

# PAQUE FOOTY

THE LOST WORLD OF THE SANDS & MCDUGALL'S DIRECTORY OF MELBOURNE

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*The Lost World of the  
Sands & McDougall's  
Directory of Melbourne*

20 August –  
20 December 2014

City Gallery  
Melbourne Town Hall

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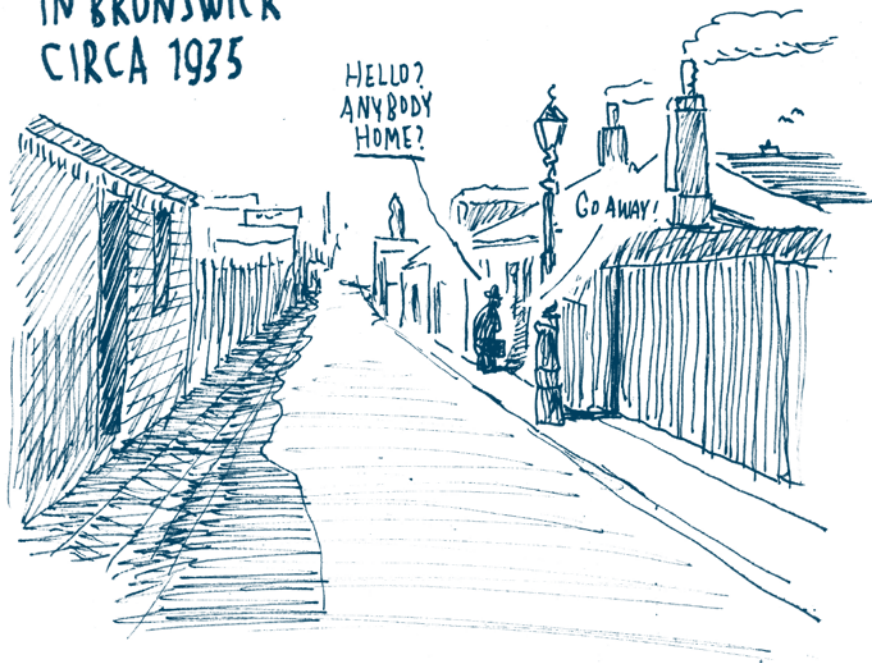
The Sands & McDougall directory was the internet of its day, a vast web of information listing Melburnian householders in enormous annually published volumes.

Its 117-year publishing legacy – and the great beauty of the huge books – is immense.

A printing phenomenon founded in 1857, the directory remains beloved by researchers.

*Page Not Found* uncovers the treasures within.

SOMEWHERE  
IN BRUNSWICK  
CIRCA 1935



## PAGE NOT FOUND:

THE LOST WORLD OF THE SANDS & MCDUGALL'S  
DIRECTORY OF MELBOURNE

**It was the *internet* of  
of information that  
collate and reflect m  
geography, demogra  
life into one big, fat v**

All illustrations by Oslo Davis

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*profits day*, a vast web  
sought to annually  
much of Melbourne's  
phy and commercial  
volume.

**Yet, while its pages are no longer found – not hot off the press, at least – the Sands & McDougall directory remains a much-used publication.**

It is also a magical one. It may have ceased publication 40 years ago, but when today's readers fossick about in one of these historic, leather-bound editions to find an old family house address or the names of some long-buried Melburnian ancestors, other lost and unexpected treasures emerge from the pages and return to life.

In many ways, these beautiful directories pre-empted the internet, or at least the logic underpinning it: like the World Wide Web, the books have immense scope and detail, and an ambition to encompass an entire, organic system. They also contain intricate byways and labyrinths that can sidetrack readers as they delve into the books, whose existence stretches back to 1857, when the first directory was published.

While these books contain a matrix of explicit, hard data, they also record implicit cultural information. Each directory is a story of lost Melbourne – or many lost Melbournes – for every year's volume records the massive changes this city has undergone.

