



THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT;

OR,

OR,

HARLEQUIN PROGRESS,  
AND THE  
LOVE'S LAUGHS,  
LAMENTS  
AND LABORS,  
OF  
JACK MELBOURNE,  
AND  
LITTLE VICTORIA.

HARLEQUIN JACK  
SYDNEY, LITTLE  
AUSTRALIA & THE  
GNOME OF THE GOLDEN  
MINE, AND THE  
AUSTRALIAN FERNERY  
IN THE GOLDEN  
CONSERVATORY,  
THE HOME OF  
DIAMANTINA.

*A FAIRY EXTRAVAGANZA  
OPENING TO PANTOMIME*

*A PANTOMIME*

WILLIAM MOWER AKHURST  
(1869)

ANONYMOUS  
(1871)

*AN ENFOLDED TEXT*





## INTRODUCTION

THE author or localiser of most of the annual Melbourne Theatre Royal pantomimes for nearly fifteen years, William Mower Akhurst (1822–78), was an English-born journalist who arrived in Adelaide in 1849 and became the secretary of a local amateur dramatic society in 1850.<sup>1</sup> Remembered as a ‘big, jolly man’,<sup>2</sup> Akhurst moved to Melbourne around 1854 and began writing comic sketches for the Nelson family of entertainers, capping his prolific Australian playwriting career in 1869–70 when he had shows running simultaneously at two Melbourne theatres – *Harlequin Jack Sheppard* at the Duke of Edinburgh and, at the Theatre Royal, *The House that Jack Built; or, Harlequin Progress, and the Love’s Laughs, Laments and Labors, of Jack Melbourne, and Little Victoria*.

In some of his later pantomimes but particularly in *The House that Jack Built*, Akhurst began to distance his stories from traditional celebrations of English literature and history and replace them with partly original plots. These, as one critic has noted, ‘marked a significant shift in the function of pantomime as an instructor of the young in the cultural and architectural achievements of the developing community’.<sup>3</sup> One of the founding fathers

<sup>1</sup> *Adelaide Times*, 18 September 1850, p. 3. Akhurst was born at Brook St., Hanover Sq., London, and baptised at the nearby St George’s Church on 24 January 1823 (Akhurst family papers, privately held). He died on 6 June 1878 on board the *Patriarch* while returning to Australia after a period of residence in London: *Illustrated Australian News*, 3 October 1878, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> *Australian Typographical Journal*, May 1898, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Richardson, ‘Harlequin in the Antipodes’, *Southerly*, 42 (1982), 212–20 (p. 214).



of European Victoria, John Pascoe Fawkner, died in September 1869, about the time Akhurst would have begun to write *The House that Jack Built*, and in several places Fawkner is explicitly paralleled with the pantomime hero Jack Melbourne. Similarly, in the Sydney localisation of the libretto two years later, Jack Sydney is several times identified with Sir John ('Jack') Robertson, the popular elder statesman of New South Wales politics, whose democratic reforms included the 1861 Lands Acts, which began to reclaim some of the squatters' vast acreage for small farmers. As well as celebrating a passing generation of pioneers for the education of the young, Akhurst's pantomime served, like many others before and after it, as a commentary on recent memorable achievements such as the opening of the magnificent new Royal Arcade (illust. 19), as well as the year's political machinations, successes and disasters.

#### The structure of pantomime and other formal influences

The form of pantomime which Akhurst used for his comic history lesson had itself altered significantly. Late in the previous century the spoken scenes began to be grouped at the beginning of the evening's entertainment, followed by the action-based pantomime proper, or harlequinade as it became known. To link the two sections together a 'transformation' sequence was introduced. At a crisis point in the plot the good fairy intervened and, thanks to lighting, smoke and trapdoors, the characters disappeared and the young hero reappeared in an instant as Harlequin, the heroine as Columbine, the 'heavy' old man as Pantaloon and the villain as Clown. The plot continued and was resolved through mime and magic, but the lack of scripted dialogue meant that often the surviving libretto omitted any details of it.

