Media presence

Since June 2013, the Society has commenced our journey in cyberspace and social media. The Society now has a presence on the internet via the following channels:

Website: www.militaryhistorynsw.com.au
FaceBook: <https://www.facebook.com/MilitaryHistorySocietyOfNewSouthWalesIncorporated>
Twitter: @mhsnsw
LinkedIn: http://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=2496804&trk=my_groups-b-grp-v

I encourage you all to visit the website, FaceBook, and Twitter pages, and inform your colleagues, friends, and family of our new found online presence.

2014 Lecture Topics

The Council has put together our draft program for 2014. It is listed below:

- January – Napoleon's Spanish Ulcer (Peninsula War / Iberian Campaign)
- February – Annual General Meeting
- March – The Battle of Little Big Horn (Mr Scott Simpson from the United States Consulate)
- April – The ANZAC Legend (TBD)
- May – The Loss of Rabaul
- June – Women in World War I
- July – The War of the Roses
- August – AN & MEF & Brigadier Howard Lecture
- September – A topic dealing with the Air Force (perhaps the Battle of Britain)
- October – The Rum Corps
- November – The 'Sydney' sinking the 'Emden' or German Naval Strategy in the Pacific
- December -- Christmas Party & Quiz

Back Up Topics

- Colonial Navies
- The Crimean War
- Mr Tim Bowden on his book *Changi Cameraman*
- The Boer War
- Military Formations

Although we have come up with a tentative program for 2014, the Council and I are always interested in hearing from you all on topics of interest so that we have a program that reflects as many of our member's diverse interests as possible.

AGM & Membership Subscriptions

Just a reminder that membership subscriptions are due prior to our February AGM. The AGM in 2014 will be held on 8 February 2014 at Victoria Barracks.

I would also like to encourage anyone interested in getting more involved and running for a Council position at the AGM to get in touch with me.

On a final note, on behalf of the Council and myself I wish all members, and your families and friends a safe, happy, and healthy Christmas and we look forward to seeing and hearing from you again in 2014!

BENJAMIN HOWELL

PROGRAM OF EVENTS (DRAFT)

January	<i>Napoleon's Spanish Ulcer</i> (Peninsula War / Iberian Campaign)	Mr Benjamin Howell
February	MHSNSW Annual General Meeting	N/A
March	<i>The Battle of Little Big Horn</i>	Mr Scott Simpson
April	<i>The ANZAC Legend</i> (TBD)	TBA
May	<i>The Loss of Rabaul</i>	TBA
June	<i>Women in World War I</i>	TBA
July	<i>The War of the Roses</i>	TBA
August	AN & MEF & Brigadier Howard Lecture	TBA
September	A topic dealing with the Air Force (perhaps the Battle of Britain)	TBA
October	<i>The Rum Corps</i>	TBA
November	<i>The 'Sydney' sinking the 'Emden' or German Naval Strategy in the Pacific</i>	TBA
December	Christmas Party & Quiz	N/A

Please note that the Society meets on the second Saturday of the month at 2:00 pm, Victoria Barracks, Paddington (unless informed otherwise)

FAMILY (MILITARY) HISTORY

Mr Harry Taplin continues the family history series commenced last year in *Reconnaissance*. The material is based on oral history recorded by Harry during interviews with survivors of the 60th Battalion, 15th Brigade, 5th Division, and 1st AIF.

Harry's father served in that 60th Battalion in WWI.

AN INSPECTION BY THE GENERAL

Somewhere about this time I inadvertently spoil the smoothness of a Divisional parade. There was to be an inspection by Lieutenant-General Sir JW M'Cay, Commander 5th Division AIF, known as 'Butcher'.

When passing along the rank he stopped in front of me and said: 'How old are you?' I replied '20 Sir'. He said: 'You don't look it. What is your name?' I replied 'William Mackay Sir'. He then asked me several more questions. 'How was my name spelt? Was I born in Australia? Where did my father come from? There are Mackays in County Amagh in Ireland'.

Our RSM Edwards, or was it RSM Jock Metcalf, smiled at me just like a man eating shark – our Colonel looked like he had ants in his pants, just fidgeted. When they moved off our Company Sergeant Major Jock McCash – reputed to eat raw 'pilbroch' and corbies baked in their feathers, insides and all, came in for the kill. He said to me: 'You nearly buggered the whole parade and next time a so and so general asks your name tell him its Jones or Smith.'