**BRICK-O-PEDIA**

From the outset, the directory's core project was simple: to list the names and addresses of every Melburnian – that is, the 'head' of a household – and every trade and business in each edition. The State Library of Victoria describes the directories as the "standard reference source for identifying the occupants of addresses in Melbourne". They were printed every year – except for the combined wartime 1944/45 edition – until 1974, the 117th year of publication. They were extraordinary objects. Exquisitely produced at the Sands & McDougall printing factory, they were at once a directory and a billboard, full of luscious advertising that spilled over onto almost every outer surface of the finished product.

Editions, at their biggest, were 13 centimetres thick, almost five kilograms in weight and (in 1927) a monstrous 3520 pages long, excluding advertising – larger than a trio of house bricks. Others were slimmer, but used a larger format – the 1968 edition, for example, was just over 2850 pages but measured 29cm x 23cm x 12cm – hardly something to prop up in bed for some light late-night reading.

Compiling each edition was a mammoth undertaking. The listings were collated by foot-soldiers combing the suburbs and knocking on doors, though some historians and librarians suspect this was not done every year despite the directories appearing annually. As well as residents, the directory alphabetically listed trades and businesses, and typically included a street directory, maps, a directory of banks, societies, associations and institutions, plus government, colonial, ecclesiastical, legal and municipal listings.

No surprise it was so obese – and little wonder, too, that each year's publication was variously considered a goldmine, a practical

guide, or a boon for debt-collectors tracking down their miscreant quarries. As for those who found the book an exercise in tedium, it might have been used as a doorstep or a footstool.

### **CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER**

Yet, while not being literature, the directory is at times curiously poetic and enigmatic, and brimming with social history. It is beloved by historians and genealogists and remains the most eloquent of time machines: a simple street number or name, and forgotten Melbourne worlds can be instantly, evocatively exhumed. Even the absence of Chinese names in its pages during the gold rush speaks volumes.

Inside one edition, we may unearth the grandmother's address that resides in our memory like a well-warmed hearth. We might excavate street-names that suddenly arouse thoughts of summer, the heady noise of school playgrounds or the fragrance of eucalypt-blossoms. We might find ourselves nostalgic for certain lolly-shops, or family outings, or neighbourhood haunts long forgotten. Or we might

**THE SWEET HARBURG**

**PIANOS.**

**80 SWANSTON STREET,**

**OPPOSITE TOWN HALL.**

**THE WONDERFUL WERTHEIM  
SEWING MACHINES**

**THE SWEET HARBURG  
PIANOS & ORGANS.**



Wonderful Vertumn  
the Wonderful Vertumn  
Sewing Machines.

The Sweet Harmonizing  
Pianos & Organs.

INSPECT

VERTHEIM'S

"PERZINA"

PIANOS.

MY DAD DESIGNED CARDBOARD  
BOXES AT SANDS & Mc.  
LITERALLY DESIGNED THEM.



re-ignite lost loves, dislodge the scab from old griefs and injuries, or plummet into the rabbit-hole of life's might-have-beens and what-ifs.

All manner of scents, sights and events both joyous and traumatic might be evoked by trawling through a directory.

### THE WEB

Using a Sands & McDougall directory was equivalent to a search engine query. By flicking through and searching for a name one could discover the “head” occupant (but not necessarily the owner) of a particular property, which is why it was frequently used, back in its heyday, by debt-collectors.

Directories began to appear in the 1800s around the world as towns started to grow more rapidly. They were initially used mainly by commercial travellers. Professor Graeme Davison, from Monash University's school of historical studies, has written that in an era before telephones, when mail was delivered up to three times a day, a directory of residents, trades and businesses – usually held at a post office – was essential. So when

Melbourne was established in 1835, directories appeared almost immediately.<sup>1</sup>

Before the age of the metropolis – especially a quickly booming one like Melbourne – there had been no need for directories. As Ammon Shea writes in *The Phone Book: the Curious History of the Book that Everyone Uses but No One Reads*, there was, pre-urbanisation, little need to find people outside one's immediate community, and any such search was done via word-of-mouth.<sup>2</sup> Indigenous inhabitants around what was to become Melbourne were a perfect example of this, before John Batman arrived.

