

The “La Trobe Journal”, N° 60 Spring 1997.

This website is a full-text archive of the *La Trobe Journal*, a scholarly publication produced by the [State Library of Victoria Foundation](#).

148

Games of Virtue and Learning: Early Table Games of Australian Interest

Juliana Bayfield

By the middle of the eighteenth century in England a new middle class had emerged in society. It was discriminating, valued learning and innovation, and most importantly was prepared to spend its recent wealth on books and games for children. Moreover, there were enterprising publishers, booksellers and mapsellers, who were sufficiently imaginative and eager to satisfy a wide range of tastes. The old idea that children were to be treated as miniature adults was gradually replaced with a view that childhood was a stage of life with its own interests and needs. Teaching geography, history, science and even religion, through play, became a favoured method of education and was urged upon all parents by educational theorists such as John Locke. The redoubtable Mrs Trimmer, the ‘guardian of education’ herself, also approved. The new children's books and games reflected the interests and aspirations of the middle class as well as its optimism, enthusiastic spirit of inquiry and adventurous nature.

The children's booktrade developed during the 1740s. Thomas Boreman's miniature books, *Gigantic Histories*, were produced in London between 1740 and 1743, and around 1744 Mary Cooper published *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song-Book*, a nursery rhyme collection. John Newbery, one of the most active booksellers and publishers of the time, was among the first to realise the commercial potential of children's books. He produced his first children's book, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book, Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly. With Two Letters from Jack the Giant-Killer; as also a Ball and Pincushion; the Use of which will infallibly make Tommy a Good Boy, and Polly a Good Girl, at the Bible and Sun in St. Paul's Church-Yard in 1744*. The book sold for six pence and for an extra two pence a ball or pincushion could also be obtained. Thus Newbery began his flourishing business, continued after his death by his successors until the business was bought in 1801 by John Harris, another successful bookseller and publisher of books and games.

In 1809 John Harris published a very attractive table game for children, *The Panorama of London, or A Day's Journey round the Metropolis, An Amusing and Instructive Game*. Players are shown the sights of London including the London Docks, the Tower, Sadler's Wells and the Giant Gog in Guildhall. One of the highlights

of the journey — and a good marketing ploy — is a visit to the publisher's own shop; there is an illustration of 'Harris's Shop, the Corner of St. Paul's Church-Yard; where you may stop one turn, and receive a Counter from each Player, to purchase a New Game, or an instructive Book, as your fancy may direct'.

Many of the new pastimes were race games teaching geography, history or morals. Funnily enough, the model for these was an Italian gambling game for adults, *Il Gioco Dell'Oca Dilettevole* (The Pleasing Game of the Goose), believed to have been given to King Philip II of Spain by Francesco de Medici of Florence sometime between 1574 and 1587. The Game of Goose became popular throughout Europe, and it was published in many English versions. It is a race between two or more players with rewards going to those who land on a goose and penalties for those occupying the other pictures. Stakes are won or lost until the player who first reaches the end wins everything. The game was easily adapted for children by adding rewards for moral behaviour, forfeits for vices and by changing the die for a teetotum or spinning top with numbers on its four, six or eight sides. Although the Game of Goose was devised in sixteenth-century Italy, it is believed to have been influenced by earlier games from the Middle East where ancient boards have been discovered and dated as early as 6,500 BCE. The Royal Game of Ur from 2,600 BCE, found in Iraq, is an example of a race game for two players consisting of dice and pieces with the aim of winning the opponent's men. In ancient Egypt Senet was a popular race game found in some of the ancient tombs. It is not known if the game was placed there for entertainment or if it had religious significance. Moksha Patamu, a forerunner of modern Snakes and Ladders, was used to teach the Hindu religion in India. The snakes plunged the player into a former life as a mouse, a rat or a horse, while the ladders led to Nirvana. The game was later used in the West to demonstrate morality, but nowadays is played for fun without religious or moral overtones. The Chinese game, I Ching, is used for divining the future, demonstrating another age-old purpose of games.

