Books are offered subject to prior sale at the nett prices in Australian dollars. All prices include Australian Federal Government Goods and Services Tax. Freight and insurance are extra and will be added to your invoice.

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We accept Mastercard and Visa. Please advise card number, ccv number, expiry date, and name as it appears on your card.

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Normal trade courtesies are observed where a reciprocal arrangement exists.
WEBB PRINTING CO.
A remarkable sequence of ten Australian erotic postcards of the Edwardian-era.

A rare and important Edwardian eroticon.
This remarkable set of postcards was printed anonymously by Webb Printing Co. and, presumably, published by them in about 1910. Webb Printing Co. was a long-standing commercial printer in the Melbourne working-class suburb of Footscray.

Acquired from the Berry Collection, a box comprising some dozens of these postcards have yielded only a small number of sets due to adhesion damage and to the unequal supply of some cards.

While individual postcards from this series have been known to Australian collectors for some time, and even single cards are rare, the complete series is effectively unknown.

We have available five complete sets in fine unused state $1650 each

Catalogue Essay pp. 3-10
Postcard sequence pp. 11-20
An Edwardian Eroticon
A unique example of Australian erotic ephemera

In 2007 Australian Book Auctions began the dispersal of the accumulated collections of the late Richard Berry, the last member of a Melbourne family of antique dealers. A legendary figure in the antique trade, Richard was a voracious acquirer and a pathologically unwilling seller: the resulting accumulation of Australian printed ephemera from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the largest ever assembled by an individual.

Among Richard’s acquisitions was the entire storeroom of the Melbourne suburban firm of Webb Printing Co. in Footscray, bought en bloc after the firm closed in the 1980s. Webb had carried on business from the beginning of the twentieth century and the firm seems to have thrown nothing away. They also seem to have maintained the files of other printing businesses in the area which they had bought or in some other way absorbed over the decades. Their storeroom was a vast treasure house of printed ephemera – file copies, printing specimens, advertising material, tickets, docketes, posters, sporting score-cards, illustrated football cards, real estate material, calendars, political material, indeed anything a local jobbing printer might have been called upon to print in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century in the somewhat self-contained community of Footscray and Yarraville.

Among the pieces associated with this archive were dozens of copies of postcards forming a narrative sequence of ten numbered cards. Although without imprint of any sort, the sequence appears certainly to have been printed by Webb, either on their own account or to order. The uncaptioned sequence shows an Edwardian young lady apparently preparing for an assignation with a lover. The sequence is by no means pornographic but it is erotic, in the widest, most generous, and perhaps tamest sense of the word – saucy rather than salacious. Nonetheless, as one of very few extant examples of Australian-produced erotica of the Edwardian or Victorian eras, this Webb series is an object of considerable bibliophilic, cartophilic, and sociological interest.

One apparently intractable bibliographical and sociological mystery of the colonial era in Australia is the complete absence of any published works that might be described as pornographic or erotic. Even works that are concerned
with human sexual behaviour in some less explicit way are effectively unknown.

The same appears to be true of works of art from the period which treat erotic or pornographic subjects. Erotic works of art are not intended for ‘publication’ but might still reasonably be expected to survive. Nevertheless, recent surveys show that it is a good deal easier to say which artists did not produce works in this genre than to say which of them did. Apart from the overtly erotic drawings by a visiting British naval officer, Lord Francis Newry, there are essentially no such works extant. Jane Lennon’s 1992 survey article reproduces what might well be almost the entire surviving corpus of such pieces, the majority of which would, in any other artistic tradition, find only a peripheral place in a survey of the erotic in art and their inclusion can only be due to a commendable determination to find something, anything, to fit the definition.

Of course, this may all be merely a matter of survival: such works may have been published or produced but have been completely extirpated in the intervening period. It defies belief that the male population of colonial Australia spurned erotic or pornographic material. They would be unique in the English-speaking world if that were true and there is, in any event, enough evidence to give the lie to such an interpretation. The brothels and street prostitutes of the main colonial cities were notorious. In Melbourne the Speaker’s mace of the Victorian Parliament went missing in a brothel favoured by Members of Parliament never to be recovered. City clubs for ‘gentlemen’ were more than places to plot the political or commercial destiny of the colonies, they were also houses of assignation at best and private brothels at worst – something that in many cases persisted into the twentieth century (see Plate 1). The ‘enfer’ in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, includes erotic and pornographic photographs assembled by David Scott Mitchell, although none of them appear to be Australian in origin. At the other end of the social spectrum, it was sufficiently common and worthy of remark for the Sydney Morning Herald to report in the first decade of the new century that visiting sailors were found with ‘revolting’ postcards when arrested for drunkenness.