The Melbourne directory had some predecessors. Historian John Lack has written that Port Phillip District householders were first listed in the censuses of 1836 and 1838, and in the 1839 post office directory, but the first actual directory, listing 900 names, was *Kerr's Melbourne Almanac, and Port Phillip Directory*, for 1841, compiled privately by William Kerr (1812–59), then editor of the morning newspaper *The Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*.<sup>3</sup>

There was an explosion of directories in the gold rush, writes Lack, but Sydney publisher John Sands and his Melbourne partner Dugald McDougall cornered the market by the 1860s, initially producing their large commercial directories for Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide.<sup>4</sup>

The first Melbourne edition in 1857 was printed the same year that the St Kilda and Melbourne-Geelong railways were opened, also the year Melbourne's streets were lit with gas and Yan Yean water laid on to the evolving young town.

Each subsequent edition brought together extraordinary quantities of information gleaned by those door-to-door canvassers, who are believed to have made their visits every few years (some historians point out that the directories are not faultless, containing errors, gaps and conflicting information).

One of the most curious aspects of the directories is that so little research has been devoted to them as a printing and cultural phenomenon, even though they are still much used. Apart from a small volume written around the

time of the company's centenary, much information, records and oral-histories have been lost or remain undiscovered.

As Melbourne historian Herbert Percy Down wrote in 1956 in *A Century of Printing: the story of Sands & McDougall Pty. Ltd.*, his "pious hope" was that his research for his book might be useful "when 'the Second Hundred Years' comes to be written".<sup>5</sup>

Less than 20 years later, the directory was defunct; within 40 years, the company itself was gone. Those bicentenary pages will never be found.

### **McHISTORY**

John Sands and Thomas Kenny bought out the stationery business of James Williams at 51 Collins Street West in 1853.

By the time émigré Dugald McDougall became a partner in 1860, the business had moved to various addresses in Collins Street. In 1861, when Kenny retired, the company adopted Dugald's surname and became Sands & McDougall Pty Ltd until its demise in 1994.





The Scottish name, though, has caused confusion ever since. The story goes that the postie was having trouble working out which of three McDougall brothers letters were intended for, so each man distinguished himself by becoming McDougall, MacDougall and Macdougall.<sup>6</sup>



So when Dugald invited his young nephew James – a stationer, of course – to migrate and join the business, it was confusing all round because the younger man was a Macdougall, unlike the company name McDougall. He became a partner in 1872 and subsequent managing directors – Kenneth, Peter and Antony – were also all Macs with a small ‘d’.



The company itself, and the directory, had multiple name changes over the decades. Beginning as *Sands & Kenny’s commercial and general Melbourne Directory* (from 1857–59), it became *Sands & McDougall’s commercial and general Melbourne Directory* in 1862 and had various other titles until eventually it was *Sands & McDougall’s Directory of Victoria* from 1948–74.



While the directory was probably its greatest legacy, the company had multiple claims to fame during its existence: not only was it renowned for its benefits schemes and picnics for employees, and its ability to keep staff for long periods – 50 years of service was not uncommon – it printed and manufactured a huge range of stationery. One of its biggest contracts for much of its life was the printing of tram tickets and, until 1910 when the federal Treasury took control of note issues, the company printed banknotes for trading banks.

At the turn of the 20th century, the company was the largest printing establishment in the Southern Hemisphere – and its “Invicta” logotype could be seen on a vast range of printed products, including many items used for the Australian Federation Celebrations in 1901, writes Don Hauser in *Printers of the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne*.<sup>7</sup>

Even so, Sands & McDougall eventually went into bankruptcy. It successively shut down and sold its various arms of business in

1994, 20 years after the Victorian directory, ceased being published.

### **DOORKNOCKERS**

They were called “walkers” – doorknockers who set out to discover who lived at every street address in Melbourne and regional centres. Dozens of areas – some comprising more than one suburb – were mapped. If no-one were home, the walkers would leave an envelope and information sheet, to be filled out and returned by post. Mostly though – especially in the early days – it was a face-to-face business.

