

**‘Mateship: Trust & Exclusion in Australian History’  
Conference Program**

**16th and 17th February 2006, Victorian Trades Hall**

**Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February**

9-10am: Registration

10-11am: New Ballroom – Welcome

**Mungo MacCallum – ‘Mates and the Mafia’**

11-11.30: Morning Tea

11.30am-1pm: Session One

New Ballroom

**‘The Politics of Mateship’**

Chair: Dr Paul Strangio

**Melissa Bellanta (University of Sydney) - ‘First-wave feminists and ‘the brotherhood of man’ in early 1890s Adelaide’**

William Lane’s concept of ‘socialism as being mates’ has attracted much comment and debate from historians, often in relation to its implications for women. In this paper, I look at the emphasis on mateship or *the brotherhood of man* within Adelaide’s Forward Movement in the early 1890s. The Forward Movement was a loose affiliation of labour, single tax, socialist, Methodist and women’s suffrage groups. Its most radical members gave sustained attention to the concept of brotherhood, sometimes explicitly presenting it as synonymous with Lane’s notion of mateship. As they saw it, the ideal society was one in which individuals would recognise their fraternal relationship to others, a recognition which brought with it a responsibility to remedy social injustice and inequity. Far from feeling excluded by the rhetoric of brotherhood, many of the female suffragists involved in the Forward Movement saw it as congenial to a first-wave feminist agenda. The brotherhood of man was a concept which politicised the interpersonal and emotional realms, they believed, making them the key to social transformation. This particular interpretation of brotherhood challenges the notion that it was necessarily masculinist in character. It also provides more of an understanding as to why some radical women were attracted to the politics of mateship in the early 1890s, believing that it could serve as a vehicle for their own political concerns.

**Nick Dyrenfurth (Historical Studies, Monash University) – ‘Howard’s Hegemony of Values: ‘Mates’ and the end of the fair go’**

When Parliament House security guards were temporarily banned from addressing the general public or MPs as ‘mate’ in August 2005, reactions varied from outraged denunciations of this ‘un-Australian’ action to an amused air of indifference. John Howard himself gave mateship an impassioned defence, predictably given his attachment to such popular vernacular. More critically however Howard’s linguistic appropriation of egalitarian ideals such as ‘mateship’, ‘battler’ and the ‘fair go’ are pertinent examples of the intersection of symbolic and material politics. In this paper, via a close reading of Howard’s language, I will demonstrate how, as Prime Minister, Howard has successfully recast shibboleths of the Australian Left, presenting them as historically and presently individualist and acquisitive. Yet for much of his Prime Ministership ‘Little Johnny’ Howard was uncritically derided by the left-leaning intelligentsia. Howard was polemicised as yesterday’s man, a conservative aberration owing to an angst-ridden context: an inconvenient blip against the irresistible tide of Whig progressivism now conceived of as a multicultural, reconciled and Republican Australia. Modern Australian progressives were of course influenced by the new social movements’ pursuance of a libertarian, inclusive rights-speaking politics – often highly individualistic – and at odds with the collectivist, class-based politics (and language) of the Old Left. As many writers have demonstrated, the uneven conditions of postmodernity, economic globalisation and the rise of identity politics have structurally undermined and de-legitimised class identity and collective action. This historic political realignment created a vacuum of popular rhetorical egalitarianism which was cleverly and pragmatically filled by the political Right, most notably by the now omnipotent John Howard. As Judith Brett rightly suggests, Howard’s opponents have been ‘mised’ by his self-description as a social conservative, neglecting his takeover of (left) radical nationalist discourse. Yet Brett’s account fails to critique or identify the very real ideological purpose and effect of Howard’s language. Concomitant with this takeover, values hitherto understood as asocial or unhealthy are now regarded as commonsense. My use of discourse analysis argues that language works not only to reflect and explain subjective positions (identity), but constitutes and distorts people’s experiences and worldviews (consciousness and on occasion political action). Thus, Howard’s discourses have had important practical effects upon the collective desire to address inequality and poverty. Cultural values such as ‘mateship’ are called upon as some essence of Australianness, miraculously independent of the tide of neo-liberal individualism. Yet such a reading of mateship/Australian egalitarianism is deeply ideological: remaking mateship as another form of individualism. Mateship appears, or is venerated, as some sort of ‘safety net’ in times of war and/or other national crises. In this schema, individuals come to the ‘rescue’ of others, but do not collectively assist or support other citizens. For the Australian Left, the historically masculinist and exclusionary icons of mateship have somewhat unsurprisingly fallen by the wayside. Many on the Left will be happy to leave the icons of mateship and a fair-go to Howard, but doing so is arguably a mistake. No political movement can live without its past, but this is seemingly what the Left is attempting: practically severing one of the more solid and imaginative connections to everyday life. On the contrary a symbolic politics reclaiming mateship and the fair go may form part

of a discursive renewal of the radical democratic project.