A rather tame literature of the colonial demi-monde made its appearance in the 1890s, which faute de mieux might be considered erotic. Anonymous books such as The Life, Adventures, and Confessions of a Sydney Barmaid (circa 1890-1) or The Devil in Sydney (1895) appeared in that decade. Racy rather than erotic, these works shared none of the overt decadence or explicit eroticism of the English and European works of the so-called Naughty
Dear Sir,

The undersigned, the promoters of the above Club, wish to draw your attention to the special advantages which your membership will be guaranteed.

The plans, etc., of the new Club-house prepared by Messrs. Reed & Barnes, Architects, will sufficiently endorse our statement, viz., that the new Club-house will be finished in a style of elegance and special substantial comfort hitherto unknown in this city, and equal to the large modern American and English Club-houses and Hotel Companies.

The site of the new Club-house is immediately adjoining the Town Hall, facing Collins Street, and the building will (under our contract of lease with the City Corporation) be finished in exterior conformity with the Town Hall itself.

The principal feature of the Victoria Club will be the privilege which Members will have of bringing LADIES either for Luncheon, Lounge, or Dining Parties, as one entire floor (the second) will be richly furnished with Boudoirs and Suites of Apartments EXPRESSLY for this purpose. This floor will have a Magnificent Balcony overlooking the whole length of Collins Street, and a PRIVATE ENTRANCE for Ladies will be secured by a SPECIAL STAIRCASE.

The opening page of a prospectus for the Victoria Club, a Melbourne club for ‘gentlemen’, adjoining the Town Hall, circa 1876. The last paragraph makes quite clear the “principal feature” of the Club: “the privilege which Members will have of bringing LADIES either for Luncheon, Lounge, or Dining Parties, as one entire floor (the second) will be richly furnished with Boudoirs and Suites of Apartments EXPRESSLY for this purpose”, with private access for the ‘ladies’ via a “special staircase”. The prospectus was part of the Berry Collection; image courtesy of Australian Book Auctions.
Frontispiece from the 1905 edition of *The Devil in Sydney*.

Plate 2
‘Nineties, such as that articulated in the published work of Aubrey Beardsley and his fellows, works that did not so much inspire the colonial pieces as lend them a degree of under-the-counter legitimacy.

In 1905 a new edition of The Devil in Sydney was “Printed by W. Hamer, for the Anglo-Australian Publishing Company 5 Shelley Street, N.S.W”, under the title His Satanic Majesty, The Devil In Sydney; or, Barmaids, Baldheads, Mashers, &c. Cyprian Corp, their Resorts and Rendezvous, and Bagnio Proprietors. This 128-page second edition, much enlarged and illustrated, had doubled in size since its first appearance in 1895. The first part (pp. 3 – 64) is a racy romance of the Sydney demimonde. A sort of picaresque tale, it is substantially unaltered from the 1895 version.

The subsequent parts are, however, new to this edition and are almost certainly the work of a different author or authors. The second part (pp. 65 – 84) takes the form of a tour to meet the “street prowlers and day and night battlers”, while subsequent briefer parts, the third to the fifth, describe various aspects of Sydney street-life and low-life, always more or less salaciously. The final, sixth, part (pp. 122-6) includes the only portion of the book that might be described as mildly pornographic, or at least erotic. It describes the writer’s experiences in a massage parlour. This he discovers to be no more than “a bagnio of the lowest type” where ‘innocent’ gentlemen are inveigled into a sexually compromising position and then subjected to blackmail. This prospect does not daunt our hero who proceeds to “fix” the three lady masseuses and even attempts to have his wicked way with the lady proprietor. The unctuous tone and misogynistic hypocrisy throughout this episode just may be ironic.

The illustrations are in the main lifted from racy publications – almost certainly European – but one is the vignette first printed on the front wrapper of the 1890-1 The Life, Adventures, and Confessions of a Sydney Barmaid and another is a wood-engraving after a photograph claimed to be of “Melbourne Kate, the lively lady at Mother H.’s supper rooms”. Almost certainly the longest extant piece of erotica, widely defined, from the colonial or immediate post-colonial period, this description of Sydney low life treads much more daringly than its tame predecessors of the 1890s (see Plate 2).

For all its ‘daring’, works like the 1905 Devil in Sydney were very, very few in number and are now of the utmost rarity. The posthumous suppression of such pieces is almost certainly due to the caution of those, such as executors and booksellers, who risked severe legal penalties for handling material viewed as offensive by the morality brigades. But this extraordinary
The sparseness of the extant published record cannot disguise the sociological reality of sexuality in the Victorian and Edwardian eras in Australia.