HARRY TAPLIN

REMEMBRANCE DAY ADDRESS

About a kilometre and a half northeast of the ancient Belgian city of Ieper, on the busy N369 highway, stands the well tended Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery known as Essex Farm.

In 1915 it was an emergency graveyard situated in shell cratered farmland, where many of the Canadian dead were hastily buried after the first ever use of poison gas in war, by the Germans, in the battle known as 2nd Ypres.

It was early spring and the hardy red Flanders poppies were springing up from the torn earth between the roughly marked graves.

A Canadian medical officer, Dr John McCrea, who was to lose his own life before the war's end, sitting by the grave of a close friend whom he had helped to bury the previous day, commenced drafting a poem, in the form of a rondeau, which even before the war was over was printed and reprinted tens of thousands of times.

SIX MONTHS FURLOUGH TO MEN WHO HAD ENLISTED IN 1914

Although I was never officially classified as a 'runner', on many occasions I was ordered to deliver messages from Company to Battalion headquarters. On this occasion I was sent with a letter from our Transport Officer to the Quartermaster at Divisional headquarters. When I came to a crossroad a lone Australian soldier was standing there. He was in full marching order wearing the Australian slouch hat, his tin hat was neatly strapped to his pack and his great coat, neatly rolled, was tied to the top of his pack. His kit bag was at his feet.

I recognised him as one of the Hargreaves of Ararat. He was the one I knew less well. I couldn't remember his name but he was wearing the colour patch of the 8th Battalion. I thought his name might be Bert. If he had green eyes he would be Bert. I felt I could hardly address him as Mr Hargreaves – so when I was near enough I said: 'G'day Bert'. He looked surprised but said: 'You must be one of the Mackay kids. What are you doing here?'

At this moment an RSC lorry drawn by two mules was at the intersection when a large shell got them, killing the mules and the driver and his off-sider. 'This is a stupid place for a rendezvous to pick up 1914 men going on leave' and turning towards the German lines he shouted 'You missed me that time and you won't get another chance – make no mistake 'll be back'. Bert seemed sorry to be leaving and I said goodbye and good luck. Bert and I were good friends after we returned to Ararat.

Somehow, for both the soldiers and the people at home it invoked emotions of loss, of grief and of remembrance. It established the Flanders poppy from that time until the present day as the symbol of remembrance and here today many are wearing the paper replica which surely affirms the promise that:

We will remember them!

The poem goes:

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky,
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt Dawn, saw sunset's glow,
Loved and were loved, and now
We lie in Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe
To you from failing hands we throw the torch.
Be yours to hold it high!
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep!! Though poppies grow
In Flanders fields*

Since Federation, Australia has suffered more than 100,000 War Dead, and no one person did more to keep extant their memory and the debt we owe them than Charles Bean, the official historian of Australia in the Great War. He was the author of six of the volumes and he edited the remaining six. It was his life's work.

He was with the troops at Gallipoli and was wounded there.

He was with them on the Western Front and risked his life many times to record their deeds proudly and accurately.

He was a prime mover in the establishment of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, where he argued successfully that on the Roll of Honour there, surrounding the Pool of Remembrance, no rank or decoration should be inscribed against the names of the Fallen, for all had made an equal sacrifice when they lost their lives.

He was tireless in pursuing justice and rehabilitation for returned servicemen, many tragically and permanently damaged in health and spirit. He believed passionately that Australia should demonstrate to the world that it would achieve a democracy where there would be equal rights for all children to receive a fine education and best health care, and that rank and honour should come from achievement and not birth or wealth.

He demonstrated the sincerity of his convictions by refusing a civil decoration in WWI and three times in post war years he politely declined a knighthood. Old age was not kind to him and before moving to Concord Repat. Hospital where he died, his declining years were spent in an unpretentious cottage on the eastern edge of the Collaroy plateau, where he wrote the following Requiem, which has been sympathetically added to, to make it inclusive of recent conflicts.

We remember those who still sleep where they were left – amid the holly scrub in the valleys and on the ridges of Gallipoli – on the rocky and terraced hills of Palestine – and in the lovely cemeteries of France.