**Carolyn Rasmussen (History, University of Melbourne) – ‘The ‘Lone Wolf’ in sheep’s clothing?: Maurice Blackburn, the Australian Labor Party and the limits to mateship’**

Maurice Blackburn, hero of the 1916-17 anti-conscription campaigns and scourge of the Wren-machine, effective industrial legal counsel and assiduous parliamentary representative, was expelled from the Australian Labor Party for a second time in 1941. Heir to a middle class heritage, Blackburn had grown up in genteel poverty. The former gave him a powerful sense of personal agency, the latter an identification with the poor and underprivileged which led him first to socialism and then the Labor Party. Though widely respected and admired, he was also distrusted by some as an intellectual, for his background and ultimately for a willingness to put principles above Party. In the culture of the labour movement a complex intermingling of ‘mateship’ with ‘solidarity’ formed the foundation of its industrial and political power. It was a force for cohesion - individual working people knew how little they counted for standing alone - but also for exclusion – as class traitor or ‘lone wolf’. Yet for some Blackburn’s exclusion elevated him to the status of Labor saint. His long and complex relationship with the Labour Movement offers a rich opportunity to explore the language and experience of mateship, solidarity and class in the period 1912 to 1944 and their continuing resonance in contemporary politics.

1-2pm: Lunch

2-3.30pm: Session Two

New Ballroom

**‘Sexing the Mate’**

Chair: Professor Marian Quartly

**John Rickard (Honorary Professorial Fellow, Historical Studies, Monash University) – ‘The Homoeroticism of Mateship’**

‘Brokeback Mountain’ was released nationally on Australia Day. Were the distributors trying to tell us something? The modern historiography of mateship can be said to begin with Russel Ward’s *The Australian Legend* in which he was careful to distinguish mateship as a form of group solidarity from the tradition of having a special mate, conceding that this latter form could take on the character of ‘a sublimated homosexual relationship’. This paper draws on a range of sources, from the culture of sport to Australian children’s literature to identify the homoerotic implications of mateship.

**Damien Barlow (Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University) –  
'Queer Mates: Australian Literature and Homosocial Romance'**

This paper firstly explores mateship in relation to the critical insights of queer theory in order to propose that Australian mateship narratives can be read as homosocial romances. Secondly, I examine some classic literary examples of bush mateship as homosocial romance in Henry Lawson's 'Joe Wilson' stories (1899-1901), Lawson's poem 'The Shearers' (1903) and Joseph Furphy's novel *Such is Life* (1903). Lesser known texts such as William Hatfield's novel *Sheep Mates* (1931) and Paul Radley's *Good Mates* (1985) will also be discussed. Of central interest is the way mateship narratives are required to de-eroticise the same-sex bonds they valorise. In the texts under consideration, two key strategies emerge to provide the Australian bushman with an alibi for potentially dubious displays of same-sex coupling: the first is the heterosexualising function of women; the second is the strategic use of animals to displace same-sex desires.

**Madeleine Hamilton (History, University of Melbourne) – 'Voices from the wall: Australian soldiers, mateship and the World War II pin-up girl'**

My paper will examine the relationship between Australian servicemen and pin-up girls via letters published in magazines and addressed directly to models. I will address the two functions of pin-ups in World War Two - both of which were instrumental in persuading men to fight. The first function was to encourage servicemen to bond through their shared consumption of pin-ups. Through the public display of heterosexuality the consumption of these images facilitated, servicemen participated in and conformed to a necessarily masculine military culture. It was believed that the perception of shared interests and goals was paramount in enabling men to fight in effective units. Compulsory heterosexuality was fundamental for the war project and the public consumption and display of pin-up girls enabled individual men to demonstrate their normality in this regard. The second and contradictory function of pin-ups was to encourage men to turn away from masculine culture and the Australian ideal of mateship, towards memories and fantasies of home and the comforts of domesticity and the family. This function had the greater effect: it was the freedom and happiness young and beautiful women symbolized that motivated them to keep fighting. Essentially they were fighting so they could get home, not because they privileged and enjoyed the masculine realm of the armed services.

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Meeting Room One

**'Fighting Mates'**

Chair: Richard Scully

**Lachlan Grant (Historical Studies, Monash University) – ‘The Australian Prisoner of War Experience in Popular Memory’**

Revisionists within the Australian prisoner of war historiography have largely overlooked and been almost dismissive of the large literature written by ex-prisoners in the forms of diaries, memoirs and autobiographies. This is due to the capacity of the prisoner of war literature to promote prisoners of war as inheritors of the Anzac Legend. These revisions of the prisoner of war historiography, largely based on oral history projects, have been instrumental in revealing the complexities of camp life, and the workings of the mateship ethos. However, a reassessment of the Australian prisoner of war literature reveals that such complexities within camp life and the ability to survive are indeed revealed within the literature written by the ex-prisoners themselves. Although influenced by the Anzac Legend, these memoirs reveal the complexities of survival and the multifaceted workings of the mateship ethos.

