



Harewood, Western Port: Stardust to Us, by Patricia Macwhirter, Hilaka Press, 1/646 Blackburn Road, Notting Hill, Victoria, Australia, 3168. 2016. 316 pages. Reviewed by Mary Cole.

This book is a logical extension of a doctoral thesis that was acclaimed by examiners.

Through the chapters one is taken on a journey, woven in stardust, from the Big bang, 13.8 million years ago, through the evolution of our universe, our planet, our country to Western Port Bay and a house, Harewood and today, 2016. This journey transports us through science, geology, and the history of our first people to tell of the contribution to the Western Port area made a remarkable family, the Lyalls.

The author developed her story clearly having stated early that this is an immigrant's interpretation of a complex indigenous history impacted upon by invasion from Europeans and the development of parallel histories to this day.

She has been able to weave established science with the unwritten history of our first people but has also found a place for spirituality and faith in the narrative.

Each part of the journey has been related back to Harewood in a most interesting manner.

Many of the illustrations that enhance the text are testament to the content of the Lyall family library that exists in part today at Harewood.

The quality of the writing and the slightly unconventional approach to the history of Western Port makes this story open to criticism but without foundation. Macwhirter's use of 'invasion' and the assertion that many more aborigines around western Port were killed by one group against another rather than by Europeans is controversial but is a logical conclusion when read from the literature of the time.

Geological time takes on a new meaning as one travels with Harewood on the giant continent of Pangaea during the Permian period to the Gondwanan continent in the Triassic period to the Australian continent and Western Port today.

The explanation of diversity of animals and humans around the globe is dealt with in such a way as to be of interest to all readers; why Australia had no animals suitable for domestication and how this affected the life style of the first people; and, contrary to common belief, the fact that aborigines did farm their land.

The modern history of Harewood and the Western Port region includes the Koo Wee Rup peatlands now cultivated intensively following drainage in the last 19th early 20th centuries. This area is now home to many of us who know the descendants of those families involved in draining the swamp. We appreciate Harewood and its history and this book which adds to the rich collection of works describing European history of this area of Victoria. None of these other books, however, weaves the stardust of the continuing story of the first people with the present day and the future like this book.

Pat's family now are custodians of Harewood weaving their own personal stardust into the future of Harewood. The amazing story of Harewood is compelling reading relevant to today.

I commend this book to all of you.

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