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'The last thing one might expect': The Mediaeval Court at the 1866 Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition

Louise D'Arcens
University of Wollongong, louised@uow.edu.au

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Louise D'Arcens
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In his preface to the *Guide to the Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866*, the exhibition's commissioner John George Knight concludes by underlining the event's principal significance as a showcase for colonial commercial and industrial achievement:

> The great aim of an Exhibition is to give the fullest possible notoriety to new manufactures and processes, and bring the manufacturer and inventor more closely into contact with the merchant, speculator, and capitalist; and, by this most practical method of advertising, to enlarge the basis of trade.[1]

Given this avowedly mercantile and progressivist vision—a vision borne out by the numerous displays of colonial manufacture—it might seem something of a surprise to us today to learn that one of the Exhibition's most arresting exhibits was a Mediaeval Court.

Nor would our surprise be anachronistic. The incongruity of the Court was not lost on the exhibition's earliest commentators either, among them the reporter for the *Australian News for Home Readers*, who commented:

> One would scarcely expect to find a Mediaeval Court in an exhibition of the products of a new colony: but such a court there is, intended to illustrate portions of ecclesiastical architecture; and it constitutes, perhaps, the most pictorially effective part of the whole building.[2]

The reporter's expression of surprise echoes the acknowledgement of the Court's incongruity found in the exhibition *Guide*, which grants that 'visitors … will find … that they have come upon perhaps the last thing one might expect to find in an exhibition of the products and manufactures of a new colony— to wit, a Mediaeval Court'.[3] Yet for the *Guide*'s author, as for the *Australian News* reporter, the Court's particular distinction, and the quality that secures its status as 'one of the most remarkable objects in the Exhibition', is its aesthetic appeal. This is most evident in the *Guide*'s comment that 'the excellence of this court lies not more in the beauty of the various articles it contains than in the admirable tone of all the decorations, giving to the place that 'dim, religious light' befitting the character it assumes.' More literary readers would have recognized the unattributed allusion to the 'storied windows richly dight' of Milton's *Il Penseroso*; and indeed it was the stained-glass windows produced by local glass stainers Messrs. Ferguson, Urie and Lyon that were singled out among the Court's many lauded decorations and *objets* as being 'mainly instrumental in producing this effect'.

Such, it seems, was the exhibition organizers' belief in the Mediaeval Court's unique appeal, that it was singled out as the commencement point in the *Guide*'s proposed 'line of

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march' through the exhibition. According to the Ground Plan included in the *Guide*, the display that would have greeted visitors upon entering the Main Hall from the La Trobe Street public entrance was in fact not the Mediaeval Court, but the fur trophy, a display comprising cases of furs and stuffed birds beneath a fur-covered triumphal arch surmounted by a taxidermic representation of the Australian

arms. Indeed, this eyecatching piece of colonial kitsch is treated first and at length in the *Argus* report on the exhibition, yet in the *Guide* it is mentioned but swiftly by-passed[4] so that the tour can begin with the charming oddity of an ersatz Old World cathedral interior.

The exhibition *Guide*'s confidence in the Court's appeal should not escape our notice. The fact that this display was granted such a prominent position suggests its significance went beyond merely providing a 'pictorially effective' diversion. For all the remarks on the Court's incongruity, no-one seemed to be in any doubt of its rightful place in the exhibition. One likely explanation for this is that by 1866 this kind of exhibit had a highly respectable pedigree, stemming from Augustus Welby Pugin's celebrated Medieval Court, which had impressed visitors first at London's International Exhibition of 1851, and later at the relocated Crystal Palace at Sydenham between 1852 and 1866. In an entry on which the description in the 1866 Melbourne *Guide* may well have been modelled, *Hunt's Handbook to the Official Catalogue* (1851) lauds Pugin's court's revival of Gothic architecture's 'pervading spirit of piety' with its 'solemnly soothing influence' upon visitors. In particular, the pious ambience attributed to the Melbourne stained-glass windows echoes the praise lavished on the windows in Pugin's Court, which Hunt also dignifies with an unattributed literary allusion, comparing them to the windows described by Keats in *The Eve of St. Agnes* as 'innumerable of stains and splendid dyes'.[5]