Fortunately, however, *The House that Jack Built* was adapted in 1871 by an unknown author and staged in Sydney with the subtitle *Harlequin Jack Sydney, Little Australia & the Gnome of the Golden Mine, and the Australian Fernery in the Golden Conservatory, the Home of Diamantina*. The Melbourne libretto ends at the moment the transformation begins: hence its subtitle *A Fairy Extravaganza Opening to Pantomime*. However, the Sydney script contains a short description of each of its subsequent six scenes, which included variety acts, comic and patriotic songs and





speeches as well as the action-mime sequences. The harlequinade by this time had become shorter and often was performed by specialist acrobats and clowns who took over the roles from the actors and singers who had performed in the opening scenes.

The pantomime in this period underwent two other significant shifts.<sup>4</sup> Since the 1820s its subject matter had begun to rely on traditional children's stories and songs – of which *The House that Jack Built* was one of the most popular<sup>5</sup> – and on fairy tales, particularly after J. R. Planché's influential *Riquet with the Tuft* (1836). As critics in both Melbourne and Sydney noted, not always with approval, Akhurst's *The House that Jack Built* borrows from both, beginning in fairyland but including only one scene re-enacting the nursery rhyme in its innocent children's form.<sup>6</sup> Since before 1820 the 'House that Jack Built' story had been used for political commentary.<sup>7</sup> Akhurst follows this tradition in making his hero Jack Melbourne and heroine Little Victoria represent hopes and fears for the future of that colony and his villain Orognome some of its current vices, particularly unscrupulous and fraudulent manipulation of mining stocks and share trading 'Under the Verandah' (illust. 20). The Sydney localiser found no reason to

<sup>4</sup> See Veronica Kelly, Introduction, in Garnet Walch, *Australia Felix; or Harlequin Laughing Jackass and the Magic Bat* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988), pp. 4–14.

<sup>5</sup> London stage versions included *The House that Jack Built; or, Harlequin Tattered and Torn* (Olympic Theatre, commencing 20 November 1817); *Harlequin and the House that Jack Built* (Covent Garden, 26 December 1823); *Harlequin and the House that Jack Built in 1851; or, The Genie of the Ring and Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp* (Sadler's Wells, 26 December 1850) and E. L. Blanchard's *Harlequin and the House that Jack Built; or, Old Mother Hubbard and her Wonderful Dog* (Drury Lane, 26 December 1861). It is likely that Akhurst had before him, as he wrote, a copy of the 1862 Manchester pantomime *The House that Jack Built*, which has strong similarities including political resonances and a 'Haunt of the Water Nymphs' scene similar to Akhurst's opening scene: *Manchester Guardian*, 20 December 1862, p. 4; 24 December, p. 2. Its script has not been located.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. *Leader* (Melbourne), 31 December 1869, p. 18; *Town and Country Journal* (Sydney), 30 December 1871, p. 852.

<sup>7</sup> *The House that Jack Built* is an 'accumulative rhyme which has had immense popularity during the past 150 years and has probably been more parodied than any other nursery story': *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, ed. Iona and Peter Opie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), pp. 231–2.



alter this element, apart from substituting a few more recent financial scandals or ones closer to home.

Also significant was the pantomime's increasing tendency in the same period to borrow generically from adjacent dramatic forms. These included burlesque, which parodied high-art stories and acting styles, such as those of classical legend and opera, as well as popular drama. Most obviously drawn from burlesque is the entire setting and part of the action of the traditional 'dark' scene, set underground in the 'Palatial Caverns of Orognome, the Gold Fiend' (265:2), which delights in its borrowings from Dion Boucicault's melodrama *After Dark* (1868). This was the first English play to use the man-tied-on-the-railway-track action sequence, though Boucicault had in turn stolen it from the American Augustin Daly's play, *Under the Gaslight* (1867). Both those plays had been seen for the first time in Melbourne during 1869. In Daly's play it is the heroine who drags the victim off the tracks moments before a train thunders across the stage; in Boucicault's version, set in the London underground, it is the hero's best friend. In Akhurst's parody, which stands at the head of a long line of intertextual jokes down to the present day, Little Victoria and Joey the wallaby tussle for the privilege of rolling Jack out of the way of the oncoming gold trucks.