**Janelle Date (Social Sciences, Edith Cowan University) – ‘Mateship and the Australian Vietnam Veteran’**

Terry Colling in his book *Beyond Mateship* suggested that the Vietnam War challenged the idea of mateship due to the lack of public support, which also saw a dependence more on families rather than mates. This paper intends to argue against this idea. Mateship among Vietnam veterans plays an important role within the veteran's life. Vietnam vets faced different and possibly more difficult circumstances than the previous wars fought by Australians. These differences included the role of the media, the reaction of the people back home in Australia, the image of the war, the short time span to adjust from their journey from Vietnam back to civilian life in Australia, the feeling of alienation and the stereotyping as 'baby killers that were sadistic, deranged, potheads'. My subjects are all Vietnam Veterans whose age range from the early fifties to the early seventies. They all served at least one tour of duty during Australia's involvement of the war. They will be a small sample of the almost fifty thousand strong force that was sent to Vietnam to fight the war.

**Rosalie Triolo (Education, Monash University) – ‘No Friendships are Stronger’: The Community and Camaraderie of the Victorian Education Department's Teacher-Soldiers, Great War, 1914-18’**

In late 1915, Lt-Col Arthur Deeble, formerly of Essendon High School, most confidently shared his view of the Department's teacher-soldiers with the Director of Education, Frank Tate. A paragraph from Deeble's letter was published in the *Education Gazette* of early 1916 and was obviously intended by the Department to applaud teacher-soldiers' positive sense of community, share in any honours through the men's membership of it, and further the Department's many contributions to the war effort including that of teacher-enlistment. But, was Deeble correct in so bold a statement? Was he telling the Department what it would hope to hear? Were his words more a reflection of the 'idealistic' early days of the war

before the greater and sustained horror of the Western Front? Did the Western Front challenge or intensify the sense of community and camaraderie? And were teacher-soldiers so complimentary of their community and relationships in private correspondence between each other, family members and non-teacher friends? Drawing on official and private correspondence, this paper affirms that teacher-soldiers considered themselves members of a special community, actively sought to maintain and promote it, and gathered considerable strength and comfort from the friendships within it.

3.30-4pm: Afternoon Tea

4-6pm: Session Three

New Ballroom

**'Mates and 'Culcha' Part 1'**

Chair: Kate Murphy

**Richard Waterhouse (School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, University of Sydney) – 'Mateship and Rural Workers: Myths and Realities'**

In his influential study of Australia's cultural origins Russel Ward argued that nineteenth century Australian bushmen were practical men, known for their capacity to improvise. They were independent and yet fiercely egalitarian, deeply committed to the proletarian practices of swearing, drinking and gambling. Above all these 'typical' Australians were committed to mateship, supporting their friends in good times and bad. Although these values were originally associated with nomadic bush workers they became widely popularised in the 1890s via the union movement and the pages of the Bulletin. And so in the twentieth century the creed of a tribe became the catechism of a nation. Of course Ward was not the only one to argue for the existence and contemporary influence of these allegedly quintessential Australian characteristics. In the 1940s and 1950s and beyond, intellectuals like Vance Palmer argued that the attributes of mateship, democracy and nationalism had originated with the goldfields diggers who had passed in on to the itinerants; films like *Tobruk* (1944) made clear connections between the characters of bush workers and World War II Diggers. And in their plays Ray Lawler and Peter Kenna explored the interactions between rural and city

characters, lamenting the impending extinction of the bushie and all he stood for—including mateship. But to what extent was mateship integral to the value system of nineteenth century bush workers? In this paper I propose to explore the values of nineteenth century itinerant bush workers and to argue that until the 1890s they were more renowned for their hatred of authority than their commitment to mateship. Only in the wake of the strikes of 1891-2 and 1894 did the shearers turn to mateship as a survival mechanism. It became a culture of consolation that allowed them to cope with a lost cause.

**Jocelyne Scutt – ‘Mateship and Manhandling: Rape, Women’s Rights and the Sport of Men’**

Mateship and football have for long been seen as symbols and elements of Australian culture, and cultural identity. Rape, sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence against women are more often acknowledged, today, as a part of Australian culture, too, although the notion that these are a part of an Australian identity would be hotly denied. When football and sexual violence against women come together, as has been highlighted in allegations of rape involving rugby and Australian rules clubs reaching the mainstream media in recent years, does mateship have a role? Is it significant that the allegations have mostly involved more than one footballer player, either in gangs or duos, with no prosecutions taking place? Is it also significant that football and the law have a close association? During the Australian rules season, football is at the heart of numerous conversations amongst the legal fraternity, and ‘the Tribunal’ – meaning the Football Tribunal where decisions are made of whether to ‘ban’ players for engaging in roughhouse tactics during matches are made – figures highly in analyses of each match. Are decisions about what is and is not ‘rape’ influenced by the mateship of men, in the combative arena of the sporting field, and in the equally combative (although less noticeably physical) adversarial arena of the courts? What place mateship in the culture of sport and the law?

**Margaret Rogers (School of Contemporary Communication, Central Queensland University) – ‘Big Balls: Pub rock, mateship and Australian masculinity’**

Pub rockers such as The Aztecs, AC/DC, Cold Chisel, The Angels and Rose Tattoo personified the rough, tough, bad boy face of Australian masculinity in the 1970s. In a decade that celebrated a new look Australia shaped by the end of the cultural cringe, public recognition of Aboriginal rights and the integration of multiculturalism, the lived experience of pub rockers and their audiences reflected and reinforced historical mythologies that defined popular conceptions of mateship and traditional Australian masculinity.