That Pugin's Medieval Court was perceived as a venerable precedent to be imitated seems especially likely when we consider that Sir Redmond Barry, who had been appointed Commissioner of the Intercolonial Exhibition (he resigned just before its opening), had also acted as the Special Commissioner for Victoria's entry for the 1862 International Exhibition in London. Barry's letters reveal that he had visited the Sydenham Crystal Palace in that year, and so would have witnessed first-hand not only the charm of the medieval exhibit, but its capacity to draw crowds.[6] Given the fame of Pugin's Medieval Court, it would arguably seem more surprising that there had not been any attempts to mount something similar at previous exhibitions held in the Australian colonies. On the other hand, for reasons I will go on to elaborate, Melbourne in 1866, in spite of its bold modernity, offered a unique moment in which aesthetic tastes, public events, and urban development all converged to make a Mediaeval Court a surprisingly apposite inclusion in a local exhibition. I wish to argue that this exhibit had a double valency, seemingly exceptional and foreign and yet also entirely at home in its modern colonial context. With its unique and felicitous blending of pre-industrial nostalgia with high-capitalist merchandising, the Mediaeval Court was simultaneously an anachronistic oddity and an entirely fitting introduction to

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the Exhibition and, furthermore, a surprisingly representative display of Melbournian civic identity.

The representative nature of the Mediaeval Court lay first of all in its reflection of an emerging medievalist aesthetic taste in Melbourne. Its attempt to reconstruct the beauty of the medieval past was far from anomalous, for in the years surrounding the Intercolonial Exhibition, Melbourne hosted a number of medievalist spectacles, and was undergoing a conspicuous 'medievalisation' of its urban environment in an architectural style paralleling that of the Mediaeval Court.

This style, which is neither named nor clearly implied in the *Guide*'s more piecemeal description, is clearly identifiable in the engraving by Albert Charles Cooke (1836-1902), which accompanies the *Australian News* report on the exhibition and which offers us a detailed pictorial representation of the Court (Fig. 1). Looking at Cooke's engraving, it is immediately apparent that the architectural idiom being presented as quintessentially 'mediaeval' is the Gothic. Cooke's image presents an edifice dominated by a central pointed arch, which leads into a chancel the *Guide* describes as 'old English', but which can more readily be described as eclectic Gothic, boasting not only five narrow pointed lancet stained-glass windows with rose designs and mandalas, but also a shallow vaulted and ribbed ceiling. The detailed account of the Court in the *Argus* on October 25, 1866 includes a description of this ceiling that usefully supplements Cooke's rather distant image of it: 'in the centre of the ceiling is the *Agnus Dei*, surrounded with inscriptions and Gothic clouds. Radiating from this are twelve panels,

each containing an emblem of the twelve apostles'.[7] Within the chancel we see an altar table flanked by two pointed panels on each side, displaying the ten commandments, the creed, and the Lord's Prayer. The distinctive Gothic quatrefoil feature punctuates a number of the Court's features: it can be seen carved into the stone font at the left of the image, which according to the *Argus* was designed by William Wilkinson Wardell, an adherent of Pugin's and Melbourne's premier Gothic Revival architect. The quatrefoil can also be seen on a nearby Gothic throne chair and at the very right edge, carved on the front of a side altar. The trefoil reappears in delicate fleur-de-lys style on the arms of the wrought iron flourished cross at the upper left of the image. And finally, suspended over the main chamber is a Gothic chandelier, also decorated with delicate trefoil and quatrefoil working. The *Argus* account reports, furthermore, a number of Gothic features that go unrecorded by Cooke, such as a stained-glass window depicting a *salvator mundi*, a favoured theme in Northern late Gothic art. The statuary flanking the Court also evokes the elongated forms and elegant drapery characteristic of the sculpture from that era. It would seem, then, that although the Court *in toto* generated what was taken by contemporary commentators to be an 'aggregate' medieval effect, the dominant idiom is unmistakably Gothic.