The fact that trade in sex products was illegal did not mean that the trade disappeared, only that it was carried out in secrecy, almost certainly blinked at by authority – as long as the bribes were paid. A rare flyer from about 1910, probably unique, shows that interest in the sexual was every bit as active then as at any other time in human history (see Plate 3). With the heading For Private Circulation. Supplied to Adults Only. Price List of Specialities. The Empire Co., 58 Eastern Arcade, Melbourne. All Articles Sent Post Free in Plain Covers. Free from Observation... the leaflet advertises various products that in those times could not be sold openly. Among the items offered, with brief blurbs and prices, are various contraceptive devices and formulations – condoms or sheaths, pessaries, “Capote Blanco, or False Vagina... Last for years”, syringes, Venus Novelty Sheath, the Rouser, Fairy Rings, etc. – all of which shows that not much has changed in the last 100 years. Also pills and remedies of many sorts, most for impotency (again not much change), and various ‘marriage’ guides (including the works of Aristotle!), and so on.

Even in the less cosmopolitan city of Brisbane similar products are seen to be available from “The Parisian Medical Agency” at 258 George Street, Brisbane. In another rare – again probably unique – small bi-fold leaflet of the 1890s a variety of remedies and contraceptive devices and ‘sex toys’ for men and women are offered: “Gent’s Elastic French Preventatives... French Novelties done up in the form of Lollies, Nuts, and Fruit... Ladies’ Charmers [dildo]. Single, 1s.6d. Double 2s.6d... Dr. Abernethy’s Preventative, A Scientific Remedy... The New French Pessaire Preventif [diaphragm]... Dr. Abernethy’s celebrated Damiana Pills Act like a charm on old and young. A genuine remedy for every Weakness of the genital organs. A sovereign tonic for the exhausted...”.

While this all sounds rather seedy, it would be wrong to assume that these slight insights into the underbelly of Victorian and Edwardian times is any more representative of the sexual life of the average Australian in that period than are the advertisements for ‘adult services’ in local newspapers throughout the country today. What all this slight but overwhelmingly persuasive evidence does, however, is to underline just how mysterious it is that our Victorian and Edwardian ancestors have left no trace of pornographic or explicitly erotic material.

There was, of course, a gentler side to sexuality in that age, although examples are just as elusive. “Osculation” or the Art of Kissing by “Yum
For Private Circulation.—Supplied to Adults Only.

PRICE LIST OF SPECIALTIES.
The EMPIRE Co., 58 Eastern Arcade, Melbourne
All Articles Sent Post Free in Plain Covers, Free from Observation.

French Letters.—Plain or with Test End. Best quality, 94 each, three for 2/6, 1s. for 7½; Super Pink Rubber, ½ each, three for 2/6, 8d. each.
The Reliance Sheath.—Test End, Pink Rubber, extra strong; last for months. 2/6 each.
The Everlast Permanent Sheath.—Moulded End, Made from Finest Quality Rubber. Will last a year. 4/6 and 7/6.
American Rubber Caps.—Made short, with contracted Rubber Band to prevent slipping. 1/ each, three for 2/6. Can be used many times.
Transparent Skin Sheaths.—Made from Cod Fish Bladders. They are drawn over loose, then wetted. Can be used a number of times. ½ each, three for 2/6.
Capote Blanco, or False Vagina.—Used by the female. The Sheath being pressed into vagina, leaving the oval inflatated rim outside. An infallible check. Made of Finest Quality Rubber. Last for years. 7/6 and 10/6 each.
The Poor Man’s Friend, or Combined Possey and Sheath.—Can be used by the male as a Sheath, or by the female as a Possey. Very durable. Made of best Rubber, 7/6 and 10/6 each.
The Vimate Possey.—Undoubtedly the very best preventative Possey yet devised. It fits like a glove, and will last for years. Woman’s never-failing safeguard. Made in finest quality Red Para Rubber, with illustrated directions and advice, in enamelled metal box, price 7/6 and 10/6 each, post free, carefully packed in plain wrapper.
Dr. Rendell’s “Wife’s Friend” Soluble Quinine Posse.—In boxes of 12, 2/6 per box.
Quinaloid.—A Gelatine-coated Soluble Possey. Not so liable to melt during hot weather, but equally good as a preventative. Two dozen in box, ½; half box, ½.
Safety Sponges.—Soft, round, selected Sponges, covered with a fine silk net and cord. Much used in France. ½ each, three for 2/6.
Quinine Antiseptic Powders.—For making solution for injection with Enema. Dissolve one powder in pint of warm water. A good preventative after coitus. 2/6 per box.
Safety Whirling Spray Syringe.—This Syringe dilutes and flushes the vaginal passage with a volume of whirling fluid, washing out all secretions and discharges. Very durable. 2/6. Antiseptic Tablets, for use with Syringe, ½ per box, ¼ per doz.
Bulb Enema Syringes.—As Red, Black, or Grey Rubber. In box with fittings complete, 3/6, 5/6, 7/6, and 10/6 each.
The Vaginilator.—A nickel-plated Syringe for injecting dry powder. It is used before coitus. A reliable check. Will last for years. Price 10/6, with 100 charges of Quinine Antiseptic Powder. Powder only, 2/6 each.
The Venus Novelty Sheath.—Best quality Pink Rubber, Test End, with fringe of soft Rubber points around shoulders of Sheath. Very durable. 2/6 each.
The Rajah.—A very strong Rubber Sheath, with Moulded End, having a double row of short projections around shoulder of Sheath. With care will last a year. 5/6 each.
The Rouser.—Another strong Sheath, with saw tooth band of Rubber around shoulder, and two transverse pieces of the same material across the end of Sheath. 5/6 each.
Fairy Rings.—Circular Rubber Rings, with serrated outer edge. Single, 1/6; double, 2/6; twenty, 5/6.