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Meeting Room One

**‘Multicultural Mates’**

Chair: Peter Barrer

**Mari Edland (Department of English, University of Melbourne) – ‘Sport, multiculturalism and mateship’**

The paper explores questions of mateships linked to sport and multiculturalism. To what extent can mateships be created and sustained within a sport of a multicultural tradition and composition? The focus will be on the experiences of the Australian Women’s National Handball Team in their preparation for and participation in the Sydney Olympic Games. Players from 20 different cultural backgrounds had been members of the selection squad and the Olympic Program/Preparation. The team’s mission statement advocated and celebrated diversity, unity, trust and team spirit. The lived experience of the Olympic Program, however, was one of distrust, lack of mateship and a team split in half. What role did the multicultural composition of the squad play in the failure to live up to the mission statement? Questions of identity, cultural citizenship and symbolic capital are central to the discussion.

**Pam Oliver (Historical Studies, Monash University) - ‘Japanese mates in wartime white Australia’**

The concept of Australians with Japanese mates in 1942-43 sits uneasily within the historiography. However, Japanese residents living in white Australia under exemption during the 40 years before World War 2 generally enjoyed good relations with Australians. Many Australians considered them ‘as Australian as we are’ and opposed their internment as ‘enemy aliens’ in 1941. Why did Australians take this risky position? Why have such stories of inclusion been marginalised within the historical record? This paper interrogates the ideological basis for Japanese-Australian mateship selecting two case studies from hundreds available in the records of the National Archives of Australia. First, Thomas Nagai who arrived in 1899 as a domestic worker. Second, the five-member Takasuka family that arrived in 1905 and comprised merchant-farmers, a school teacher and an Australian soldier. Language analysis further elucidates two opposing processes evident in trust and friendship between Australians and Japanese. Positive experiences of friendship challenge traditional racial stereotyping. Alternatively, beliefs about racial superiority can be employed to evaluate the friendship offered by Japanese negatively resulting in distrust of the motives for friendship. In this case, friendship can be viewed as a possible cover for a sinister agenda aimed at harming a trusting Australian community.

**Sunil Govinnage (Notre Dame University) – ‘Multicultural Mateship’**

A sense of mateship, particularly the term ‘mate’, as used in Australian society covers all relationships suggesting a mutual closeness. Despite its beginning with Australia’s Anglo-Celtic history, it appears that the concept of mateship has also been filtered into other ethnic groups in Australia. Although socio-anthropological literature on multicultural mateship is not well known, some literary texts provide

insights into how mateship is perceived and or embraced by other ethnic groups. The objective of my paper is to look at the 'mateship' concept and examine how issues such as trust and exclusion have been transformed into multicultural Australia. In this paper, I intend to present a textual analysis using my published literary works outlining how Australian mateship has been embraced, accepted and/or rejected by recent immigrants in multicultural Australia. I will discuss how Australian-Sri Lankan and Sri Lankan mateship in Australia have been represented in selected texts with a view to providing observations on how the mateship concept has been critiqued and embraced by new arrivals, particularly those who immigrated to Australia at the end of the White Australia Policy. The paper concludes that there is a need for further investigation of mateship in multicultural Australia which has not been captured by traditional studies on multiculturalism or ethnic relations in Australia.

## Friday 17<sup>th</sup> February

9-9.45am: Registration

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Registration**

9.45-10.30am: New Ballroom

### **Eva Cox – 'Mates and mateship: exclusion and belonging'**

Google and Sensus offer a plethora of references on mateship which offer ample evidence of both its maleness and its elements of working class, Anglo-Celtic origins: diggers, Gallipoli, Anzacs-soldiers at war, the pain of the outback battles against harsh nature, workers. It is a romantic image of egalitarian cohesion which excludes too many. Yet for John Howard and many others, it satisfies a limited viewpoint that they want to impose on those it excludes eg most women, and many men, Indigenous, European and other groups, unless they are prepared to 'assimilate'. Mateship was misused in Cronulla recently to evoke some specious unified violence and undermine the possibilities of belonging for those not deemed to fit in. What happens to those who are made feel they can't belong? Does prejudice make them pariahs? Can they ever satisfy the stereotypes required to fit in on majority terms? What happens to the parvenus who adapt to gain acceptance? Can they ever relax and feel that they belong? I will use Hannah Arendt's work to look at how this version of 'social glue' destroys the possibilities of bridging differences and creating the trust needed for a more civil society.

10.30-11am: Morning Tea

11am-12.30pm: Session Four

New Ballroom

**'Mateship and Social Capital'**

Chair: Dr Marc Brodie

**Jacqueline Dickenson (History, Melbourne University) – 'Historicising political trust'**

This paper argues that claims of a decline of trust in politicians by voters in western democracies must be historicised, and proposes how one such study might be undertaken. The emphasis on trust during both last year's Australian Federal election campaign and this year's British General election campaign exposed deep anxieties about its perceived decline in contemporary society. A feature of these anxieties is a nostalgia for a Golden Age of trust; a time in the mythical past when politicians *were* trustworthy, when backdoors could be left unlocked with confidence, when women and men lived side by side in perfect harmony, a pre-spin paradise in which citizens lounged around relaxed and comfortable in the knowledge that they could trust each other, and their institutions, implicitly. Sociologists and journalists have proposed a contemporary 'crisis of trust', using only vague historical examples to support their assertions. There has been no sustained historical examination of shifts in trust relations in one society across a long time period on which a valid 'crisis of trust' theory could be based. By examining the trust relationship between Australians and their political representatives across a broad time span, I propose to test the assumptions of this scholarship.