It is true that when compared with engravings of Pugin's Medieval Court (Fig. 2), Cooke's image cannot but highlight the relative modesty of the colonial iteration. Nevertheless, the images are alike in their depiction of the two Courts' shared ecclesiastical

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Fig. 1. Albert Charles Cooke, wood engraving of the Mediaeval Court,
The Australian News for Home Readers, December 20, 1866, p.8.

aesthetic. The similarity is even more apparent in Philip Delamotte's photograph of the reconstructed version of Pugin's Court exhibited at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham which, with its front-on perspective, may also have been a model for the Melbourne Court (Fig. 3).

In its conflation of the medieval with the Gothic, the Court reinforced Melbourne's wider embracing of the Gothic Revival style over the past decade. Indeed, this idiom came to be the architectural *lingua franca* of Melbourne's major ecclesiastical projects, a number of which were under construction at the time of the Exhibition's opening. Master builder John Young (1827-1907), who built the Court and supplied the majority of its furnishings and ornaments, had also been working on the construction of a number of Melbourne's most significant Gothic revival buildings, most famously St Patrick's Cathedral, which had been under construction since 1858. Like the rebuilt St Mary's Catholic Cathedral in Sydney, St Patrick's was designed by William Wardell, the foremost disseminator of Pugin's

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Fig. 2. Engraving of Pugin Court, Great Exhibition 1851.
The Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue (Virtue: London, 1851), p. xxiv.

architectural vision in the Australian colonies. Pugin's profound influence in colonial Australia has been exhaustively documented in Brian Andrew's *Australian Gothic*;[8] suffice to say that along with St Mary's, St Patrick's marked the apotheosis of Australia's participation in the larger international Gothic revival

movement, and we cannot discuss the Mediaeval Court without considering it and Melbourne's other ecclesiastical buildings. Indeed, a number of the Court's features would find their final destination in these churches and cathedrals, and were on loan to the Court while the buildings were under construction. The splendid stained glass windows in the chancel were designed, according to the *Guide*, for the Episcopalian Church at Casterton, while a number of the carved figures on the walls were intended for St Patrick's.

Closer still to the exhibition and its immediate concerns, the superiority of the Gothic

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Fig. 3 Phillip Delamotte's photograph of the Reconstructed Mediaeval Court, 1859. Reproduced by permission of English Heritage NMRC, Swindon. Ref. No. DP004632.

as a form of civic architecture was at the heart of the lengthy speech entitled 'The Halls of Europe' delivered by Sir Redmond Barry on 8 September 1866 to the builders working on the Exhibition buildings. In outlining his civic vision for Melbourne, Barry urged a more concerted use of Gothic Revival to lend Melbourne an appearance of imposing grandeur and 'lordliness of style' befitting its wealth and emerging civic stature. Having listed the great Gothic cathedrals of medieval Europe and England, he went on to say 'let me also, at the hazard of arousing the indignation of our highly intelligent body of architects … express my regret that, with such models before them, the ecclesiastical architecture of Victoria is not allowed to exhibit more becoming examples of their ability'. Barry then resorted to the now-legendary rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne as a strategy of incitement, pointing to the New South Wales colony's most impressive exemplars of Gothic

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Revival, which were as yet unmatched by Melbourne.

This speech suggests that the exhibition's Mediaeval Court can be regarded not simply as an index of Barry's admiration of Pugin's court, but as a kind of neo-Gothic sampler of his (and others') vision for Melbourne's destiny as a great global city; a fragment of Gothic architecture to be sure, but a completed fragment, that could temporarily satiate the Melbourne public while the great cathedral projects were still under construction, and tantalize them with a taste of the great neo-Gothic future to come.

But Gothic architecture was not the only means by which Melbournians in the 1860s witnessed reconstructions of the Middle Ages. The local theatrical scene had also, over the preceding years, placed before the Melbourne public living images of medieval history and mythology. Richard W. Schoch and others have persuasively argued for the vital role of theatrical performance as 'an active partner in the nineteenth-century effort to recover the medieval past'.[9] Perhaps more than any other medium, theatre had the singular capacity to offer a simultaneously physical and spatio-temporal embodiment of the personages, events, and scenes from the Middle Ages. In particular, the plays of Shakespeare had come increasingly in this period to be treated as a medium for the dissemination of popular representations of the English medieval past, such that Shoch argues '[a] Shakespearian past inevitably ghosts or haunts [Victorian] theatrical representations of the medieval past'. [10]