We remember those who lie asleep in the ground beneath the shimmering heat of the Libyan desert – at Bardia, Derna, Tobruk – and amid the mountain passes and the olive groves of Greece and Crete, and the rugged, snow-capped hills of Lebanon and Syria.

We remember those who lie buried in the rank jungles of Burma, New Guinea, and in the distant isles of the Pacific.

We remember those who lie buried among loving friends in our Motherland and in our own far North.

We remember those who lie in unknown resting places in almost every land and those gallant men whose grave is the ever-restless sea.

Especially do we remember those who died as prisoners of war, remote from their homeland, and from the comforting presence of their kith and kin.

We think of those of our women's services who lost their lives in our own and in foreign lands, and at sea, and who proved to be, in much more than in name, the sisters of our fighting men.

We recall too, the staunch friends who fought beside our men on the first Anzac Day, men of New Zealand who helped create the name ANZAC.

We recall all those who gave their lives in the Royal Navy, the Royal Australian Navy, the RAF, the RAAF, and the Merchant Navy.

We honour those British men and women who died, when for the second time in history their nation and its kindred from the Dominions, stood alone against the overwhelming might of an oppressor.

We remember those gallant men who died in Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam, East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq.

May these all rest proudly in the knowledge of their achievements, and may we, and our successors in that heritage, prove worthy of their sacrifice.

FURTHER READING:

A Corner of a Foreign Field: Illustrated Poetry of the First World War, (ed.) Fiona Waters 2007,

The Great War and Modern Memory, Paul Fussell 1975,

1915. The Death of Innocence, Lyn Macdonald 1997,

Gallipoli to the Somme: The Story of CEW Bean, Dudley McCarthy 1983,

Here is their Spirit: A History of the Australian War Memorial 1917-1990, Michael McKernan 1991

JOE CRUMLIN

TALES FROM THE BATTLEFIELDS

I have been fortunate to meet many World War II veterans through my membership of an Air Force Ex-Aircrew Association. Of their many stories I have heard I would like to share with you what I consider to be two of the best. Jeff was a Royal Air Force Wireless / Air Gunner (WAG) in North Africa during World War II.

Although being aircrew they were sometimes detailed to man listening posts in no-man's land between the opposing forces to gather intelligence with their radio expertise.

One day, while in their outpost a group of trucks approached them from the allied lines. Thinking they were British, they rushed to greet them only to be ordered by efficient looking soldiers in strange helmets to raise their hands. Jeff said that a very polite young German Lieutenant explained in the classic phrase: 'For you the war is over'.

They were placed under guard and the officer ensured that they were given supplies of food, coffee and cigarettes.

Later in the day several tanks appeared heading towards them and they were obviously British.

The German Lieutenant said unfortunately he must leave them, wished them well and shook their hands and then prepared to depart. Jeff thanked the Lieutenant for treating them so decently and he replied: 'Ah yes, Sergeant, out here in the desert we are gentlemen, but that war in Russia is s**t'.

What more can one say?

Jim, a retired airline pilot, was a fighter pilot in Italy in the closing stages of World War II.

The German army was in full retreat and the soldiers were evidently taking anything of value they could carry with them as loot. Jim and his group were strafing (attacking) at low level a village through which the Germans were retreating. He thought his eyes were playing tricks when up ahead he saw a piano being lifted by block and tackle from the second storey of a building to a truck waiting below and surrounded by German troops.

In his words, he said: 'I gave it a couple of squirts and it fell magnificently hitting the ground in a cloud of dust and scattering grey clad figures'. He told me that when his ground crew heard about it they even painted a small piano on the side of his fighter. Surely this would have to be a world's first (and probably only).