**Winsome Roberts (Social Work, University of Melbourne) – 'Mateship? Competitive fraternalism and cooperative fraternalism in the colony of Victoria, during 'the long boom' 1860-1890'**

Australian colonial conditions markedly resembled our own: globalised free trading accompanied market-driven competition. Governments encouraged and supported capitalist enterprise, relied on regressive taxation for revenue and encouraged local voluntarism to provide civic amenity and redress destitution. Lured by prospects of 'getting on', gold rushes' settlers faced a fiercely competitive economy. In a high risk environment that offered no entitlement to assistance, hazardous circumstances could and did take their toll. With no institutional provisions and few kin supports, newcomers lured by ambition and haunted by failure, realised the strength in numbers and the strategic utility of mutualism. Local communities were sites of popular mutualism through friendly societies, co-operatives, building societies, trade unions, clubs, professional organisations, churches, improvement societies and ethnic associations. Resultant high levels of mutualism may be interpreted as exemplifying mateship; indeed 'Social Harmony' was the talk of the day. This paper challenges that interpretation by contextualising the fraternalism. Detailed evidence from the reconstruction of an inner Melbourne suburb shows that competitive

networking trumped cooperation. The boom's prosperity was underwritten by social inequality. Mutualism was the prerogative of those already privileged by steady circumstances, and served as a multiplier for their further advancement at the expense of the marginalised. Mateship? Mutualism worked for personal gain, not the public good. Given the broader political economy that proffered a free for all not a fair for all, it could not be otherwise.

**Karina Butera (History, Heritage & Society, Deakin University) – ‘The disappearance of ‘mateship’ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’**

Although the term ‘mate’ is central to understanding the Australian identity and a word widely used in our contemporary lexicon, this paper argues that ‘mateship’, in the original sense of the term is an exclusively hyper-masculine concept which is losing its currency as a mode of relating in Australian culture. Drawing on discussions of mateship that arose during the author’s current research which explores the role friendship plays in everyday life for men and women across the life-course, this paper poses the argument that in everyday discourse ‘mateship’ is being replaced with a mode of relating that is better described as ‘friendship’. The views of three different generations of Melbourne men: retirees, middle aged men and men in their early twenties are compared and contrasted in order to illustrate the discursive transformation in accepted modes of relating from mateship to friendship. Three historical shifts are suggested as reasons for the changing nature of mateship: the rise of the feminist movement and validation of emotionally expressive ways of relating, the absence of direct contact with war and cynicism over patriotic duty for the average Australian male, and the escalation of neo-liberal competitive capitalism. The paper concludes that unless there is a change to the values underpinning Australia’s political and economic structure, ‘mateship’ will become a relic that future historians scour archives to discover.

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Meeting Room One

**‘Working Mates’**

Chair: Nathan Hollier

**Rory O’Malley (University of Sydney) – ‘Mateship in the Shearing Sheds: What was the ‘wide comb dispute’ all about?’**

The first significant shearing strike since 1956 occurred in 1983. Called the ‘wide comb dispute’, reports of intimidation and woolshed arson made lively newspaper and television coverage. Hundreds of pages of transcript mark a four year saga in the Arbitration Commission. Apparently, ‘mateship’ was compromised by a ‘greedy’ element amongst shearers. An intriguing dimension was the association of wide combs with New Zealand shearers. They had always exhibited idiosyncratic attitudes to weekend shearing and wet sheep. Moreover, they did not seem to display the obligatory hatred of ‘squatters’ embedded in AWU mythology. But these shortcomings had not previously much worried the AWU. The National Farmers

Federation, energised by young 'monetarist' economists in its secretariat, saw an opportunity to embarrass a traditional graziers' enemy. The paper examines 'mateship' as idealised by the AWU, somehow embodied in the ban on wide combs since 1926. AWU rules had circumscribed wide combs as early as 1910. But by 1980 rank-and-file shearers were becoming more individualistic ('aspirational', to use a vogue coinage). Rural society's conception of 'mateship' seemed more in tune with the New Zealand attitude to shearing, which defined different boundaries of trust and exclusion.