Another generic influence evident in *The House that Jack Built* is the extravaganza, which exploited the increasing technical resources of the nineteenth-century stage to present fantasy scenic spectacles: the 'Great Glass Sea' (240:13) of the opening, the glittering gold and jewels in the cave scene and, as in most pantomimes, the visual transformation which contributed to the change from opening to harlequinade. By the 1860s such transformations were emphasising not the actor substitutions but the achievements of the set designers who by means of a system of gauzes and lighting changes made successive splendid visions appear and dissolve into the next. What John Hennings designed for the Melbourne production is not known, but reviews almost unanimously considered it the most memorable part of the evening. After declaring *The House that Jack Built* to be in general 'infinitely bright, gay, glittering, and beautiful', the critic 'Jaques' (J. E. Neild) continued:



The transformation scene is what certain chroniclers of these things love to term a triumph of pictorial art. It seems as if the process of its development would never come to an end. It grows as if it would never cease to grow. You settle in your mind that what you see is the limit of capable beauty, when presently new forms and colours of loveliness present themselves. The picture is bewildering in the complication of its sensuous impressiveness, but the perfect symmetry prevents its suggesting any feeling approaching to confusion in the mind . . . Nor is it simply gaudy and dazzling. There is judicious balance of colour, and a consequently harmonious result.<sup>8</sup>

Jaques noted that the living actors blended perfectly with the painted scenery and that the fairies, who in other such entertainments often looked as if they were likely to fall off their perches,<sup>9</sup> appeared 'to enjoy their several situations as if it were the most agreeable thing possible for them to recline in graceful attitudes amongst paradisaical bowers'. He added, by way of apology, 'It is irregular, no doubt, to begin a notice of a pantomime by a description of the transformation scene, but naturally enough one notices first what impresses one the most strongly.'

For a modern reader probably the most noteworthy visual feature in *The House that Jack Built* is its use of that precursor of the travelogue, the moving panorama. There were at this time a number of types of visual spectacle loosely called panoramas, ranging from large scenic canvases in front of which actors were positioned in imitation of, for example, the climaxes of famous historical battles, to giant 360-degree versions which were marketed as self-sufficient entertainments. The 'diorama' began the fashion for 'dissolving views' by using semi-transparent cloth alternatively lit from in front to make it appear solid and from behind to make it seem to disappear. (Transformation scenes were a development of the diorama.) The moving panorama was yet another type of scenic

<sup>8</sup> *Australasian*, 1 January 1869, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> On 22 December 1861 *Reynold's Newspaper* in London commented on the way in which, in the transformation scene, members of the ballet chorus were placed 'in the stern clutches of an iron brace to which they are strapped, and with which they are wound up into the air, until such time as it shall please the audience to cease applauding' (p. 4).



spectacle, where a scene or sequence of scenes was painted on a long scroll of canvas and wound on two rollers from one side of the stage to the other.<sup>10</sup> It was quickly noticed that when actors walked on the spot facing in the opposite direction to the background movement, an illusion of travelling could be created. Well before the cinema camera with its panning and tracking capabilities was invented, the moving panorama was able to give the illusion of a foot, railway or ship journey, ‘with its painted surface slowly traversing the stage like passing scenery’.<sup>11</sup> It could also be swung 90 degrees and wound top to bottom to give the effect of a vertical climb up a mountain.

