

Australia 1901–2001: a narrative history

by Andrew Tink. NewSouth Publishing, 2014, 432 pp, RRP \$39.99

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Australia is short of good general histories. The old war horses, Geoffrey Blainey and Manning Clark, still hold pride of place. This is a pity because there is strong demand for such works as, for example, the best-selling British histories of Simon Schama demonstrate. A sound, readable general history can be a treat for the novice and also present facts afresh to the knowledgeable. Andrew Tink's *Australia 1901–2001* is therefore to be especially welcomed.

Tink has been a successful barrister, senior NSW MP and, more recently, the author of several well-regarded works of Australian history. There is much talk at present about the decline of the political gene pool. Reading Tink's book makes one think that some new historical DNA might not go amiss. He writes in an unashamedly evocative, narrative style that a traditional academic historian would find difficult to bring off. Yet Tink does not sacrifice accuracy for effect. The thoroughness of his research is impressive and his command of the historical currents striking. Tink has an eye for an anecdote that brings his text alive without ever seeming forced. The narrative segues seamlessly from major events to pungent vignettes. As an example, after several chapters celebrating the exploits of Australians in the First World War, Tink notes:

For those diggers who had their faces obliterated or hideously disfigured, or chunks of their skulls sheered off, for those who were incontinent, paralysed or dismembered, or had had their minds enfeebled, or for other reasons could not remain with their families, the Red Cross ran the Graythwaite Anzac Hostel, a grand two-storey mansion located in lush gardens overlooking the harbour at North Sydney. It was here that such invalids found a welcoming refuge (pp75–76).

If I have a criticism of *Australia 1901–2001* it is that there is not enough questioning or analysis. A general history does not have to avoid conclusions – John Hirst's excellent recent work is entitled *Australian History in Seven Questions*. It is a pity that Tink does not talk more about the broader perspective as many interesting ideas lurk below the surface of his book.