**Lenore Layman (Social Sciences & Humanities, Murdoch University) – 'Mates in Dangerous Workplaces: self- understandings and customary practices among miners on the Western Australian goldfields 1889-1905'**

'Brady was a steady man and well respected by his mates', the *Kalgoorlie Miner* of 21 May 1896 reported of Frank Brady who had died instantly in a fall down the main shaft of Cassidy Hill Mine. 'Steady', 'respected', 'experienced', 'honest', 'hard-working', 'sober', 'careful', 'practical', 'mate': these words recur in reports (inquests, newspapers, reminiscences) of employed miners who died from work injuries in the early years of Western Australian goldmining. It is not too great a stretch to see the four cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, courage and justice reconstituted in a particular modern, industrial and masculine form in this miners' discourse of fatality. 'Mate' was central to the discourse. In mining 'mate' meant workmate, more than just working together but responsible for each other in dangerous manual working conditions. In the early goldfields it often also meant camp mate, living and sometimes travelling as well as working (as employees) together. If 'mateship' is understood as a *workplace* relationship (and an international one at that) and not as some particular Australian male virtue (or – latterly in the literature — vice or myth) then more historical sense can be made of it. This miners' discourse points to a meaning of 'mate' which did not carry heroic, rural, individualist or conservative connotations although, in the first generation at least, it remained ethnically exclusive.

**Barbara Webster (School of Humanities, Central Queensland University) – "They'd go out of their way to cover up for you': men and mateship in the Rockhampton Railway Workshops, 1940s-1980s'**

History, literature and the media extol the virtues of traditional Australian mateship in life-threatening circumstances. Notwithstanding the ultimate expression of self-sacrifice as evinced in combat situations and mining disasters, other defining characteristics of mateship—fraternity, solidarity, loyalty, trust and, arguably, shared humour, recreation and even a higher sense of purpose—also existed in other less-perilous environments. Mateship also found expression in large, male-dominated workplaces where dirty, heavy and potentially dangerous tasks presented. Mostly through oral testimony of former and current employees of many years, this paper examines the nature of mateship in one such location, the Rockhampton Railway Workshops, from the 1940s to the 1980s. It is argued that manifestations of mateship among the men there were the product of the particular demographic,

industrial, social and cultural conditions of the workshops and that it was also historically contingent. From a zenith in the 1950s, when the population peaked at 1250 men, mateship gradually declined as both employment conditions and society changed. Downsizing of the workforce with commercialisation, abolition of seniority and, albeit to a lesser degree, the acceptance of women into a hitherto male domain have contributed to the 'death' of mateship in the local workshops.

12.30-1.30: Lunch

1.30-3pm: Session Five

New Ballroom

**'Mates and Strangers Part 1'**

Chair: Nick Dyrenfurth

**Ana Kailis (Historical Studies, Monash University) – 'Mateship and the Dissident: The Abandonment of David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib'**

A cornerstone of official constructions of Australian nationalism and now a seemingly irrefutable 'core Australian value', 'mateship' is said to embody the very essence of Australianness, citizenship and the right to a fair go. The centrality of 'mateship' in the rhetoric of the Howard Government, however, overlays concurrent practices of radical exclusion, demonstrated most starkly by the abandonment of David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib, the two Australians incarcerated in the US detention facilities at Guantanamo Bay. Hicks and Habib have not only been exposed to a fundamental violation of their basic human rights, but have also had their Australian citizenship rendered meaningless. Meanwhile, Australian Muslims, especially those critical of government, face official marginalisation for failing to ascribe to 'core Australian values'. Drawing on the cases of Hicks and Habib, and experiences faced in the broader Islamic community this paper will explore the way contemporary uses of 'mateship' remain centred on key notions of exclusivity, failing to incorporate the idea of 'the dissident' and concepts of difference. It will examine, further, whether the concept of 'mateship' can be reconfigured into a more inclusionary form or whether it needs to be abandoned if we are to build an Australian society founded on the centrality of fundamental human, civil and political rights.

**Linda Wade (History and Politics, University of Wollongong) – "By Diggers Defended, By Victorians Mended': Mateship beyond the boundaries of nationalism'**

The term mateship is often used to describe the trust, friendship, and support

shared by Australian men in times of war, a bond supposedly specific to groups of Australians. This paper challenges the nationalist and gendered interpretations given to these bonds through an examination of the relationship Australian soldiers formed with the residents of the French town of Villers Bretonneux during World War I. After the town was almost completely destroyed by shellfire in 1918 a group of Australian soldiers worked to rebuild the homes and livelihoods of the French they were living alongside. When peace intervened before the task was completed the project continued into peacetime. The bonds thus formed have been excluded from official Australian war memories: at Anzac Day ceremonies held at Villers Bretonneux each year, Australian dignitaries remember the role of the Australian Imperial Force there as one of success against the German army, rather than one which acknowledges the bonds they formed with the people of Villers Bretonneux during the course of their military duties.

**Shirleene Robinson (History, Bond University) – ‘Exclusion, mateship and Aboriginal workers in Queensland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’**

Aboriginal workers provided vital labour in nineteenth and early twentieth century Queensland, with the pastoral industry in particular being almost totally reliant on this workforce. While Aboriginal workers were essential to the prosperity of rural Queensland, they occupied a contradictory place in white society. Some Indigenous workers were treated well by their employers and were able to maintain their important connections with their country. The majority, however, were exploited, under-paid and maltreated. The many young Aboriginal children who worked in Queensland during this era were particularly vulnerable. The Australian bond of mateship allegedly flourished on the frontier, yet the treatment of Aboriginal workers by their European employers and European colleagues contradicts this myth. Aboriginal workers consistently proved themselves to be highly skilled workers, yet once they had finished their labours for the day, they were expected to assume a subordinate position in the wider society. If mateship did in fact exist, it was between a very narrow category of white men. This paper questions what sort of relationships existed between Aboriginal and European workers and bosses in Queensland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? What challenges do they pose to the idea of mateship in Australia’s past?