Former Sands & McDougall chairman Peter Macdougall – whose working life was largely spent at the company’s vast Spencer Street offices – says the directory had its own separate office in the building, where information cards were collated and stored for every known street address.<sup>8</sup> Because the directory was printed annually, the metal type for each page was retained in trays and only altered if the residents moved or if street names or numbers were changed.

Former Sands & McDougall employee Leigh Day recalls that the directory department at the building comprised some young women who typed up the information gathered, plus a few “walkers”. “They only worked for the directory, those reps,” says Day. “Hard to believe they would cover every street in Melbourne, and even in country towns. But they did!”<sup>9</sup>

These doorknockers, writes John Lack, “did not rely on hearsay but checked their information carefully. While researchers will find gaps and conflicts in the information, judicious and persistent cross-referencing of the street, alphabetical and trade sections usually produces dividends. There is simply nothing to match these directories for their reliability, comprehensive coverage, and continuity of publication. Melbourne’s directories have become of inestimable value to social scientists and historians.”<sup>10</sup>

### **DOORSTOPPERS**

The directory was divided into several sections, some of which were added or removed during its long existence – during which



time it began to include regional areas and for several decades incorporated the ACT.

But for most of its time, the directory faithfully included a street directory for Melbourne Proper and suburbs; alphabetical listing of people and businesses; trade and professional directory; a miscellaneous directory (banks; societies, associations and institutions; government and official; colonial; ecclesiastical; legal and municipal); advertisements and maps.

Who used all this? Sets of directories were commonly held by post offices, municipal libraries, police and legal firms – for the latter, it seems, the directories were a wonderful resource when debt-collecting. The directory was sold by subscription to such organisations and individuals and was also available (for £1 in 1907, *The Age* reported) at the Sands & McDougall shop in Collins Street, which moved to 128 Elizabeth Street in 1949.

The directory itself boasts how it might be used in its Preface, which began in 1935 and later

transformed to the ‘This is Your Guide’ double-page spread. These instructions explicitly suggest that the guide be used as an instant form of credit checking – users could confirm the bona fides of those wishing to cash cheques or open accounts.

While also providing correct addresses for mailing, appeals, invoicing collection or delivery, the guide was also seen as invaluable for agents and canvassers or companies conducting district sales campaigns.

Many, though, were at a loss as to the directory’s function. Leigh Day says facetiously that the thick books were useful to stand on to reach the top of a bookshelf.<sup>11</sup> And like phone books, diaries and road-maps, it was out of date almost as soon as it was published. Each edition made its predecessor useless for all but historical research.

And yet it was an extraordinary feat to publish. The Melbourne Museum of Printing’s curator Michael Issachsen says that the early days of the directory would have been a labour-intensive affair.

Even as early as 1894, the directory was about 1530 pages long, not including 38 pages of gloriously illustrated advertising at the front of the book. Composed by hand using the letterpress method, each page would have been made up letter-by-letter. Isaachsen estimates most compositors could manage about 2000 letters an hour. A typical Sands & McDougall seven-column listing page would contain in the order of 10,000 letters.<sup>12</sup>

This is not including the laborious task of doorknockers collating the information, a four-person office managing the information and typing it out on cards, and tricky printing processes to put gold lettering on the spine and the front and back covers, and to put ads (sometimes using screen-printing or spot-colour) on the fore-edge of the text block of the books.

Little wonder this Herculean task ultimately could not be afforded – indeed, it is astonishing it continued as long as 1974.

## THE FIEFDOM

Sands & McDougall's factory, at 357 Spencer Street, resembled a small fiefdom comprised of many guilds. The vast site consisted of various buildings on separate titles, most on the same block bounded by Spencer Street, Batman, Adderley and Jeffcott Streets, with McDougall Lane running through its centre – at the heart of which was once the stables.

A series of photographs was taken in 1896 at the factory, showing staff in various departments. There they are in their crisp white aprons in the litho, box, gilding, colouring or envelope departments, or in the binding, engraving, artist, composing, writing-ink, embossing, sewing or machine printing departments. There was also the directory department somewhere within the rabbit-warren of offices, but this was not photographed – or, at least, there is no record of it.

But there is, of course, a glorious image of the outside of the flagship six-storey building taken from Spencer Street.