At the time of the Intercolonial Exhibition, many locals would have had vivid memories of Melbourne's own recent season of medievalist Shakespeare. Between October 1863 and June 1864 Melbourne and its environs witnessed two theatrical seasons of the renowned English Shakespearian actors Charles and Ellen Kean, who had come to Australia under the management of local impresario George Coppin. The Keans, who by the time of their Melbourne tours were some years past their prime, had built their reputation on their exhaustively researched, grandiose stage sets and fastidiously correct period costumes. Although their antiquarian ambitions extended broadly across history, they arguably reached their apotheosis in the reproduction of the English Middle Ages via Shakespeare's chronicle plays. As dramatisations of English history, Kean's productions of Shakespeare's chronicles were significant for

their deployment of an antiquarian aesthetic in the service of a nationalist theatrical pedagogy. These plays were regarded as historical records, and Shakespeare as a vehicle for teaching English history to the English—and, by extension, the colonial—public.

Such was the historical exactness of the Keans' 'upholstered Shakespeare' that Charles Kean, arguably more fêted for his research than his acting, was made a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1857. But letters exchanged between the actor and his Australian manager suggest that the Melbourne productions were less lavishly antiquarian than those the Keans had staged in England. To Coppin's assumption that they would 'bring out all the dresses and properties for your Shakesperian [sic] productions', Kean replied that he no longer had access to such paraphernalia, adding rather waspishly that even if he had, it would be 'utterly

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impossible' to transport them.[10] In fact, the ageing Kean's plan was to give unadorned scene readings in Australia, and he relented only grudgingly when Coppin stressed the financial risk involved in offering Shakespeare to the Australian public without the theatrical spectacle for which Kean was renowned.[11] Reviews of the Keans' Melbourne performances in late 1863 suggest that actor and manager struck a compromise. For while there are mentions of splendid costumes,[12] and handsomely mounted individual scenes, the Melbourne stage was, it seems, comparatively bare. The *Age* review of their *Henry VIII*, despite its reminiscence about the 'unrivalled splendour' of the Keans' London performances of this play, admits that the Melbourne version is 'divested … of … many of its original accessories' and 'not splendidly illustrated in [its] theatrical furnishings and scenery'.[13]

Nevertheless, one can note in these reviews a determination to treat these relatively austere performances as instances of the Keans' antiquarian art. Melbourne audiences were urged to see history alive before them not in the distractions afforded by 'the "upholstery" of Oxford street'[14] but in the performers' meticulous embodiment of historical personages. This displacement of the antiquarian impulse from the scenery to the acting is perhaps best illustrated in the *Age* review of their performance of Dion Boucicault's play *Louis XI*, which describes Charles Kean's enactment of the fifteenth-century monarch as 'a pre-Raphaelite picture, finished with scrupulous accuracy of detail … we quite forget about the actor and the stage—we have laid open before us a stirring page in the history of France'.[15]

While the Keans might have been forced to travel light, they nevertheless demonstrated the historical genius of their acting in a whole suite of mostly Shakespearian medievalist plays, including *Richard III*, *King John*, *Louis XI*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Henry VIII*. Moreover, their presence in Melbourne managed to generate some rather more spectacular antiquarian Shakespeare. In a fierce rivalry that became the stuff of local satire,[16] the actor Barry Sullivan, incumbent at the Theatre Royal between 1862 and 1866, mounted his own more lavish productions, often of the identical plays being performed by the Keans. The *Age* review of his *Richard III*, which in November 1863 he staged in direct competition with the Keans' production of the same play, describes the performance as '[p]roduced with beautiful scenery and splendid appointments'.[17] Sullivan's particular advantage over the Keans was that he had at his disposal the valuable services of the scenic artist John Hennings, whose painted historical backdrops were widely regarded as equal to those seen by London audiences.