The eighteenth century's new-found interest in using games for educating children through play was taken up by the map and printsellers. One of the earliest geographical games was *A Journey Through Europe or The Play of Geography*, invented and sold by John Jefferys and printed for Carrington Bowles, a map and printseller, on 14 September 1759. This was an engraved map of Europe coloured by hand. The rules state that the game is to be played 'in all respects the same as the Game of Goose'.

By 1770 the children's booktrade was making healthy progress, and the publishing of children's games had made a tentative beginning. One distinctive aspect of the new literature and game trade for children was an interest in Captain Cook and in Australia. If Linda Hannas in *The English Jigsaw Puzzle 1760-1890* (London, 1972) is correct, then possibly the earliest reference to Australia in a publication for children is on a dissected map. The original date of 1762 on the puzzle, *The World had been*

erased, and the route of Cook's first voyage added as well as the markings, 'Antipodes of the principal Cities in Europe' and 'New South Wales. Discovered in 1772 [sic]'. The author puts forward the theory that the widow of John Spilsbury, the inventor of dissected puzzles for children, had the original date of *The World* removed just before she sold the business in 1772. It is suggested that the date was erased in order to include Cook's new discoveries and to prolong the selling life of the puzzle. Be that as it may, it might be doubtful that the public of the day would have bought many copies of a game with an incorrect date of such a celebrated and well documented event for the edification of their young.

In the year 1774 the *Royal Geographical Amusement* was published by Robert Sayer, another map and printseller. During the last decade of the eighteenth century another ten or so race games were produced. They were sold backed on canvas and contained in a slip case. One of these games from the 1790s is Wallis's *Tour Through England and Wales, A New Geographical Pastime*, which was published in London by John Wallis on 24 December 1794. It has 16 sections mounted on linen with the explanation and rules printed together with the game, which is played with an eight-sided teetotum and up to three pyramids representing travellers, or players, and four counters or markers, called servants. The rules hopefully suggest that 'if a double set of counters and pyramids are purchased, six may play'. On the tour around the 117 towns and cities marked on the map of England and Wales the traveller occasionally has to wait a turn or so to visit the sites. He must then pay the same number of stakes for the number of turns that he is obliged to miss. The forfeits are placed at random and do not appear to have any moral or purpose. Chichester, for example, 'produces fine lobsters and manufactures needles' and Dorchester is 'famous for its strong beer and its superb county gaol lately built'. Neither of these towns requires the traveller to lose a turn to view the sites, whereas at Worcester he must stay two turns to see the several 'manufactories' of china and gloves among other products, and at Marlborough he stays one turn 'to dine at one of the finest Inns in the kingdom'. At the Isle of Man he is shipwrecked and is out of the game.

Table games of journeys around the world or through the British Empire often consisted of maps, sometimes with scenes inserted, accompanied by a rule book describing the manners and customs of the people. Historical games could consist of a spiral track made of round vignettes illustrating historical, mythological or contemporary scenes and terminating in a dominant centre-piece portraying an English monarch. Pyramid-like structures were also favoured to demonstrate history from the world's beginning to the contemporary monarch at the apex. These kinds of early games with their formal designs occasionally introduced Australia.

Very similar to the *Tour Through England and Wales* is another Wallis game, *Complete Voyage Round the World. A New Geographical Pastime*, published in London on 20 January 1796 by John Wallis at his Map Warehouse, No 16 Ludgate

Street (Plate 12). This is one of the earliest known table games to mention Australia. It is a map of the world which has 100 places to visit and could be played by the same number of people as the Tour and with the same rules. Again there is no apparent moral or significant historical reason for the placement of forfeits. A turn is lost in order to view sights as disparate as the Royal Library in Copenhagen and the black hole in Calcutta where '123 persons were suffocated in 1757'. The only town marked in New Holland, 'the largest island in the world', is Port Jackson, or Botany Bay. 'To this place the convicts are sent from England. Here the traveller must stay two turns, to view the new colony'. Shipwreck in the 'Magellan Straights' results in the traveller losing his chance of the game. Bowles and Carver had a more moral intent for their Geographical Game of the World — 'To prevent any idea of the traveller being brought here [Botany Bay] as a convict he need only stay four turns to observe the manner of our new acquaintance'. The game makers were prepared to describe society, wars and all, for the moral benefit of young children.