Two years before Akhurst wrote *The House that Jack Built*, the entertainer Charles Thatcher (1830–78) devised a highly successful comic lecture called *Life on the Goldfields*, illustrated with diorama scenes from the history of the gold rushes of the 1850s.<sup>12</sup> These had been painted by the prominent Melbourne-based scene-painter John Hennings (1833–98), who was also the principal designer for the premiere season of *The House that Jack Built*.<sup>13</sup>

In the pantomime, Hennings combined with Akhurst and, on the grander scale made possible by the huge stage of Melbourne’s largest venue, the 3,300-seat Theatre Royal,<sup>14</sup> they introduced two moving panoramas in addition to the diorama effects in the transformation scenes. One of these panoramas is clearly inspired by Thatcher’s humorous history lecture: it celebrates European conquest and settlement from ‘An Aboriginal Wood in Australia Felix’ (294:2), the arrival of John Fawkner’s first settlers in 1835, an early image of Collins Street (intended as a contrast to the great metropolis of thirty years later), a squatting property, the gold rush, the Burke and Wills expedition, to the new Melbourne Town Hall

<sup>10</sup> Anita Callaway, ‘“On a Clear Day You Can See Forever”: The Colonial Panorama and the Theatre of Landscape’, *Australian Journal of Art*, 12 (1994–95), 96–112; W. J. Lawrence, ‘Some Stage Effects: Their Growth and History’, *Gentleman’s Magazine* (July 1888), 83–95; Nancy J. Doran Hazelton, ‘The Tourist in the Audience: Travel Pictures on the Nineteenth-Century Stage’, *Theatre History Studies*, 12 (1992), 13–24.

<sup>11</sup> Callaway, ‘On a Clear Day’, p. 103.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Thatcher, *Life on the Goldfields* (1867), ed. Robert H. B. Hoskins (Christchurch, NZ: University of Canterbury School of Music, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> *CTA* 267; Irvin 124–5.

<sup>14</sup> *CTA* 584–5; Irvin 181–2.



(illust. 21). Oddly there is no equivalent scene in the Sydney version – possibly the theatre management did not have access to the technology or the extremely long roll of canvas required. Nevertheless, the Sydney script ends its less explicit celebration of local achievements at the Sydney Post Office, then under construction. The decision to represent such major public buildings was not simply architectural admiration or civic pride: town halls and houses of parliament were markers of responsible self-government, while between 1858 and 1872 the post office became the central collection and distribution point for the telegraph service which transformed communications between the colonies and with London.<sup>15</sup>

Equally intriguing is a vertical panorama – scene 2 in both scripts – where the scroll is rolled from the stage floor up into the flies, thereby giving the illusion that Jack is digging from a northern-hemisphere fairyland down through the geological layers to the centre of the earth, breaking through into an Australian underground gold mine and eventually arriving in Melbourne. The Sydney version is less precise, but it too offers a visual image of Australia upside down at the bottom of the world. During this journey both versions have Jack lampooning as ‘fossils’ political figures and events in their respective colonies, but the scene has additional resonance. Possibly Akhurst’s original inspiration came from a report in the *Illustrated Australian News* on 5 September 1868 of the discovery by Frederick McCoy, the first Professor of Natural Science at the University of Melbourne, of the ‘Ichthyosaurus Australis (McCoy). – A New Australian Fossil Monster’ (illust. 22). Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* had been published in 1859, and the decade of the 1860s was one when the theory of evolution was vigorously debated and widely parodied. Popular interest was high. McCoy himself, an anti-Darwinist, gave a three-hour public lecture in June 1869,<sup>16</sup> while in the Melbourne Exhibition Hall there was a large ‘collection of minerals, rocks, and fossils . . . laid out . . . for public inspection’.<sup>17</sup> One of many colonial anxieties was about Australia’s place in the geological record.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Thatcher, *Life on the Goldfields*, ‘Scene 8th: A Post Office on the Gold fields’: ‘What a world of recollection the Post Office conjures up’ (p. 51).

<sup>16</sup> *ADB* v. 135.

<sup>17</sup> *Argus* Supplement, 11 September 1869, p. 1.