**OPPOSITE PAGE**

Crowds outside the Sands  
& McDougall building in  
Spencer Street, Melbourne,  
1964

**THIS PAGE**

Staff at Sands & McDougall,  
Melbourne, 1962

Photographer:

© Maggie Diaz (1925–)

State Library of Victoria  
Pictures Collection

S.G. NICOLLS & COMPANY



THE RENOWNED PRINCES  
OF TAILORS &  
JUVENILE CLOTHIERS

In this fiefdom, hundreds of workers beavered away at their distinct tasks and former employee Leigh Day says that when he started in 1954 more than 400 people worked there.<sup>13</sup> By this time, the company had formed more departments – including furniture-making – and the cabinet carpentry section was in a separate building across the road in Batman Street. Day started work in the upstairs retail warehouse and particularly remembers the envelope-making department where all manner of envelopes were created, from plain and printed to ones with brand names or even – such were the mores of the day – ones specially designed to contain condoms.

He remembers the directory office staff spent their entire day typing up information gleaned from the “walkers”. This copy would be sent to the composing room. “It was a continually evolving thing, the directory,” he says.<sup>14</sup>

In 1964, American émigré photographer Maggie Diaz, then known as Maggie Besson Fraser, was commissioned to take photos in and around the extraordinary

factory site. Diaz, now 89, is unable to recall much about those days due to ill-health but her sumptuous black-and-white photographs tell a rich story about the busy hive full of workers.

### VERY ‘MAD MEN’

While the information pages contained within a Sands & McDougall directory can be somewhat soporific to behold – column upon column of names and addresses in small-point text – each volume is also richly decorated with often beautifully illustrated advertisements.

The front and endpapers of a directory, where the bulk of the ads appeared, perhaps tell us more about the social and business history of Melbourne than the more formal contents will ever do.

The ads were financially crucial to the directory. The first edition in 1857 comprised 200 pages, but there were another 65 pages of advertisements at the end of the volume, all beautifully decorated and designed. As the decades went by, the ads became more significant, reaching a peak in the middle of World War II: the 1943 edition

had a mammoth 100 pages of advertising. By the 1960s, this was in decline and there were only a few ads in the last edition in 1974, though the listings took up more than 2500 pages.

The contents of the ads chart the changing technologies being taken up in this thriving metropolis. Many ads from the 19th and early 20th centuries feature grand images of enormous factories and industrial sites, touting the city as one of the great centres of manufacturing in the empire. The number of banking ads is also noticeable, helping to shore up the city's growing reputation as a locus of finance during its exciting decades of gold-rush boom in the 1850s–60s.

The advertising was often ingeniously displayed. Like contemporary “pop-up” ads or ticker displays of “breaking news” on TV breakfast shows, the directory at times had advertisements repeated above and below the text on its pages. After four or six pages, the ads change, then are repeated a few pages later, much like a slow and persistent

brainwash. We cannot help but absorb them.

As the directory itself advises, “Nothing Succeeds Like Success! Then let the Public know what you have to Sell by... ADVERTISING in the Melbourne Suburban and Country directory.”

### THE ANNALS

In 1906, Sands & McDougall included a section in the directory called “Annals”. The company had been asked to publish “an epitome of remarkable events that occurred in the early days of Melbourne”.

These included a great “native corroboree (dance)” being held at Eastern Hill, with 700 Aborigines present; one inch of ice being found in Melbourne and the suburbs in 1853, the earthquake of 1855, the sighting of the Great Comet, its tail 30 degrees wide (1853) and the Great Fire of Collins Street (also 1853). And in 1844 it was noted: “Everything cheap – bread, 1d. per lb; butter, 3d; beef and mutton 1d; bullock's head, feet, and offal given away for nothing.”

There was the first marriage (1837), the first races (1838), and the first





SANDS &  
McDOUGALL  
IN SPENCER ST



newspaper (*The Port Philip Patriot*, whose first 10 issues in 1838 were written by hand), and the 1841 census, which found 6000 inhabitants. There was also the founding (1841) of the Melbourne Total Abstinence Society (16 years later, when the first Melbourne directory was published in 1857, there were 146 hotels listed for Melbourne Proper alone; contrastingly, by 1974 there were 531 in the greater Melbourne).