Meeting Room One

**‘Mates and ‘Culcha’ Part 2’**

Dr Maria Nugent

**Gabrielle Wolf (History, University of Melbourne) – ‘A Modern Sort of Mateship?: Challenges to Australian Mateship in New Wave Theatre’**

Since the first outpouring of Australian plays in the Federation era, Australian theatre practitioners have been preoccupied with portraying a national identity.

Consistently fundamental to those depictions has been a representation of the mateship bond. Contrary to many other Australian cultural forms, in the theatre, mateship has not been confined to a masculine notion; it pervades relations between men as well as women, lovers, relatives and fellow community members. This paper focuses on Melbourne's New Wave drama of the late 1960s and 1970s, which challenged the operation of the mateship ideal in practice and proposed that it should be broadened even further. New Wave practitioners were inspired by the new nationalism to discover and celebrate Australians' distinctiveness. Yet, absorbed in the idealistic and rebellious counter-culture, which championed minority rights and contested conservative traditions, they also criticised Australian society and were determined to instigate change. Through an examination of plays by David Williamson, Jack Hibberd, John Romeril, Alexander Buzo and others, this paper explores how New Wave practitioners rejoiced in Australians' apparent propensity to respect the mateship ideal. It also investigates how they encouraged audiences to recognize the urgent need for Australians to meaningfully fulfill the demands of this ethic, to engender community spirit and a sense of social responsibility, and erode long-standing, tacit assumptions of the racial and class exclusivity of Australian mateship.

**Leo Coucaud (Anthropology, University of Melbourne) – ‘The commodification of mateship in Australian beer and car advertisements’**

This paper offers a constructive critique of the anthropologist Michael Taussig's post-modern theory of the genesis of an Australian national identity. Fundamentally, his thesis is that the “male half” of our national identity is the historical result of constructing difference to British Imperialism. To this effect, Taussig persuasively argues that Russel Ward's “quintessential” Australian Bushman and C.E.W. Bean's portrayal of the Anzac Legend represent the literary romanticisation of an Australian working class hero. From this point of view, the working class larrikin was the most visibly different to the British as Other and therefore the most suitable to represent Australian national difference. The only problem with this interpretation is that it can not explain why a performative style of masculinity which is overwhelmingly associated with white Australian heterosexual men still predominates in popular culture as the dominant image of Australianness. For instance, car manufacturers and alcohol breweries have been known to exploit the values of mateship in order to promote their products in Australian beer and car television advertisements. Thus it is more than likely that the commercialisation of male commensality reinforces this hegemonic masculine image as the most representative icon of Australian national identity. Using examples of recent advertisements I propose to show that the longevity of this stereotype points to far more deep-seated differences in the power relations between the sexes which Taussig's textualist approach cannot account for.

**Christina Hunt (School of Contemporary Communications, Central Queensland University) – ‘In Search of Cecil Holmes: Revisiting the Feature Films of an Australian Outsider’**

This paper revisits the work of largely unrecognised Australian filmmaker, Cecil

Holmes. Lifetime socialist and political activist, during the 1950s Holmes produced two remarkable feature films – *Captain Thunderbolt* (1953) and *Three In One* (1956). Both films are deeply concerned with mateship, and are testament to his ability both to represent and valorise an alternative perspective of society's marginalised, and to offer self-reflexive perspectives on his own professional, creative, and social marginalisation. *Captain Thunderbolt* tells the story of how the legend of Captain Thunderbolt began, and how two mates in colonial Australia eventually become symbols of hope and optimism for their community against an oppressive colonial authority. The film works on several levels: the unusually close relationship between two childhood mates, class struggle, and the 'outlaw'. *Three In One* comprises three separate stories: Frank Hardy's *The Load of Wood*, set in 1931 Depression, tells of two desperate working class men poaching firewood from a rich squatter. Based on a Henry Lawson story, *Joe Wilson's Mates* is a rich metaphor for mateship, unions and unionism, and indeed national identity. The final story, *The City* tells of a struggling young working class couple in Sydney city. In summary, this paper demonstrates the close congruence between Holmes' own career and life, and his pioneering film work.

3-3.30pm: Afternoon Tea

3.30-4.30pm: Session Six

New Ballroom

**'Visualising and Reading Mates'**

Chair: Lachlan Grant

**Patricia McLean (School of English Film and Theatre, Victoria University of Wellington) – 'Male duality and the myth of mateship in the novels of Maurice Gee'**

As many critics have noted, the work of New Zealand novelist Maurice Gee is more complex and uncertain than it initially appears. Problematizing their fictional worlds and the social realist genre in which these worlds are depicted, his novels produce what James K Baxter termed a 'tension of belief'; the type of tension created when familiar genres and themes - in this instance social realist accounts of male friendship - are manipulated to deliberately generate ambiguity and unease. In Gee's fiction, this tension produces the ambiguity that critics have such difficulty naming and explaining. Representations of the split male subject that recur throughout the novels may be interpreted as one source of ambiguity because male-male relations are in themselves a place where men's ambivalence to each other may be enacted. By drawing on the familiar terms of mateship, Gee deliberates on the tensions these relationships simultaneously reveal and hide. In so doing, he takes mateship from the everyday to the literary; from the actual to the indeterminate. Using social realist techniques to lull readers into a false sense of 'realist' security, his accounts of this familiar myth of Pkeh male culture

gesture towards the possibility of their realness but finally disclose their untruths.