Captain Cook's discoveries are well documented in Wallis's *Complete Voyage Round the World*. Cook is mentioned in relation to eight places on the map in addition to 'Owhyee' where the traveller must stay one turn 'to see the bay where Captain Cook was unfortunately killed in a contest with the natives, Feb. 14, 1779'. John Harris's *Geographical Recreation or A Voyage Round the Habitable Globe*, published in 1809, is of the spiral track design. The death of Cook is shown in one of the '116 prints, descriptive of the Manners, Customs and Dresses of different Nations'. At the centre of the game are four figures, representing Europe, Asia, Africa and America. A circular, historical game by John Harris, entitled *The Jubilee. A New and Interesting Game*, published in 1810, refers to New Zealand explored by Captain Cook in 1769 and to the convicts sent to Botany Bay in 1787. The publisher advertised that this game 'will serve as a Stimulative to the Rising Generation, by showing them the Glory, Honour and Consequence Old England has attained under the Auspices of their revered Monarch! [George III]'. In Wallis's *New Game of Universal History and Chronology*, published in 1814, there are illustrations of a sailing ship in Botany Bay and of the 'death of Captain Cooke at Owhyee. Stop one turn to lament this great man'. There are 137 vignettes surrounding a portrait of George, Prince Regent (later George IV). Starting with the Creation of the World in Anno Mundi 1, scenes range through an extraordinary choice of events from the 'Universal Deluge' in Anno Mundi 1656 to Anno Domini 1000 when paper made of cotton rags was first used in England and to 1793 AD when the King and Queen of France were beheaded by guillotine.

In 1816 Walker's *Geographical Pastime, or Tour Through the Eastern Hemisphere or Old World, An Amusing and Instructive Game* was published by William Darton. In this the traveller no longer comes face to face with villainous convicts as a warning against the consequences of bad behaviour, but she may spend two tranquil turns

'botanizing' in Botany Bay. Some of the areas named on the map of Australia are 'Edel's Land 1619, Endracht Land 1616, Nuyt's Land 1627, De Witt's Land 1628, Van Diemen's Land'. Botany Bay, Port Jackson and Sidney [sic] are printed in descending size of type faces to convey their relative importance. The game includes the following descriptions of Australia.

New South Wales, the well-known receptacle for British convicts, is the name of the eastern coast of New Holland, which was first explored by Captain Cook in 1770 ... The quadrupeds are principally of the opossum kind; the most remarkable is the kangaroo; the native dogs are fierce and untameable; there are also weasels and ant-eaters, with that remarkable animal the duck-billed platypus ... There are many beautiful birds; the principal are the black swan, the ostrich and cassowary.

Port Jackson is a bay and harbour of New South Wales, a few miles to the north of Botany Bay. This place was preferred to Botany Bay by Captain Philips, and it was concluded to settle tie colony of convicts here; accordingly the town of Sydney was built, which is the chief settlement, the seat of the governor, &c. The town is seated in a cove of Port Jackson, contains a church, orphan-school, jail, military hospital, naval yard, &c. The governor's house is of stone, some others are of brick, but the generality are built of logs and plastered.

Botany Bay is also a Bay of New South Wales, so named from the abundance of herbs and plants found near the shore. As is mentioned above, it was originally fixed on for a colony of convicts from Great Britain; but since the convicts are actually settled at Sydney Cove you may-Stop here
Two turns to botanize.

In 1827 a new edition of *A Complete Course of Geography, by Means of Instructive Games* invented by the Abbé Gaultier included 'numerous emendations and additions, and an entire new set of maps, including the recent discoveries in the Arctic Regions'. The Abbé Gaultier, an educationalist originally from Piedmont, had settled in France in 1780 and later fled the revolution to London. He died in 1818 but his *Geography* continued to be reprinted. In 1815 it was 'collated with the author's last Paris edition by Jehoshaphat Aspin', a cartographer. In the new edition of 1827 the death of Cook is acknowledged in the answer to the question — 'What have you to observe respecting the Sandwich Isles?' 'The prompt, somewhat pompous reply, which is rewarded with one token, proclaims — 'The Sandwich Isles, eleven in number, were discovered in 1777, by Captain Cooke, who was killed by the natives in 1779, at Hawaii, misspelt Owyhee, the principal of them'. The 'game' comprises detailed questions and answers about geography and lists rewards for the correct responses. It also presents coloured maps with all details given and another set of maps with only the outlines. Counters, each marked with a geographic name, are used to show places on the unmarked