According to the news report, the remains of these kinds of marine reptiles 'are only found in geological formations of the Mesozoic age . . . Geologists have based several theories on the supposed absence of these formations in Australia.' It was now proven that Australia had participated fully and equally in natural history. Sketches of the 'monster' were printed above a comparative drawing of a complete skeleton found in Dorsetshire, demonstrating graphically that the Australian animal was much larger, 'at least thirty feet in length'.<sup>18</sup>

### Political satire

Political comment was intrinsic to nineteenth-century pantomime. Newspaper comparisons between parliamentary proceedings on one hand, and melodrama and farce on the other, were equally common. But it is probably not a coincidence that, just a week before the Melbourne opening night of *The House that Jack Built*, Marcus Clarke's satirical weekly *Humbug* ran a front-page article entitled 'The Parliamentary Pantomime' and followed it with both a poem 'Harlequin Humbug' and a double-page cartoon on the subject (illust. 23).<sup>19</sup> Presumably Clarke knew of Akhurst's libretto and used the idea as a launching point for savage and libellous invective against the instability and ineffectiveness of Victorian politics. He attacked in particular the recent coming to power of John A. MacPherson as Premier and what Clarke perceived as his ministry's attempts to sabotage the passing of the new Land Act.<sup>20</sup>

Clarke's magazine was a supporter of the previous reformist government of James McCulloch, which had survived almost continuously for nearly six years. Its attempts to pass progressive legislation – including a new land-reform bill designed to assist small selectors to set up family farms and to prevent fraudulent purchases by squatters – had been blocked repeatedly by the non-elected and squatter-dominated upper house of parliament. This impasse led to public expressions of resentment, occasional violence and the recalling of the popular pro-reform governor, Sir Charles Darling.

In September 1869, however, the McCulloch ministry fell

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. <sup>19</sup> *Humbug*, 15 December 1869, pp. 1, 6, 8–9.

<sup>20</sup> *ADB* v. 185–6.



because of two matters relatively unconnected to this frustration of the will of the democratic majority. In the first week of September, McCulloch's Attorney-General, G. P. Smith, attempted to have his cabinet colleague, the popular Lands Minister James Grant, committed to an institution as an alcoholic. Grant had been the architect and hero of Victoria's first land laws of 1865; and the new legislation, then being debated, gave him major additional powers in regulating and administering the selection of agricultural and pastoral land.<sup>21</sup> Not surprisingly, the pro-squatter *Argus* exploited to the utmost this division within the government's own ministry and made much of the idea of their plans to place sweeping and arbitrary authority in the hands of a habitual drunkard.<sup>22</sup>

At almost exactly the same time, the government managed to offend all its backbench supporters by ignoring their ambitions and instead appointing George Rolfe to the ministerial position of Commissioner of Customs. Rolfe was a former parliamentarian but at the time was not a member of either house. A member for Crowlands, Robert Byrne, immediately and successfully moved a motion of dissent and the ministry resigned.<sup>23</sup> It was expected that Byrne would form a new ministry with himself as Premier;<sup>24</sup> in the event, he became Treasurer in a government led by the thirty-six-year-old MacPherson. But Byrne had to face a by-election two weeks later and was challenged and defeated by none other than the non-parliamentarian seeking re-election, George Rolfe himself. *Humbug* gleefully observed:

Byrne, late, achieved a great success  
By pulling Rolfe from off his post;  
Some men by victory, no less  
Than by defeat, are wholly lost.  
This bitter lesson he'd to learn,  
For Rolfe in falling fell on Byrne.<sup>25</sup>

As a result of this turmoil MacPherson's short-lived ministry was just clinging to power when the new Land Act was passed on 29

<sup>21</sup> *Argus*, 24 August 1869, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Argus* Supplement, 11 September 1869, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*; *Argus*, 15 September 1869, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Argus*, 20 September 1869, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Humbug*, 13 October 1869, p. 8.



December during the season of *The House that Jack Built*.<sup>26</sup> But it was amended and compromised legislation, with one of its earlier opponents, James McKean, having become the new Minister for Lands.