The Empire Company’s “Price List of Specialties” (circa 1910).

Plate 3
Anonymous. “Songs without Words”.

Plate 4
"Yum"... Illustrated by E.T. Lyne & W.J. Hosking, a small and far from salacious 24-page novelty booklet published in Ballarat in 1891 by the Federal Novelty Co. treats, with what even then must have been quite pawky humour, a subject that would have raised a blush on a pure cheek and a stern frown on an upright brow. "Songs without Words", a good-humoured and witty private production, and one that is a good deal more explicit, was produced on the blue printer in some Australian office at the turn of the century and provides perhaps a much more accurate and a much more positive and healthy insight into the majority erotic mind of the age (see Plate 4).

In any consideration of the subject of Victorian and Edwardian sexuality in Australia, the figure of William James Chidley calls for attention. The several editions (1911-15) of Chidley's privately-printed The Answer, pleading for radical reform of the taboo subject of human sexuality and distributed by him free of charge on the streets of Melbourne and Sydney, is almost certainly the first Australian publication of its type. Chidley’s theory of natural coition, natural dress, and natural diet was sincerely held even if absurdly impractical. Believing his theory to be mankind’s only hope of salvation, he submitted himself to all the indignity and persecution that late Victorian intolerance and Edwardian hypocrisy could bring to bear. His book condemned and destroyed, himself arrested, fined, incarcerated, and eventually committed to an asylum where he died within a few years, Chidley remained to the last obsessively defiant. The Chidley affair was largely a matter of freedom of speech: only the most Victorian of minds could find – and they did find – any real obscenity in his book. And it is sanguine to be reminded that, such was the antediluvian mentality of official Australia, Chidley’s book even fifty years later would have met the same condemnation and he would probably have been subjected to the same persecution.

In such a climate it is perhaps not so hard to understand why Australian colonial pornography or erotica – if there ever was any – has disappeared so completely.

One would be excused, since the printed evidence is so one-sided, for believing that ‘illicit’ sexuality was an entirely male domain in those not so very distant times. There is, however, very compelling evidence to the contrary. This is succinctly exemplified in two typed notes complete with their Melbourne-postmarked envelopes from 19 January 1911. These notes, addressed anonymously to “Young Lady” at an address in one of Melbourne’s most affluent and ‘proper’ middle-class suburbs, provide an unexpected insight into female sexuality in Edwardian Australia.
The brief first note, sent through the post with the envelope addressed to “Young Lady” at the street address, is a tease, indicating that there is a pleasant surprise awaiting her at the local Post Office “to be collected”. Having been duly collected, the second letter is longer and more explicit. This remarkable document throws light on the secret life of Edwardian young women in well-to-do middle-class Melbourne and bears transcription in full.

I have been for years in Collins Street I was once a leading woman in a shop and am a certified dentist. I have girl friends in shops in the suburbs who send me the addresses only of decent girls in the place and last July I had two from your district. I have now sent to 5 addresses there and do not know who answers. There may be more than one from your place. I can for 2/6 show you how simply married people stop trouble & also some photos from life also for sale. I always tell those I see and who like to know the great secret at the best age to have nothing to do with any one except married relatives the older the better as they dare not speak and always have the preventive by them which must be insisted on for use. What girls do to each other is very harmful. The girl must make the advances and any girl can fix a man. I saw three girls & three friends to-day at different times out of eight I sent to at S. Yarra and no one the wiser. You better show this or send it to a quiet friend not living close and bring her with you as going to a dentist. I trust you not to betray me.