### LOST THINGS

Melbourne's resemblance to an organism – one that grows, sheds cells and replenishes itself with nutrition – seems most apt in the way it acquires, merges and alters its growing legion of suburbs and streets. Many individual suburbs have, over the years, been subsumed by bigger, tougher identities.

Some – Royal Park (in Parkville) – have remained as place names without a postcode, while others are largely forgotten: Tunstall, Spottiswoode (now Spotswood), Balmoral, Black Flat, Bolingbroke (now part of Coburg), Brown's Hill (part of Kensington), Box Forest, Cambridge, Greenwich,

Hotham (now Hotham Hill), Irishtown, Newlands, North Port, Pentridge (now Coburg), Tally Ho, Westgarthtown, Upper Footscray, or Yarraberg (now part of Coburg).

Myriad trades and industries, too, have largely gone: according to the 1857, 1871 and 1872 directories, there were bonedust-makers, chimney sweeps and nightsoil-men, japanners, lapidaries, lightermen and wharfingers, brace-makers (and suspender- and buckle-makers), carton and “fancy box” manufacturers, and many other occupations that might perplex or surprise contemporary readers. Jump ahead to 1906, and people are busy in Melbourne working as acetopathists, bellfounders, breeches makers, dray and lorry builders, drysalters, heliographers, phrenologists, straw hat, bonnet and plait makers and stay makers, or at inebriate institutes, invalid homes, milk and coffee palaces or oyster saloons.

### DEATH

The directory folded in 1974, the same year Melbourne's underground railway loop began construction: the city was changing.



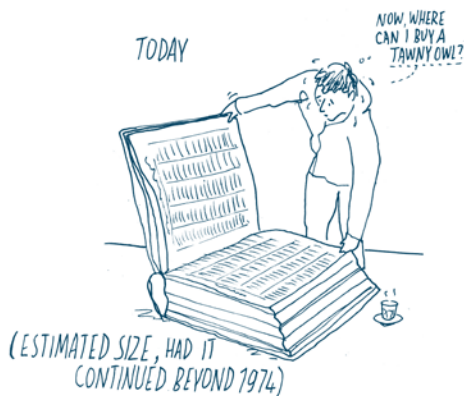
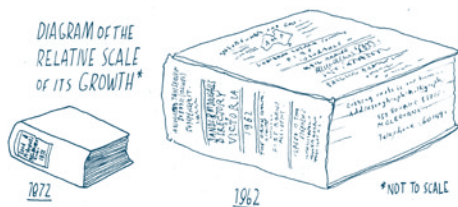
A growing sense of privacy meant that residents were no longer so willing to surrender their personal information to the doorknockers; the cost of producing the enormous tomes was becoming prohibitive, and there was no chance it would be getting any smaller. Almost all homes had telephones and phone books were distributed for free.

Peter Macdougall, former managing director and chairman, once said the directory was simply too huge, too hard to prepare, and not a profit-maker. His nephew Tim Macdougall was 16 when the directory was scrapped and recalls that the “walkers” were no longer able to accurately or comprehensively compile such a massive amount of information by doorknocking such an increasingly vast urban area.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from free phone books, the directory was also under siege from the Melway street directory, electoral rolls and new and more effective modes of advertising – television and radio in particular had usurped the function of the directory as a forum for business enterprises. Don Hauser writes that

while a 1975 issue had been planned, the cancellation of 600–800 copies by the Victoria Police left the next largest order at only 30 copies, so production of the directory was unsustainable. (The sale of many tonnes of letterpress type metal returned a generous liquid asset to the company, however.)<sup>16</sup>

The directory, after 117 years, was an anachronism. Few, though, would have predicted its immense popularity among historians, researchers and genealogists in the decades since its demise. As Graeme Davison has written, “Unlike the telephone directory, which lists subscribers only alphabetically, it offers a picture of the social composition of neighbourhoods... In an era before the telephone became almost universal, Sands & McDougall was as well known as Melway is today.”<sup>17</sup> Davison reports that Peter Macdougall told him that competition from the phone directory, the cost of employing canvassers to obtain information from householders and the high-production costs of the huge volumes finally sank the long-lived enterprise.<sup>18</sup>