DAVID TWYFORD

BOOK REVIEWS

BROKEN NATION

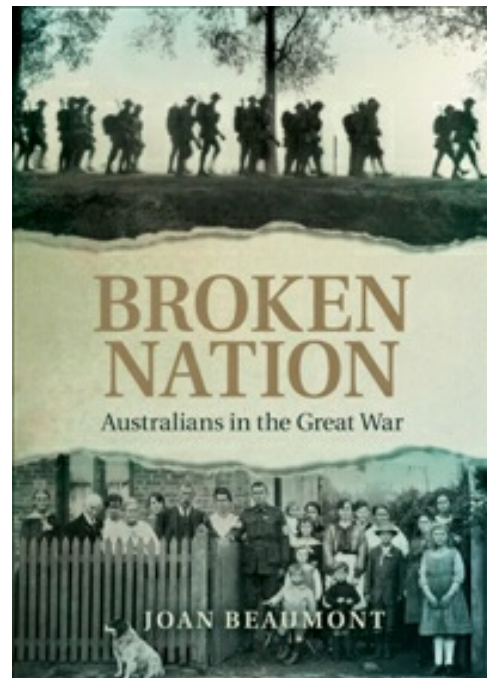
By Joan Beaumont

Allen & Unwin Book Publishers, 656pp, RRP \$55.00

This is an important book that differs substantially from what we are used to seeing. In the preface the author states that she intended the work 'as a comprehensive history of Australians at war in the period 1914-1918 that integrates battles, the home front, diplomacy and memory'.

The book accomplishes these objects admirably. Because of the scope of the work this review notes matters that caught your reviewer's attention but needless to say there is great detail on many issues.

There is early reference to the 'mythic' nature of the Anzac legend and the part played by Charles Bean in its propagation. It seems that Australia with over 1,500 memorials has more than any other country that participated in the conflict. In works of this scope there are always tucked away new facts. For example it was noted that 6% of the soldiers undergoing operations for amputation of limbs did not survive.



Another curious statistic was the percentage of soldiers killed in the AIF was 20% roughly the same mortality rate for that age group for men who remained at home! Returning to the main theme of the book the author lists the volunteer's reasons for enlisting.

These include: attractive army pay rates in straightened economic times, difficult personal relationships, monotony of city life, the loneliness of bush workers or returning to family (18% of 1st AIF volunteers were born in the United Kingdom).

On the political front the Commonwealth was in its infancy without a proper bureaucracy of stable political groupings. Accordingly the introduction of price control for food was hindered by conservative state upper Houses of Parliament. These problems were overcome with regulations made under the Commonwealth defence power. Consequently German Australians were interned.

Where the book deals with actual campaigns it does so well. In discussing the Anzac landing there is proper recognition of the New Zealand participation. The lack of artillery was noted and the assumption that this could be replaced by naval gunfire refuted. It seems that the trajectory of the naval guns was too low to penetrate the Turkish trenches. The medical needs of the landing were underestimated with 200 stretchers for 24,000 men.

There is a harrowing description of the putrefaction of the bodies on the battlefield. Simpson and his donkey (or donkeys) are mentioned in the context of their relationship to the national ethic aided by the Christian significance of the donkey. There is an excursus into the battles in the Sinai and Bean's extolling of the light horse's achievements.

The news of the landing reached Australia on 8th May 1915 triggering an outbreak of celebration. The first casualty list was published on 3rd May 1915. More than 1,100 men had been killed presaging the dreaded sight of a clergyman at the door with bad news. The Governor-General's wife, Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, set up an Australian branch of the Red Cross. This organization provided an impressive list of comforts for the soldiers including knitting the 1.35 million pairs of socks. In Australia women did not take the place of men in factories as happened in England (due to trade union influence).

In 1916 Prime Minister William Hughes visited the United Kingdom for talks with the War Cabinet and Australian trade. Australia's contribution to the war effort was supported by the sales of metal, meat and wheat to the United Kingdom. These were put at risk by U-boat warfare. Britain's dependence on the Dominions in prosecuting the war changed the relationship with its former colonies forever. Now the Dominions were demanding a greater say in the affairs of the Empire and Hughes was in the forefront of these demands.

On the first anniversary of the Anzac landing celebrations were proposed. In Sydney they were staged managed by the theatrical entrepreneur JC Williamson.

Over 50,000 people attended including the Governor-General and his wife who was not amused by being jostled by the crowd and needing to meet her social inferiors.

The first conscription campaign created bitter debate and division within the community. One interesting argument raised in favour of conscription was eugenic. The potential fathers of the next generation are being killed whereas without conscription the fathers of that generation will be the 'medical rejects and cold footed malingerers'!