map. The game was published in book form by John Harris, who had produced the second edition in 1795. Hailed as a valuable means for teaching geography, several versions followed, but the Abbé Gaultier's heavy didacticism did not have a lasting influence on the publishing of English games for children. Later in the nineteenth century the children's book and toy trade often again merged to produce items of fun, such as toybooks, paper doll books, panoramas, peepshows, toy theatre sets and figures, as well as, pop-ups and other moveables. In 1795, however, neither the attitudes nor the technology were quite yet ready for these kinds of amusements. Most often a game meant an educational one, albeit one with counters and other tokens of fun.

In table games the main references to Australia, forty years after its discovery, were to Captain Cook, to his discoveries in the South Seas, and to his death. Even by the 1850s the discoveries in the South Seas were still being celebrated in games such as *The Pyramid of History* by W. Sallis. This was another game starting with *The Creation* and depicting biblical events along with those from ancient history and from contemporary times. At number 34, the end of the game and the apex of the pyramid, is Queen Victoria and her family. Not far below in number 28 is 'South Sea discoveries' with a picture of an unnamed seaman — unmistakably Captain Cook — with flag and hat aloft in the prow of a longboat being rowed ashore. *The Crystal Palace Game* of 1854 has yet another illustration of the death of Cook.

Next in interest were the descriptions of convict settlement in Botany Bay; these have been discussed above. Flora and fauna, however, rated only an occasional mention. John Harris's *The Jubilee* (1810) contains a vignette which includes an elegant kangaroo very similar to the one in William Darton's *British and Foreign Animals, A New Game, Moral, Instructive and Amusing, Designed to Allure the Minds of Youth to an Acquaintance with the Wonders of Nature*, published in 1820. The earliest illustration of a kangaroo in the State Library of South Australia's Children's Literature Research Collection is in a battledore, or illustrated alphabet, entitled *The Aunt's Gift*. This was published in 1795 and contains a woodcut of a 'kanguroo'. A miniature series of books published by John Marshall in 1801, *The Infants Library*, also has in Book 5 an illustration of a kangaroo with the most improbable ears. This is surprising since the text refers to a real kangaroo that can be seen at Richmond. 'The kanguroo is a curious animal brought from a foreign country, and may be seen in the King's garden at Richmond'. The illustrator obviously did not know the author, who could have told him about the kangaroo nearby; consequently, another imaginative version of this marsupial was added to the many others in early books about Australia.

Three games produced in the 1850s were devoted entirely to Australia. *The Life of Emigration*, a dissected puzzle, consists of five scenes showing *The Voyage*, *The Arrival*, *Sheep Shearing*, *Clearing the Ground* and *Transport of Wool* (Plate 14).

Originally the illustrations accompanied a series of articles on Australia giving information on the climate, products, the gold fields etc., published in *The Leisure Hour* from 5 August to 2 September 1852. The puzzle depicts Australia as a country where hard work and diligence will be rewarded when the wool is transported, presumably to the 'home' country of England. Sallis's *Australia and its Scenes* shows *The Departure*, *The Voyage*, *The Emigrant Settlement*, *The Goldfields*, *The Successful Digger* (with a huge gold nugget in his hand) and *The Unsuccessful Digger* (with his head in his hands). In contrast is *Race to the Gold Diggings of Australia*, a race game from Plymouth to Port Philip where a scene of great activity awaits the traveller on the other side of the sand hills (Plate 35). With a leap and a bound he is able to dig up huge nuggets of gold, all there for the taking. Although *Race to the Gold Diggings* is without any virtue at all and therefore would be more likely to survive intact, it is now rare and valuable; but then again other more virtuous games from this period are also rare. More typical during this period, representing the might of the British Empire and the importance of the colonies, are games such as *A Tour through the British Colonies and Foreign Possessions*, published by John Betts in the 1850s. This is a hand-coloured lithograph with London at the centre surrounded by scenes from such colonies as Australia with its gold fields, sheep and cattle country and employment of convict labour.