When Sands & McDougall's enormous factories in Spencer Street were being sold in 1978, the curator of Australiana at the University of Melbourne's Baillieu Library, Judith Keene, noticed the For Sale signs. She approached Peter Macdougall and asked if there were anything that might be of value to the library. The library's holdings of the directory were scattered and incomplete; Macdougall generously donated an almost full set.<sup>19</sup>

### THE 2014 EDITION

The last edition of the directory was published in 1974 and it weighed in at approximately 3.7 kilograms, with about 2250 pages (excluding ads). It was nine centimetres thick, drawing together the names of most residents of Melbourne, whose population then numbered approximately 2.4 million. When it started in 1857, it was 266 pages long and a mere centimetre thick. The population then was measured by state, rather than metropolitan area, and Victoria was about 292,000-people strong.



Were the company and its directories to have survived, a 2014 edition would be unprintable. The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics figures (June 2013) estimate Greater Melbourne's population at 4.35 million – so a Melbourne directory for 2014 would be about 16 centimetres thick and close to 4500 pages long.

Those pages are unlikely to ever be found.

**Andrew Stephens**

August 2014

- 1 Davison, Graeme, in *Fifty books from fifty years: celebrating a half century of collecting, exhibition catalogue*, editor Richard Overell, Monash University Library, 2008, p34-35
- 2 Shea, Ammon, *The Phone Book: The Curious History of the Book That Everyone Uses But No One Reads*, 2010, Perigee, pp40-45
- 3 Lack, John, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00470b.htm>, 'Directories'
- 4 Lack, 'Directories'
- 5 Down, H.P., *A century in printing: the story of Sands and McDougall Pty Ltd, during its first hundred years 1853-1953*, 1956, Sands & McDougall, p5
- 6 Down, *A century in printing*, p13-14
- 7 Hauser, Don, *Printers of the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne*, Onedescription Press, 2006, p124
- 8 Interview with Peter Macdougall and Tim Macdougall, March 20, 2014
- 9 Interview with Leigh Day, January 30, 2014
- 10 Lack, 'Directories'
- 11 Interview Day
- 12 Interview with Michael Issachsen, April 17, 2014
- 13 Interview Day
- 14 Interview Day
- 15 Interview Macdougalls
- 16 Hauser, *Printers of the Streets*, p125
- 17 Davison, *Fifty books*, p34
- 18 Email from Graeme Davison, March 13, 2014
- 19 Email from Judith Keene, May 18, 2014

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**Andrew Stephens** is a writer and artist. He has worked at *The Age* since 1987.

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**Oslo Davis** is an illustrator and cartoonist.

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**PAGES 6 & 7**

Fore-edge advertising on various Sands & McDougall directories. Photography: Heather Walker

**Thanks to:** The Deputy Lord Mayor Susan Riley and author Gideon Haigh for their opening remarks; the staff of the Arts and Culture Branch, City of Melbourne, for commissioning and guiding this project; Oslo Davis for his witty ability to take us back in time; Stephen Banham for his impeccable sense of design; Tim Macdougall for invaluable insights, and for introducing me to his uncle, Peter Macdougall, former managing director of Sands & McDougall; James Macdougall; Rob McDougall; Alison McDougall; Susan Millard and Anthony Tedeschi (University of Melbourne's Baillieu Library); Judith Keene (University of Sydney); Graeme Davison (Monash University); John Lack (University of Melbourne); former Sands & McDougall employee Leigh Day; Maggie Diaz and Gwendolen DeLacy; The Melbourne Writers Festival; Suzy Freeman-Greene for editorial suggestions and encouragement. And for their love: Kenneth, Timothy and Adelaide; Judy and Jim; David, Lisa, Mietta, Sue, Rosco, Tony, Jeanie, Simone and Henry; Miss Lisa Hall, Gen, Ross, Viva, Emmanuel and Elias.

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ISBN 978-1-74250-984-6

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