The division of views on conscription within the labor party was in part responsible for a split within the party itself. Hughes left the party and formed a coalition the Liberals. The Sydney Morning Herald wrote at the time of the 1917 Anzac day celebrations that the Australian effort was comparable with the effort of the Greeks at Marathon. The pent up frustration after three years of war led to a general strike in August 1917. The strike petered out leaving the union movement in a much weaker position. The battle narrative is continued throughout the book noting the failure of tanks at Bullecourt and the success of artillery at Menin Road. One gesture of humanity is recorded in that the Germans held their fire whilst stretcher-bearers removed the wounded at Passchendaele. The Germans pointed to the wounded men to make the task of the stretcher-bearers easier. The symbolism of success at Beersheba and the capture of Jerusalem are considered.

Arguably 1917 was the bleakest year of the war and the Government wishing to concentrate the minds of those at home restricted sporting events and the sale of alcohol. The Sydney and Melbourne football finals were allowed as considered sacrosanct. The second conscription referendum got underway with Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix, playing a leading role. An egg was thrown at the PM whilst addressing a Queensland rally leading to the creation of the Commonwealth Police Force.

The 'yes' vote prevailed with the members of the AIF but not by a significant margin. Hughes' views of the war aims made his counsel less welcome in Britain and his outspoken criticism of President Woodrow Wilson's internationalist views led to his being denied a visa to visit America. One interesting vignette on the Hughes/Wilson enmity was when asked if Australia in the event of it being granted a mandate of New Guinea would allow the entry of missionaries, he replied 'I understand that the poor people are very short of food and for some time past they have not had enough missionaries'. President Wilson did not see the joke.

The book details Keith Murdock and Charles Bean's attempt to prevent the promotion of Sir John Monash to corps command. The Australian success at the battle of Hamel is dealt with in some detail.

The book concludes with scholarly considerations of Australia's contribution to the final victory, the effect of the war on the Australian population and the Anzac Legend. The work is complemented by an excellent series of maps and collection of photographs. In addition as an aid to further research it has a number of appendices, extensive endnotes, a bibliography and an index. The book is highly recommended to serious students of Australian history and should be present in every Municipal and High School library.

JOHN TWYFORD

JACK'S JOURNEY

By Kit Cullen

Allen & Unwin Book Publishers, 400pp, RRP \$32.99

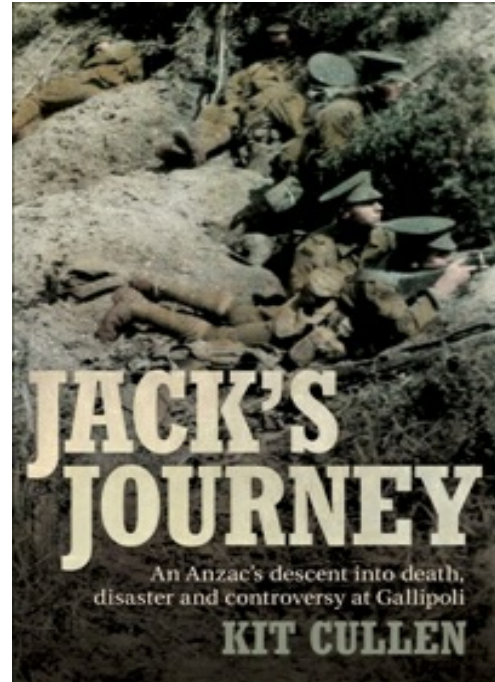
This work is of a very different genre from Professor Beaumont's work reviewed above. It is based on the diary of 24-year-old Jack Collyer from Mudgee NSW. Jack enlisted in the AIF in September 1914 and was killed early in the Gallipoli campaign. His family were local builders and clearly closely knit.

The diary came into the possession of the author who realized its archival value and the book consists of the reproduction of the diary supplemented by the author's commentary and extracts from Jack's contemporaries diaries and other archival material. The author comments 'I have let the men and women-nurses-who were there tell the story as much as possible; after all, they witnessed what happened.' On arrival in Sydney from Mudgee Jack joined the 4th Battalion AIF to commence training.

The diary starts in October 1914 with Jack's departure from Circular Quay on the 'SS Euripides'. Many of the incidents recorded in the work will be known to our readers but here they are seen through the lens of a young man embarking on a great adventure. Jack was clearly impressed by the beauty of the Ocean. The food ranged from good to bad and often consisted of rabbit stew. On the voyage two soldiers died of pneumonia.