So, less than three years before the Intercolonial Exhibition, Melbourne had borne enthusiastic witness to a high-profile battle over the presentation of medieval history onstage. Closer still in time, we find another medievalist production, this one mounted only two months before the exhibition's opening: *Ivanhoe, or the Trial by Battle*, a theatrical adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's medievalist novel *Ivanhoe*. Premiering at the Theatre Royal on August 25 1866, the play was an amalgamation of the two best-known adaptations of

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Scott's novel, W. H. Murray's *Ivanhoe* and Thomas Dibdin's *Ivanhoe, or the Jew's Daughter*.[18] Although the opening night performances garnered tepid reviews from both the *Argus* and *Age* reviewers, the scenery (probably also by Hennings) was unanimously praised for its historical verisimilitude and 'minute care in the details'[19], with the *Argus* reviewer enthusing

the various portions of Sherwood Forest are shown with an appearance of reality

which, combined with the foresters carrying their bows and their javelins, and the

sound of the 'brisk horn', takes the imagination vividly back to the old feudal time.[20]

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The sensation scene depicting 'the conflagration and destruction of Torquilstone Castle and the abduction of the Jewish maiden' was especially singled out in both newspapers for its spectacular scenic effects.

The enthusiastic reception of this play's recreation of the Middle Ages suggests an audience whose aesthetic tastes had been trained for a sympathetic reception of the Mediaeval Court. Indeed, as much is suggested by the *Age* theatre reviewer, who comments on 'the exorbitant desire recently manifested by the Melbourne public for the romantic, the historical'—a comment that might well allude to the legacy of the Keans' recent seasons in Melbourne.[21] That this production of *Ivanhoe* was still part of public consciousness throughout the running time of the Exhibition is evident in the noticeable presence of *Ivanhoe*-themed costumes at the Mayor's Fancy Ball held in the New Exhibition building on Thursday 20 September, 1866. According to the list of guests' costumes published in the *Argus*, Mr John Bruce came as Wilfred of Ivanhoe, Mr W. C. Biddle as the brooding Templar Brian de Bois Guibert, Mr Thomas Drysdale as Robin Hood, and Messrs Samuel Brush and Richard Goldsbrough as Friar Tuck. Furthermore, no fewer than four gentlemen of Melbourne society donned the distinctive garb of the Knights Templar, and another two came as 'jolly friars'. Among the ladies we find Mrs W. M. Kilpatrick and Mrs Joseph Wilkie evoking the world of *Ivanhoe* by coming, respectively, as 'a Norman lady' and 'a lady of the court of Richard Coeur de Lion'. It is true that the costumes at this ball were not limited to medieval personages, or indeed to figures from European or English history. Nevertheless, the imaginative appeal of the medieval period is strongly in evidence: those *Ivanhoe*-esque characters kept company with numerous others inspired by the Middle Ages, including monks, hermits, friars, knights, a troubadour, a nobleman, noblewomen, and peasants.[22] In many ways, then, the Mediaeval Court, far from being 'the last thing one might expect', seems thoroughly of a piece with an urban environment punctuated by physical reconstructions of medieval buildings, scenes, and people.

Analysing the Mediaeval Court as an expression of colonial Melbourne's aesthetic idiom tells only part of the story. We need also to consider its historical and ideological valency, particularly in relation to the capitalist, imperialist, and racial ideologies that underpinned not only the Exhibition, but also the civic and colonial cultures in which it participated.

The Court's arguably surprising compatibility with Melbourne's mercantile culture

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merits attention because it belies the exhibit's allegedly historicist, not to mention religious, impetus. John Ganim notes that after the 1851 Great Exhibition, medieval reconstructions were 'among the most popular exhibits at world's fairs', but argues that their antiquarianism rendered them 'often the most difficult to assimilate to the fairs' modernizing agenda'.[15] Nevertheless, as Ganim also points out, even Pugin's 1851 Court had combined medieval aesthetics with industrial *tekhnē*, famously drawing the scorn of Ruskin and the future pre-Raphaelites for its use of manufactured rather than handcrafted items. This would suggest that in fact the medieval exhibitions, while ostensibly anti-modern, in fact functioned at least in part as apologias for modern mass-production, simultaneously masking and parading their debt to the latest in design and manufacturing ingenuity.[24] The Melbourne Mediaeval Court can be seen in this way: for all its evocation of transcendence, its edifying interior provided a perfect vehicle for the showcasing of local industry. The rapt admiration of its 'dim religious light' did not prevent any commentators from anatomizing minutely its exhibition of locally manufactured products.