**John Ramsland (History, University of Newcastle) – ‘Mates as War Heroes and War Heroes as Mates: Charles Chauvel’s *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940) and *The Rats of Tobruk* (1944)’**

This paper addresses the shaping of mateship as exclusive Australian social behaviour in Chauvel’s morale-boosting war films. Their historical context is addressed and canvasses gender, ethnicity and class. How the genre that Chauvel created entered later films is also explored in this study. The three protagonists of the narratives are bonded by war experiences, representing a vision of the ordinary soldier as heroic legend. Chauvel’s task was intended as ‘a message of inspiration’ to cinema audiences. Yet while the *Forty Thousand Horsemen* is replete with optimistic charm and nationalistic sentiments, *The Rats of Tobruk* provides a darker, more melancholy view with a sense of war fatigue. In both the loyalty of the mates and their reliance on one another are crucial ‘to the fighting spirit’ that has overtones of blood sacrifice. The rural idealism of individualism is embodied in characterisation. In both the three friends are from bush backgrounds. Symbolically Australia is depicted as understated speaking and acting that excludes others. In both films two die in battle – foreign land has to be watered with blood – and the third returns home; mateship is replaced by a love relationship.

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Meeting Room One

**‘Mates and Strangers Part 2’**

Chair: Ana Kailis

**Julie McIntyre (History, University of Sydney) – ‘Misplaced mateship?: wine and ‘diplomacy’ in early colonial New South Wales’**

There is something surprisingly contemporary, and at the same time disturbing, about the following line from the 1790 journal entry of New South Wales colonist John Hunter: “Bennelong sat down to dinner with Governor Phillip, and drank his wine and coffee as usual.” In this line, and several others by Hunter discussing Bennelong’s wine consumption, there is a sense of trust and sharing rather than exclusion. Any vestige of mateship between Phillip and Bennelong is clouded, however, by current knowledge of the outcome of contact between indigenous Australians and white colonists. Although it was fundamentally diplomatic in origin, the relationship between Phillip and Bennelong is one of the earliest documented cross-cultural attempts at what we might now call ‘mateship’ in colonial Australia, but offering wine to Aborigines turned out to be a case of misplaced mateship. Ironically, wine has grown to be one of the nation’s most significant European-derived agricultural exports while indigenous Australians battle debilitating alcoholism in a tragic cultural limbo.

**Annette Falahey (University of Sydney) - ‘Mateship and Local Watering Holes:**

### **Indigenous and non-Indigenous drinking communities at Australian hotels'**

This paper highlights processes whereby Indigenous and non-Indigenous collectives develop their sense of mateship, trust, and exclusions, with regards to alcohol consumption in Australian hotels. Traditional and revisionist accounts of Australian history consider alcohol consumption as exerting a profound influence on the shaping of Australian culture. Defined in these terms, drinking together has forged significant ties among non-Indigenous people and created a strong sense of sociality in this country historically. Drinking is considered as a social activity in which 'mates' (invariably male) engage. Indeed 'mates' drinking (typically beer) in hotels has been celebrated throughout Anglo-Celtic-Australian social and cultural artefacts. Moreover, dominant and revisionist accounts of Australian history routinely depict the drinking practices of Indigenous Australians in stereotypical ways as concerning alcoholism, violence and the erosion of traditional community life. Alternatively, this paper addresses mateship culture developed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities when they consume alcohol in Australian hotels. The discussion addresses trust and exclusions in terms of the interactions and organisation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal drinking communities. Towards these ends the research presented in this paper is qualitatively-based; it includes fieldwork materials that rely on participation observation data collection techniques. This includes information gleaned at remote (Uluru and the Ayres Rock resorts in the Northern Territory) and urban (Newtown and Redfern, two inner-city suburbs in Sydney) locations in Australia, at licensed premises (hotels) and, with Indigenous and non-Indigenous drinking groups. This paper demonstrates that Indigenous and non-Indigenous collectives routinely gather around the consumption of alcohol in Australian hotels. They do so as one means to pursue their collective interests, create cultural identity, develop social attachments and publicly determine the utilisation of space. It cannot be assumed from this that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal drinking collectives are closed, cohesive and comprehensive. On the contrary, the collective(s) and contexts(s) of drinking communities in Australian hotels connect with all other institutional areas of social life. Indigenous and non-Indigenous drinking communities thereby resonate with broader sociological meanings than those confined to the particular locality or community under investigation.

**4.30-5.30pm**

**New Ballroom**

**Plenary Session hosted by Marian Quartly and Paul Strangio**

**7pm onwards - Informal dinner at Abla's, 109 Elgin St, Carlton**