If you wish to learn secretly post early the enclosed to the “Argus” with twelve penny stamps. When I see the advertisement I will at once write to the post-office at Surrey Hills To “MANICURE” to be called for and arrange to meet you in town in a busy street at 3 one afternoon. Watch the paper and you will see if I get a reply from any in your district – see Saturday advertisement. You will be doing no harm and breaking no law if you elect to do what lots of girls do with absolute safety and secrecy.

Whether or not Young Lady took up this offer is tantalisingly unclear: “the enclosed”, whatever it was, is no longer present and a search of the Argus personal advertisements around this time has proved fruitless. Above all, why were these highly improper notes not immediately discarded but instead kept, with their envelopes, to be discovered almost a century later with miscellaneous papers in a suburban auction room? What is abundantly clear, however, is that, irrespective of the response of our Young Lady, the promotion of such a scheme in such a way suggests, on the one hand, a
considerable degree of sexual interest and sophistication among young women at the time and, on the other hand, implies the willingness of young women, even of the ‘better class’, to engage in illicit sexual activity. And, most importantly, that there were enough such young ladies to justify the writer engaging in her exceedingly risky commercial undertaking.

This last piece of evidence is perhaps the most important when reflecting on the Edwardian postcard series that is our concern here. It shows, as clearly as any form of indirect evidence can, the quite active sexual instinct of Australian young women in the Edwardian era, without an understanding of which this sequence of images might well prove quite puzzling. A central issue in any reading of the sequence is the intended audience. While analysis of this question is inevitably subjective to some degree, it seems safe to argue that the postcard series was intended for correspondence – one is tempted to say ‘conversation’ – between the sexes, more particularly young adults. It is unlikely that they would have been intended for correspondence between members of the same gender, except perhaps in a facetious way. Consequently, the active, if often heavily veiled, sexuality of both Edwardian young women and young men becomes a necessary context for the explication of the sequence.

The narrative represented by the postcards can only be read in one way, despite peripheral ambiguities. The first depicts a young woman finding a letter upon returning home (After a day out? Perhaps even at work?). In the second card she sits on a day bed or *chaise longue* – a central prop to the whole sequence – having read the letter which she holds speculatively to her chin, the envelope hastily dropped on the floor, a conspiratorial look, excited and anticipatory on her face. The third card begins the main burden of the series as she begins to remove her outer garments. The fourth to the eighth cards follow her progress disrobing, never to a state beyond the merely suggestive, with a smile on her face. In the ninth card she lies on the day bed partially under the covers, we must understand her to be in her nether garments, contemplating with pleasure what appears to be a grape in her right hand – shades of Mae West. In the final card she lies back, arms behind her head, smiling out welcomingly at the viewer.

There are several iconographic points of interest, some more subtle than others. Apart from the first card, the smiling young woman always looks out to the viewer, following Sir Kenneth Clark’s distinction between the naked and the nude, reassuring the viewer that these are not voyeuristic images. The young woman has on her finger an engagement ring, which is consistently if often subliminally present: the implication is that she is
preparing for the arrival of her fiancé, somewhat legitimising her otherwise ‘improper’ behaviour. She undresses in front of and lies on a day bed or *chaise longue*, not a double bed – is she simply preparing for a nap? is she day-dreaming of her lover or something else entirely? is she smiling out at us in anticipation of something completely innocent? These ambiguities and visual hints are crucial in establishing an agreeable suggestiveness rather than flagrant eroticism in the sequence.

Notes


4. What appears to be the only known copy of this 1905 edition was sold by New Century Antiquarian Books in 1998 (Catalogue 7/23); now Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

5. Private collection.

6. Private collection.

7. Private collection.

8. Not to mention his *The Phenomena of “Erection”* (Sydney, 1916) that was seized and rigorously suppressed (copies survive at least in the State Library of New South Wales and the State Library of Victoria).


11. The images themselves seem to derive from posed photographs. This is most strongly suggested by the incongruity in the depiction of the face of the young woman, an incongruity that is a commonplace consequence when adopting different camera angles but that is not conceivable to such a degree in the case of an artist working from a life model.

12. Twentieth-century arts practice has largely invalidated Sir Kenneth Clark’s distinction between the naked and the nude, which was always to some extent special pleading. The distinction has, however, some validity in Edwardian visual language, which was the basis for Clark’s subjective distinction in any event.
Postcard no. II
Postcard no. III
Postcard no. VI
Postcard no. VII
Postcard no. VIII