A second and related topic of conversation concerned a number of suspected land frauds involving members of parliament including a Mr Stutt. The allegations were being investigated behind closed doors by a Land Inquiry Committee, which hardly ever met because, in the political upheavals, several of its members found themselves to be no longer members of parliament. *Humbug* also versified on this:

Bold Stutt is our Clown, and McKean Pantaloon,  
And Humbug, the Harlequin, reader.  
You know the clown's trick with the pantomime doll,  
If you don't 'tis an "out and out" pity;  
For that toy on the floor is an effigy droll,  
Of the recent Inquiry Committee.<sup>27</sup>

Akhurst's libretto is a lighter, less satirical confection, though it uses much the same material and is indefatigable in trying to include references to as many of these topical events as possible.

The Sydney localiser, two years later, had a similar period of parliamentary instability, ineffectiveness and compromise to satirise. Since 1866 New South Wales politics had polarised around a conservative coalition led by James Martin, supported by the former radical Henry Parkes and opposed by the leaders of two other factions, Charles Cowper and the John Robertson mentioned earlier who, like James Grant in Victoria, had made his name in New South Wales through his land-reform legislation. However, in December 1870 Cowper resigned to become Agent-General in London and Parkes had to withdraw for more than a year due to

<sup>26</sup> Often referred to as 'James Grant's Land Act', after the long-serving Commissioner for Crown Lands (*ADB* iv. 283–4); but his successor, McKean, was in power when the legislation finally passed the Upper House.

<sup>27</sup> *Humbug*, 15 December 1869, p. 6. For a report on the Land Inquiry Committee, see *Argus* Supplement, 11 September 1869, p. 2. The 'clown's trick' presumably involved secretly substituting a doll for a real baby before dropping it.



bankruptcy. To general astonishment and in some quarters outrage, an unlikely alliance was formed between the reactionary Martin as Premier and the reformist Robertson as Colonial Secretary. At the time the unknown localiser sat down to revise Akhurst's script for the Sydney production, the Martin–Robertson coalition had just staggered through 1871, achieving little but destroying old allegiances and the liberal power-base. Four months later it would fall from inertia, leading to Parkes's triumphant return for his first term as Premier. The Sydney version of *The House that Jack Built* consequently replaces all the specific references to Victorian politics with rather heavier-handed nose-thumbing at these ongoing machinations in New South Wales, most obviously in Jack's topical song 'The Style in which its done' (261:1 – 264:12).

### Stage history

Akhurst's *The House that Jack Built* proved to be a protean work, with no fewer than three separate productions, the last two (in Sydney and Brisbane) being reworkings for their local communities. The Melbourne season was a major success and ran for thirty-two performances. As well as the principal performers and the transformation scene mentioned earlier, the two panoramas (including the political caricatures) were acclaimed, as was Jack's topical song (for which, unfortunately, no words survive), the dancing of the Duvalli sisters and the juvenile march imitating the Flying Squadron sailors.<sup>28</sup> Most of the songs were not familiar to the audience: the *Age* noted that they were 'popular melodies, or rather melodies which have become popular in England, but are as yet unknown in Melbourne'.<sup>29</sup>

This season employed probably the most powerful cast that could have been assembled from colonial actors at this time. The Melbourne Theatre Royal, owned by the veteran actor-manager George Coppin (1819–1906), was managed by him in partnership with John Hennings and the major actors H. R. Harwood (1830–98) who

<sup>28</sup>*Age*, 27 and 28 December 1869, p. 3; *Argus*, 27 December 1869, p. 5; *Australasian*, 1 January 1870, p. 18; *Daily Telegraph*, 28 December 1869, p. 3; *Humbug*, 29 December 1869, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup>*Age*, 27 December 1869, p. 3.



played Jack Melbourne and Richard Stewart (c. 1826–1902) who was the villain Orognome.<sup>30</sup> Stewart's family was also prominent, with his stepdaughters Docie and Maggie playing Queen Diamantina and Little Victoria respectively, while towards the end of the pantomime his daughter Nellie Stewart (1858–1931), later the 'unrivalled prima donna of the Australian musical stage'<sup>31</sup> but here an inexperienced eleven-year-old not credited on the playbills, is allowed to share a 'Double Hornpipe' with another child actor. The children's success was achieved particularly through the stature and guidance of their mother, Theodosia Yates (1815–1904).<sup>32</sup> She was one of the few mid-century performers who came to the colonies after genuine success as an actor and singer in London. In 1846 she starred in the first Australian production of Michael Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl*, the popular ballad-opera which is extensively parodied in Akhurst's pantomime and which was sung by Yates's daughter Maggie Stewart. For much of the second half of the nineteenth century, the Stewarts were the first family of the Australian stage.