As well as the race games which taught geography and history there were a great number which gave advice on morality. Two with impressive titles were produced by John Harris — *The Reward of Merit, A New Moral and Entertaining Game*, published in 1801, and *The New Game of Emulation, Designed for The Amusement of Youth of both Sexes and calculated to inspire their Minds with an Abhorrence of Vice and a Love of Virtue*, published in 1804. Another favourite was *The New Game of Virtue Rewarded and Vice Punished, For the Amusement of Youth of both Sexes* by T.N. Newton, published by William Darton in 1818. The latter game is played with a teetotum, 12 counters and a mark for each player. Rewards are given for Prudence, Honesty, Charity, Patience, Piety and Temperance, but Obstinacy, Anger, Hypocrisy and Confusion are definitely not condoned. The two most dangerous vices of all are Sloth and Brutality, for these require the player to be sent to The House of Correction or back to the beginning of the game where he must wait while every other player turns three times. Virtue, the winner of the moral stakes, 'claims the contents of the bank and wins the Game'. Thus are joined morality and financial reward, a happy union for the continued prosperity of the middle class.

An interesting alphabet game, made in Germany around 1840, entitled *Figuren-Alphabetspiel auf Wurfel: Alphabet Figures Play upon Dice*, consists of 25 miniature blocks, each with two illustrations as well as the letters of the alphabet in upper and lower case Roman and Gothic scripts (Plate 13). There are words in German, French and English and illustrations of Xerxes, a Zebra, a 'Kangeru, Le Kanguro, The

Kanguro' as well as a Dugong and a Wombat. Wooden blocks were often made and used in Germany, particularly after the establishment of the kindergarten movement by Froebel in the 1830s. Although there are a few examples of blocks from the late eighteenth century, their heyday was in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Most were made in Germany and consisted of biblical scenes, animals, domestic scenes and other aspects of nineteenth-century childhood. There were also blocks with complicated maps of Europe, England and Wales, South America and Asia, for example, which required the child to have an excellent knowledge of geography in order to assemble them.

Other examples of European games with Australian interest include two lottos from the 1880s — Cosmos, produced in the Netherlands and Zoological Lotto made in Germany and published in England. Both these games introduced children to the birds and animals of Australia as well as those of other parts of the world. Cosmos also included brief descriptions of Captain Cook, the Murray River and the cities of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. A very appealing French game from the same period is Jeu Joyeux au Kangourou. (Plate 16) This has a tin kangaroo that hops down an incline to push a selection of balls into numbered sections at the base of the game. It would appear that the player who has the highest score wins.

Australian children before the 1890s had very little access to information about their own country through play or through fiction, and even text books were slow to include Australian history and geography. The Catalogue of the Intercolonial Exhibition (Melbourne, 1875) described the following situation:

The only toys we make for ourselves are wooden horses, waggons, carts, and wheelbarrows, and wickerwork baskets, dolls' perambulators, &c... The toys in use among us are chiefly of European manufacture, and are imported from England; a few also come from China. The importation amounts to about £12,000 a year. Every novelty for the amusement of the young that is introduced in London very speedily makes its appearance here also.

There is a considerable production of Books and Pamphlets in the colony ... Mr Calvert makes a speciality of coloured Picture Books, which his authors cleverly adapt from familiar English models. They are turned out in excellent style ... The specimens of Picture Books, intended for Australian children, designed and printed in colours by William Calvert, are very good, both in drawing and in execution, and further deserve commendation, as an attempt-to familiarize Australian children with the natural history and surroundings of their colonial home.

Today these Calvert picture books, which are among the first attempts at introducing colour printing into Australian children's books, are extremely rare; so too are most other children's books published in Australia during the nineteenth century. Some, like the Calvert books, were put out for special occasions, others were produced

privately for friends, but none were widely available to Australian children. This situation was to change in the 1890s when books such as *Seven Little Australians* and *Dot and the Kangaroo* were produced. It mattered little where the books were published because it was the 'Australian-ness' of the story that counted. At last Australian children were to have a literature of their own, but they had to wait another decade for table games to be produced in any significant number.