One feature, however, that differentiates the Melbourne Mediaeval Court from other medievalist displays such as Old Manchester and Salford (Manchester Exhibition 1887) or Vieux Paris (Paris Exhibition 1900) is that although it is tied to local industry, it does not display an *in situ* medieval past. Rather, the medieval past is located in a colonial fantasy of an 'Old English' church interior, a fantasy which reveals the extent to which this display was imbued with imperialist meanings. Indeed, its showcasing of local manufacture marks the Court as an unexpected but unmistakable tribute to post-gold rush Melbourne's role in the larger work of British imperial industry. As Ganim notes, the Fairs' salute to 'industrial wealth' was inseparable from their celebration of 'the growth of empire' and the triumph of the West.[25]

The Court's quietly triumphal engagement with imperialist historicism is evident in the choice of a Gothic aesthetic. The Gothic as an architectural language was far from being ideologically innocent in colonial Australia. Brian Andrew states that for Pugin 'Gothic equal[led] Christian and Christian equal[led] Gothic';[26] and Hilary Carey has argued that Australia's uptake of Gothic was as an ecumenical 'English' style that did not have the thorny sectarian complexion that it had in places such as Ireland, where it was regarded as synonymous with the Church of Ireland's attempt at imperial

control over Irish religion.[27] The Mediaeval Court's adoption of this aesthetic, like that of Australia's Gothic Revival churches, makes it, then, an embodiment of a benign, 'universal' English Christian past which has apparently been transplanted effortlessly, and rightfully, in colonial soil. In this respect its historico-ideological agenda dovetails with that of the Keans' Shakespearian tour, offering a visual history lesson in which colonial audiences are encouraged to recognise their inheritance of the greatness of England's early culture. In so doing, the Court embodies what Peter Hoffenberg has called 'imperial nostalgia', that is the 'cultural policy to create and preserve … historical fantasies at the exhibitions', which aims to create 'an historical

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Australia'—in this case via an evocation of modern Australia's connection to English antiquity—and attempts to resolve local tensions via the 'participatory remaking of history, memory, and identities'.[28]

What 'local tensions' might Melbourne audiences have participated in resolving (or rather disavowing), as they strolled through the serene interior of the Mediaeval Court, collectively remaking the Australian past in the image of medieval England? Arguably in its integrated recreation of ancient Christianity and Englishness, the Court marked the triumph of this cultural lineage over the 'primitive' cultures of Australasia and the Pacific, which were represented in a desultory and piecemeal fashion. It has become a commonplace today to emphasise the element of anthropological theatre at the Fairs, played out in elaborate life-sized simulacra of Egyptian street scenes, Japanese tea houses, and so on. Ganim develops this argument in a singularly interesting direction in his analysis of the Fairs' physical and ideological collocation of orientalism and medievalism, in which the two come to 'be paired … as stages of cultural development', with 'the Middle Ages represent[ing] in time what the Orient represented in space, an 'other' to the present development of Western Civilization.[29] Ganim's persuasive thesis cannot, however, be extended unproblematically to the 1866 Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition, where the fragmentary culture of the Australian-Pacific region is unambiguously subordinated to the sophisticated integrity of the European past.

The Intercolonial Exhibition's less 'anthropological' nature reflects its gearing toward the promotion of Australian and South Pacific industry. The only exhibits that reflected anything other than Australian settler industry were minor displays of aboriginal artefacts, a New Caledonian Court, a New Zealand Court, and a tiny display from Batavia, which was housed within the South Australian Court. It is true that the New Caledonian Court was opposite the Mediaeval Court, and that it included 'weapons of the aborigines of the island';[30] but from the *Guide* it is clear that this display was subordinated to the Court's primary mercantile purpose. Unlike the anthropological courts of the World's Fairs, it did not stage any diverting recreations of Melanesian village life, and there is no pairing of it with the Mediaeval Court as the spatial and historical 'others' of nineteenth-century Australia. Further away in the Main Hall, we are told that the New Zealand Court is fronted by 'a nest of Maori kits, made from flax', but little is made of them; they serve as a kind of indigenous bunting, picturesquely framing the settler-culture mercantile goods which are the focus of the display. Even more pointedly, there appears to have been no item at all of an ethnographic nature in the (admittedly small) display from Batavia, a fact lamented by the reviewer of the *Australasian*, whose review is incorporated into the exhibition *Guide*. The absence of anything revealing about the elusive 'Dutch East Indiaman' is most regrettable, according to this reviewer, because it deprives Australians, and the British Empire at large, of vital insight into a complex people who are custodians of raw materials that are of great commercial interest to the Empire.[31] The supposition underpinning this commentary—that

