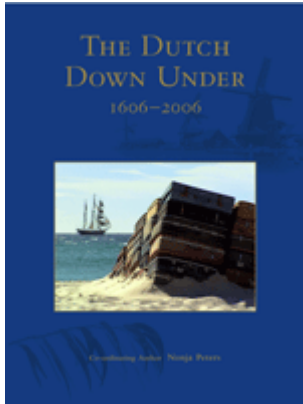


The Dutch Down Under 1606-2006 edited by Nonja Peters. Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2006, pp. XIX + 422, A\$69.95, hardback, ISBN 1 920694 75 7.



In 1606 recorded Dutch contact with Australia began with the voyage of the *Duyfken*, resulting in the mapping of part of the coastline of Western Australia. This handsomely illustrated four-hundredth anniversary volume, in semi-coffee-table format, both celebrates and interrogates the Dutch experience in New Holland. The twenty-three contributions are arranged in five sections, mixing personal stories with scholarly analysis. The first section deals with early voyages and the first migrants. The second looks at the relationship between Australia and the Dutch East Indies during World War II and so leads into the postwar migration, 168 000 people in half a century. Sections three and four contain most of the academic core, with studies of aspects of resettlement and especially social life. A final section of two chapters examines employment and art. Although one of the largest non-British immigrant groups, the Dutch have been remarkably invisible in Australia. This was partly because they far outstripped other immigrant communities in their speed of conversion to English, perhaps helped by the similar structures of the two languages. Contributors point out another reason, 'pillarisation'. Although the Netherlands was founded on a Calvinist rejection of Spanish rule, the United Provinces included an extensive Catholic population. To make the state work, the two groups had to find a formula for peaceable co-existence. Their 'consociational' answer was very similar to the Aussie political philosophy of live-and-let-live, along with its paradoxical accompaniment of social segregation separating Protestants and Catholics. Hence both in speech and outlook, the Dutch found it easy to fit in. They did not so much assimilate, argues Desmond Cahill, as accommodate. My only reservation about this volume, as someone with an interest in the Netherlands (not an enthusiasm common among English-speaking intellectuals) is that it is if anything too much focused on the Australian end of the story, although return migration and inter-generational contact with the homeland are considered. I should have welcomed more detailed examination, with maps, to explore possible regional aspects of migration from the Netherlands. The land of windmills and polders may look both small and uniform from without, but it conceals complex local variations. Perhaps the anniversary will trigger further research. Meanwhile we can all wish Dutch-Australia a year of typically quiet celebration of a remarkable story of achievement.

GED MARTIN
21 March 2006