There was a two-year gap between the Melbourne season and the Sydney season, which took place in the latter city's largest and best-equipped theatre, the 2,500-seat Prince of Wales,<sup>33</sup> with acclaimed settings by Sydney's equivalent to Hennings, W. J. Wilson, who was assisted by Alfred Clint.<sup>34</sup> The actors, however, were not as distinguished and the casting was unusual. In both Melbourne and Sydney versions the Dame role (Dame Melbourne/Dame Sydney) was played by a male actor, as was customary in pantomime. But in Sydney the ageing Charles Young (1819–74),<sup>35</sup> one of Australia's best-known veteran actors, seems an odd choice as young Jack Sydney, while to have Little Australia played by a male comedian, Harry Power, also seems to undermine the civic allegory which Akhurst had devised. It was usual in many pantomimes to cast a female actor as the principal boy and for that actress to engage in love scenes with the female juvenile lead (although the

<sup>30</sup> CTA 263–4, 560–1. <sup>31</sup> CTA 558.

<sup>32</sup> CTA 561. <sup>33</sup> CTA 464.

<sup>34</sup> CTA 150–1, 646; *Sydney Mail*, 30 December 1871, p. 1395; *Town and Country Journal*, 30 December 1871, p. 852.

<sup>35</sup> ADB vi. 450–1; CTA 653.



Melbourne production avoided even this). But to have two mature men playing these roles suggests that their intentions were to play their scenes together as high-camp farce.<sup>36</sup>

A comparison of the two scripts shows that whoever adapted the work for Sydney deleted the references to Victorian politics, sometimes replaced them with NSW equivalents, added a few other political and general topicalities and also inserted a number of approving references to local businesses, from butchers to jewellers. It is quite likely that at least some of the honourable mentions represent paid advertising. If so, they did not get their money's worth because, after only twelve Sydney performances of *The House that Jack Built*, the Prince of Wales Theatre was completely destroyed by fire on the night of 6 January 1872 with the loss of two lives. All the sets, costumes, musical scores and instruments were lost and neither the theatre nor its contents were insured.<sup>37</sup>

Six years later again, another *House that Jack Built* appeared for the festive season, this time in Brisbane, 'Adapted, localised, and expressly re-arranged' for the Queensland Theatre. It had at least fourteen full-length performances and another ten part-showings, a more than creditable season in what was then a fairly small town. No author was given and no libretto survives for this last known version, but the plot included 'the Fossils', a 'Demon Gold Mine, Underground Railway' and, to celebrate local architecture, 'The Brisbane Houses of Parliament', suggesting that this was Akhurst's pantomime reworked yet again. A further clue can be discerned from the presence in Brisbane of Edward McLean (who had choreographed the Sydney production) as director of the 'Dances, Marches, and Evolutions'.<sup>38</sup>

### Texts

Both the Melbourne and Sydney texts of *The House that Jack Built* exist as published libretti. Three surviving copies of the Melbourne

<sup>36</sup> When the libretto for the Sydney production was printed, Miss M. Burton was listed to play Little Australia; at short notice Harry Power's name was pasted over hers: see the copy now held in the Mitchell Library at 792.3/ 5, formerly in the collection of the National Trust Museum of Childhood, Sydney.