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rendering colonial subjects knowable facilitates their economic domination—is, of course, hardly remarkable. Indeed, this same domesticating impetus underlies a great many of the anthropological displays at the Great Exhibitions. What is distinctive about the *Australasian* review is the nakedness of its commercial and imperial discourse. Divested of the veneer of cosmopolitanism and anthropological fascination usually found in commentaries on the 'native displays', the purpose of these displays is laid bare: and the reviewer is almost brutally pragmatic about the fact that the principle role such a display would be to serve Britain's jealous interest in South East Asian trade.

This hard-bitten approach to the purpose of the Exhibition leads us again to ask what cultural work a 'folly' such as the Mediaeval Court would be doing in this context. Returning to Hoffenburg's formulation, the second, arguably more pressing, tension that the Court participated in disavowing was between the acknowledgement and the denial of Australia's indigenous past. By drawing on, and

embodying, an imperial narrative of English continuity, the Court replaced Australia's indigenous past with the image of a medievalised 'historical Australia'. Of course, this could be said of any imposition of Gothic building within the Australian landscape; but it was especially pointed in the case of the 1866 Exhibition. The differing profiles of the medieval and indigenous displays at this exhibition say much about its role in the 'participatory remaking of history'. Des Cowley has recounted Redmond Barry's abortive attempts to include casts of aboriginal heads and a comparative vocabulary of Aboriginal languages in the exhibition.[32] Furthermore, Cowley mentions that while the exhibition's Victorian Court contained a large display of 'aboriginal products', these were, in a revealing juxtaposition, sandwiched between samples of clothing produced by convicts and colonial women.[33] It is not so much that aboriginal culture was absent from the exhibition: as well as the Victorian Court, the Fine Arts Court contained a series of photographs of aboriginal people taken at Coranderrk Mission, while an array of indigenous items was included in the Central Board's exhibit. But the dispersal of aboriginal presence throughout several locales in the exhibition had the cumulative effect of representing indigenous culture as a dispersed and piecemeal culture, with its decontextualised artefacts approaching the status of bric-à-brac. This was in stark contrast to the Mediaeval Court, whose richly intact chamber reflected the intactness of the culture it embodied.

The 1866 Intercolonial Exhibition was nevertheless haunted by the collocation of primitive or 'native' Australia with the medieval as obverse representations of the infancy of human civilization. Unlike the exhibitions discussed by Ganim, however, European antiquarianism and indigenous ethnology were not so much complementary as competing discourses for understanding the colony's past, and Melbourne had to make a choice.[34] In featuring and fêting the Mediaeval Court as it did, colonial Melbourne—the Melbourne of Gothic cathedrals and historical Shakespeare—nominated unmistakably the cultural infancy that it believed would best fit its ideal image of civic maturity.

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1   J. G. Knight, 'Preface', in *Guide to the Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866*, Melbourne: Blundell and Ford, Printers, 1866, p.11.

2   *Australian News for Home Readers*, December 20, 1866, p.8. The description of the court as 'pictorially effective' uses the phrasing found in the *Age* report on the exhibition, October 25, 1866.

3   *Guide*, p. 19.

4   It is given a fuller treatment later, when the tour of the Main Hall has completed its circuit. See the *Guide*, pp. 27-28.

5   Robert Hunt, *Hunt's Handbook to the Official Catalogues: An Explanatory Guide to the Natural Productions and Manufactures of the Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, 1851*, London: Spicer Brothers and W. Clowes & Sons, 1851, p.134.