The State Library of South Australia's Children's Literature Research Collection, started in the late 1950s, has been the recipient of several outstanding gifts of books, toys and games, dating from the late eighteenth century to the present. Consequently, the collection strongly reflects the reading of South Australian children over this time. In the late 1960s a gift of 200 books and 50 games owned by the nine children of Mary and William Gilbert was donated to the collection. William's father Joseph had arrived in South Australia in 1839 and settled at Pewsey Vale, where he became established as a pastoralist and vigneron. The books — dissected puzzles, cards, table games and magic tricks — are fine examples of the varied forms of children's entertainment in the 1880s and 1890s. Many of the books and games were designed to instruct as well as entertain, and were sent out from England by the children's aunts who were interested in the kindergarten system of learning through play. Card games, for example, taught religion, history and geography. In her unpublished account of life at Pewsey Vale Miss Dorothy Gilbert wrote about some of the card games she remembered. These included *The Counties of England*, *Anno Mundi: a Scripture Recreation for the Young* and *The Kings and Queens of England*, published by Jaques & Son, Hatton Garden, London. We also had a tremendous variety of the Happy Family type of game — the countries of Europe, fascinating flag cards with the country's principal towns and cards for each town pictured, the counties of England and their county towns, similarly illustrated, the Kings of England and the principal events of their reigns. The cards were all dealt out, and the one on the left of the dealer started. If he or she had a key card in hand they usually started to ask for those listed, you could only ask for a special card if you already had one of the 'family' in your hand, or a key card. If you were lucky and got a card first try you went on asking till you drew a blank, then the turn passed to the one who couldn't supply your request. Gradually as cards passed backwards and forwards the players all round the table got wise as to who had the long tricks. Italy, Austria and Russia were the most valuable of all, they had so many towns to their credit and it was so hard to remember whether Fiesoli counted as Italy or Austria, or Warsaw as Russia or Germany.

We all played together in the day nursery on wet days with endless toys, puzzles, brick building, mechanical toys we were allowed to wind up ourselves ... The children played games of every description, graduating through *Beggar My Neighbour* and *Old Maid*, to *Hearts* and *Whist* and *Bezique* □

They sang songs and nursery rhymes with mother or governess at the piano; and on Sundays there were very special Bible games and stories and hymns ... On other evenings Father played one of us Draughts, Back-gammon or Halma. He was usually there most of the time reading, against a background of noise.

In the late nineteenth century there were some attempts to produce table games in Australia, but only a few have survived. The Adventures of a Mailman from Melbourne to Ararat was first published in the 1880s and went through two revisions. The earliest version follows the mailman from the Melbourne Post Office through Melton to Bacchus Marsh and across Lal-Lal Creek to the tented township of Ballarat and finally on to the township of Ararat, also a group of tents but with a solid brick Asylum in the background. The mailman encounters floods, bushrangers, a broken bridge and a bushfire on his journey. The Sydney version has the same sorts of hazards on the postman's way from the Sydney Post Office to Bathurst. Another interesting game from this period is the Australian Bushmen Game about an Australian contingent in the Boer War. This was published in Ballarat during 1901. The publication of the National Bicycle Game in 1899 saw the true beginning of Australian-made games which were to be produced on a wide variety of subjects during the twentieth century.

A recent bequest by Ben Hutchison, a bibliographer and admirer of nineteenth-century publications, has made possible the purchase of many of the rare games discussed in this article.
*
— The Friends of the State Library of South Australia have also continued to acquire valuable items for the collection.

The game of Snakes and Ladders is today considered a classic, and is loved by children from all over the world. Whilst the game itself is known by most people, its origin is less well-known. Originally, the game of Snakes and Ladders was known variously as Gyan Chaupar (meaning "Game of Knowledge"), Mokshapat, and Moksha Patamu, and was originally a Hindu game. Nobody knows for sure as to who invented this game, or when it was created. It has been speculated that this game was already being played in India as early as the 2nd century AD. Others have credited the invention of the game to Dnyaneshwar (known also as Dnyandev), a Marathi saint who lived during the 13th century AD.