<sup>37</sup> *Sydney Mail*, 13 January 1871, p. 40; *Illustrated Sydney News*, 20 January 1872, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 24 December 1878, p. 1.



version are held in the State Library of Victoria. There are two known copies of the Sydney version, both in the Mitchell Library. The Melbourne text used as copy-text for the present edition is held in the State Library at \*LTP 792.3 Ak4H. The booklet measures 18.0 x 12.0 cm and has no watermark; there are two sixteen-page sections wrapped in advertising matter (two folios) that were probably a separate printing job. The cover reused the text block of the title-page. The printer was H. Cordell of 30 Flinders Lane West, Melbourne. The collational formula for the play (ignoring the two cover folios) is 8<sup>o</sup>: A<sup>8</sup> B<sup>8</sup>. The green-paper folios contain advertisements on all available end-paper surfaces. A second copy is identical except that the wrappers are blue paper; it is held at \*SLT 819.92 Ak4 and is bound in with other plays by Akhurst presented to the Public Library of Victoria by Mr Sydney T. Akhurst on 5 December 1871. A third copy, in the J. K. Moir Collection (MC 782.9 Ak4G), is likewise bound in with other plays; it lacks wrappers.

The Mitchell Library copy held at 782.9/ A is the copy-text for the Sydney version presented here; it measures 17.7 x 10.7 cm, is over-stitched with white thread and has a pasted brown-paper cover (one folio). Title, character and cast list, and the dialogue occupies pp. 1–30; the end-papers and pp. 31–6 are closely filled with advertisements. The Harlequinade is on p. 30; two of its scenes occur at shops named in following advertisements, and the typography of these scenes and advertisements is similar. The second copy (ML 792.3/ 5) was formerly held in the National Trust Museum of Childhood, Sydney; it was transferred to the Mitchell Library in 1998. It is from the same impression and is identical except for a light-yellow paper cover and the fact, noted above, that the name of Harry Power has been printed on a small rectangle of paper and pasted over that of Miss M. Burton, indicating a change of cast after the work had been printed. The collational formula for the Sydney edition (ignoring the cover folio) is 12<sup>o</sup>: A<sup>12</sup> B<sup>6</sup>.

Unlike most of the other scripts in this volume, published pantomime libretti, sold as theatre programs prior to each performance, were meant to be read and appreciated as popular literature. Some of the puns, such as the names of many of the minor characters, were not spoken on stage and could only be enjoyed in



the reading, while others were missed in performance – if the frequent complaints of the playwrights are to be taken as evidence of the actors' cavalier approach to the script.<sup>39</sup> At other times actors pointed such word play to induce laughter and occasional groans from the audience. The *Australasian* review of the Melbourne season noted on 1 January 1870: 'As usual with all Mr. Akhurst's pieces . . . the word-acrobatisms are endless, these varying from a surpassing cleverness to a distressing torturing of inoffensive parts of speech.' Theatregoers could also consult their programs during the performance, since at this time most auditoria were still fully lit. The typographical convention used in these published pamphlets to alert the reader to a pun is to enclose it in quotation marks or print it in italics; often the 'set-up' word or phrase is similarly indicated. This is respected in the present edition.

This play exists in two separate versions that have, in relation to their original audiences, equal authority; both were major popular-stage productions. About eighty per cent of the dialogue and stage directions is identical in both, but the differences between them are significant. They consist principally of references to people, places and prominent businesses in either Melbourne or Sydney, and to political and other public events topical in one colony or the other in the year in which that version was performed. In order to draw attention to this localising nature of pantomime scripts, a method of 'enfolding' has been used, printing once only those sections that are identical, but including all variant material found in either version: differences in font and layout, supplemented by diacritical abbreviations and editorial notes, identify the version in which the unique material appears.<sup>40</sup> (For an explanation of the symbols and method of presentation, see Note on the Text.)

<sup>39</sup> E.g. the complaints quoted by Kelly in Walch, *Australia Felix*, Appendix 1, pp. 120–1.

<sup>40</sup> For an explanation of, rationale for, and example of this method of editing, see Bernice Kliman, 'The Enfolded *Hamlet*', *Shakespeare Newsletter*, Extra Issue (1996), 2–44.