6   See Gerard Hayes, 'London, Paris, Philadelphia … Victoria at the Great Exhibitions', *The La Trobe Journal,* 56, Spring 1995, 2-5; For Barry's visit to the Crystal Palace, see Ann Galbally, 'Patron of the Arts at the Antipodes', *The La Trobe Journal*, 73, Autumn 2004, 4-18; and Ann Galbally, *Redmond Barry: An Anglo-Irish Australian*, Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1995, p.123.

7   *Argus*, 25 October, 1866, p.2.

8   Brian Andrew, *Australian Gothic: the Gothic revival in Australian architecture from the 1840s to the 1950s*, Carlton South, Vic., Miegunyah Press, 2001.

9   Richard W. Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage: Performing History in the Theatre of Charles Kean*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.8.

10   Letters from Coppin to Kean, October 22, 1862, and from Kean to Coppin, February 25, 1863, in J. M. D. Hardwick, *Emigrant in Motley: The Journey of Charles and Ellen Kean in quest of theatrical fortune in Australia and America, as told in their hitherto unpublished letters*, London: Rockliff, 1954, pp. 51 and 55.

10   Letters from Coppin to Kean, October 22, 1862, and from Kean to Coppin, February 25, 1863, in J. M. D. Hardwick, *Emigrant in Motley: The Journey of Charles and Ellen Kean in quest of theatrical fortune in Australia and America, as told in their hitherto unpublished letters*, London: Rockliff,

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1954, pp. 51 and 55.

11   Coppin to Kean, 22 October, 1862, in *Emigrant in Motley*, p.50.

12   That the Keans did bring some costly period costumes with them is suggested by an article in the *Argus* on 12 April 1864, p.5, which mentions that the Keans' costumes were seized as collatoral against a debt owed by the insolvent manager of the Haymarket Theatre.

13   *Age*, 27 October, 1863.

14   *Age*, 27 October, 1863.

15   *Ibid.*

16   The *Melbourne Punch* made repeated sport of the Kean/Sullivan rivalry throughout late 1863. This rivalry, and the 'unscrupulous, wicked tricks' of the 'madly jealous' Barry, is discussed by an incensed Ellen Kean in a letter to her daughter Mary, dated 20 November, 1863. See *Emigrant in Motley*, pp. 97-100

17   *Age*, 16 November, 1863.

18   See *Argus*, 27 August, 1866. See also James C. Corson, 'Scott's Novels: Dramatized Versions', *Notes and Queries*, 1945, 189:1, 17-18. My thanks to Anne McKendry for drawing my attention to the production of *Ivanhoe.*

19   *Age*, 28 August, 1866.

20   *Argus*, 27 August, 1866.

21   *Age*, 29 August, 1866.

22   *Argus*, 21 September, 1866.

15   John M. Ganim, 'Medievalism and orientalism at the World's Fairs', *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia: international review of English Studies*, 38, mid-summer 2002, pp. 179-90.

24   David Wayne Thomas, for instance, discusses 'Old Manchester and Salford', a massive, replica of a preindustrial district mounted at the 1887 Manchester Exhibition, emphasising its simultaneously nostalgic and apologetic response to the wrenching changes brought about by Northern England's embrace of laissez-faire capitalism. See David Wayne Thomas, 'Replicas and Originality: Picturing Agency in Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Victorian Manchester', *Victorian Studies*, Autumn 2000, pp. 67-102.

25   Ganim, 'Medievalism and Orientalism at the World's Fairs', p.180.

26   Brian Andrew, *Australian Gothic*, p. 8.

27   Hilary Carey, 'Gothic Imperialism in Colonial Australia', paper delivered at the Australian Research Council Network for Early European Research Inaugural International Conference, 3-8 July 2007, The University of Western Australia.

28   Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, p.273.

29   Ganim, 'Medievalism and Orientalism at the World's Fairs', p. 181.

30   *Guide*, p. 42.

31   *Guide*, pp. 36-39.

32 Des Cowley, 'Redeeming an Obligation: Aboriginal Culture at the 1866 Exhibition', *The La Trobe Journal*, 73, 2004, pp. 112-20.

33 Des Cowley, 'Redeeming an Obligation', p. 113.

34 For a masterful account of these competing views of the past in colonial Victoria, and the relationship between time and timelessness in white perceptions of aboriginal culture, see To m Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, Cambridge and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996.