An entry in November referring to William (Billy) Chidley will ring a bell with students of early Sydney history. The metaphor was 'as mad as Billy Chidley' who preached sexual freedom in the Domain dressed in a toga. He died as a result of self-immolation in the Ryde Psychiatric Centre and rates a mention in the NSW Law Reports!

The description of the voyage through the Red Sea and Suez Canal are interesting. On the last day of the voyage many of the soldiers suffered a violent attack of food poisoning that the Colonel attributed to dirty cooking utensils or the rabbits. The ship docked at Alexandria and the battalion travelled by train to Cairo.



Jack's and other diaries give a good account of life at the Mena Camp including a reference of Charles Bean's letter written at the behest of Major-General Bridges concerning the bad behaviour of Australian troops. It is well recorded how this letter stirred up a hornet's nest.

On the 3rd April 1915 the Battalion departed for Lemnos on the 'Lake Michigan'. On board the battalion was informed of their destination. After a period of training on Lemnos the battalion once again embarked on the 'Lake Michigan' bound for Gallipoli with a pipe band playing. In preparation for the landing the troops were issued with three days food rations. The Padres save the Catholic Priest were not allowed with the first wave of troops. It seems the reasoning for this was that the space was needed for more equipment. The exception made for the priest may have been an administrative foul-up.

One curious fact that remains unexplained was an order that no white handkerchiefs were to be taken on service. One wonders if this is because of the high visibility of white or the other (less warlike) purpose that it might be put to? There is a detailed account of the organization of a Turkish regiment from a Turkish Lieutenant-Colonel.

Jack was wounded when elements of the 4th Battalion were attempting to assist members of Royal Marine Light Infantry at a forward position named Death Trap Valley. It seems he was hit in the thigh by an explosive bullet (dum dum). Although outlawed by the Hague Convention of 1899 both sides may have used them at Gallipoli! Jack remained on the beach for two days before being evacuated on the hospital ship 'Gascon'. He died and was buried at sea. Much of the remainder of the book is taken up with archival material relating to the problems that faced the medical staff and the fighting associated with Death Trap Valley.

The author from his research has concluded that the 4th Battalion did not receive proper recognition for its efforts at Death Trap Valley. It would seem, especially in terms of medals awarded, that Royal Marine Light Infantry received more accolades. The author questions the way the episode was dealt with in the writings of Charles Bean. His ideas are iconoclastic and vigorously put.

It must be added that the Australian War Memorial vigorously contested what the author has had to say. It is not for *Reconnaissance* to take sides on an historical debate but to acknowledge that it is for an historian to form a view on the material he or she is writing about and to express that view. In your reviewer's opinion the book is well worth reading and exhibits considerable research skills in the collection and presentation of the material.

It is the firmly held view of *Reconnaissance* that others who come into possession of treasures like John Collyer's diary make proper use of it or pass it on to those who can. The work includes several appendices, endnotes and an index. Finally, it should be added that the photographs and maps are of the highest quality.

JOHN TWYFORD

FROM THE PUBLISHER

With the Spring issue of *Reconnaissance* for 2013 the Society concludes another successful year. I hope that the publication has been of interest to our members. We have had regular contributions from Joe Crumlin and Harry Taplin. In addition there have been contributions from Les Perrett, Kevin Smith, David Twyford and a book review from Tom Algeo. I extend my heartfelt thanks for those contributions.

Our plans go beyond the present form and it is hoped in the future to expand the publication by the addition of more book reviews. For this we need reviewers. I hope some members will offer their services in this regard. Reviewing a book is fun and all that is need is a pencil to mark the relevant passages and then once the book had been read it is easy work to write the review.

I should also add that as Dr Johnson said writing a review 'concentrates the mind' and after the exercise one always comes away with a better understanding of the work. As a mental exercise it is probably more beneficial than the *Herald* crossword! We have now ascertained that we can considerably expand *Reconnaissance* without increasing the cost of publication. Accordingly we will be looking for longer more considered contributions. In this endeavour we will offer peer review in the hope of attracting the work of academics.

From my point of view it has been an exciting time putting *Reconnaissance* together and to extend my thanks to all who have helped me. In particular I would like to thank Ms Myra Nikolich who has looked after the desktop publishing.

Dr Kevin Smith has advised that the December edition of his newsletter is now available. The publication may be obtained by contacting Kevin at the following address: kevin.robert6@bigpond.com

JOHN TWYFORD
