

SYLVIA MARCHANT
BROWSES THROUGH
THE DELIGHTS OF THE
LIBRARY'S COLLECTION OF
ILLUMINATED ADDRESSES



Honouring in colour

ILLUMINATED ADDRESSES FROM 1862 TO 1968

ABOVE
Robert Wendel
(active 1860–1881)
Illuminated address
presented to their Royal
Highnesses Prince Albert
and Prince George by the
mayor, aldermen, councillors
and citizens of the City of
Melbourne, 1881
watercolour and ink
48.4 x 74.3 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an6621832

WHAT IS AN ILLUMINATED ADDRESS? Is it flashing lights on your front door or an envelope with your home address artistically embellished? No. It is in fact a formal greeting or the honouring of someone with a large, profusely decorated document. Often written on parchment, the more ostentatious examples might be bound in a leather folder, lined with silk and lavishly decorated in gold and silver. The sentiments in the message are expressed in formal language and handwritten in ornamental scripts such as copperplate or modern Gothic Textura. Illuminated addresses might mark special events or contain messages of loyalty, sympathy or commendation as well as messages of goodwill, congratulations or gratitude. Words such as loyalty, devotion, esteem, dutiful, progress and prosperity, cordial welcome and illustrious occur frequently. With their ink or watercolour illustrations, which have some reference to

the recipient or the occasion being celebrated, the addresses are outstanding examples of calligraphy and illuminating, crafts which owe their origins to the medieval treatment of holy writings. The appellation ‘addresses’ came about because originally the words contained in the documents were meant to be spoken at a formal ceremony and then presented to the recipient in this opulent form as a treasured gift and memento.

The production of illuminated addresses began in the nineteenth century, stimulated by a renewed interest in the Middle Ages, especially in medieval illuminated manuscripts. The addresses not only display fascinating and occasionally intricate artwork or craft, they also shed light on the social history of the day, pinpointing who were the significant or valued persons in a community; eminent citizens, royalty and holders of high office were showered with such tributes which acknowledged their achievements.

The term 'illuminated' refers to 'letters or text decorated with gold, silver, and colours, or with tracery or miniatures executed in colours'. In its heyday between the 1880s and the 1930s (after which the practice died out), each illuminated address was prepared individually by artists and calligraphers and became a fashionable and gratifying way to honour a distinguished person. The most magnificent addresses in the Library's collection were those that were presented to royalty and governors-general. They display splendid gold and silver adornment and are presented in ornamentally tooled leather-bound folders. The earliest example in the collection, dated March 1862, is from the chairman and councillors of the Municipality of Emerald Hill in the Colony of Victoria, expressing sympathy to Queen Victoria on the death of her consort Prince Albert in 1861. As befitting the sentiments of the message, it is not a colourful document but is in shades of grey. The latest, dated 1968 and addressed to the then Governor-General Lord Casey, takes the form of a scroll of addresses delivered during the 1968 Duke of Edinburgh's Third Study Conference in Australia.

Besides the condolence address to Queen Victoria, there are two other addresses to royalty in the Library's collection. In 1881, the mayor and citizens of Melbourne gave the princes Albert and George an address in a red, gold-tooled leather presentation binding containing two pages of script, described as a 'high Victorian version of Gothic Textura', highlighted in colours as well as in gold

and silver. Lavishly decorated, the address is finished with the red seal of Melbourne and flaunts symbols of royalty, including the Royal Coat of Arms and the Prince of Wales' Feathers, while Australia is represented by a scarlet illustration of Sturt's Desert Pea. Floral borders and a panorama of Melbourne scenes complete the picture.

The third royal address, also to the princes Albert and George, is from the mayor and councillors of the Municipal Borough of Sandridge. Smaller but following a similar pattern, it is decorated in watercolour and gold ink, and shows a Union Jack flag in each of the top corners placed above the Royal Coat of Arms, the Prince of Wales' Feathers and the Australian Coat of Arms. The message of loyalty and welcome is finished with a gold seal. The three addresses were apparently acquired by chance as Australian items such as these would most likely be deposited in Windsor Castle library.

Addresses to governors-general are the most plentiful in the collection and governors-general Novar, Isaacs, Tennyson, Denman and Stonehaven are among those represented. Twelve are included in the papers of Viscount John Lawrence Baird Stonehaven from loyal citizens, usually to welcome him on official visits. The Royal Geographical Society of Australia, Queensland, presented him with an address in 1926 to welcome him to the 41st anniversary meeting. It is enclosed in an elaborate folder of blue leather, heavily tooled in gold, and has his name and title in the centre. In contrast, the address inside is

BELOW LEFT
Emerald Hill Municipal Council, Victoria
Illuminated address to Queen Victoria on the death of Prince Albert, 1862
Manuscripts Collection
MS 4283

BELOW RIGHT
Royal Geographical Society of Australia, Qld
Illuminated address to Lord Stonehaven, 1926
Illuminated Addresses 1925–1930, Viscount John Lawrence Baird Stonehaven
Manuscripts Collection
MS 6073



undecorated though the script is elegant and the language flowery, with such phrases as 'exceptional honour' and 'privilege of offering a cordial welcome'. The largest collection of addresses for a governor-general is in the papers of Sir Isaac Isaacs with a listing of about 23. A selection of these can be seen on display outside the Manuscripts Reading Room on the second floor.

Prime ministers were also the recipients of such accolades. Andrew Fisher (prime minister three times between 1908 and 1915) received one from the citizens of Nowra in 1912, welcoming him on his first visit to the district. It is in an album of photographs of Nowra, and has a frame painted with gold leaf, coloured script and floral decorations. William Morris Hughes (prime minister between 1915 and 1923) acquired a large number of addresses; there are over 20 in the Library and they come from a variety of well-wishers which suggests that Hughes was held in high regard by many people. Constituents, trade unions, the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia, citizens of Sydney and others honoured him in this way. Among the more usual presenters are some heartfelt good wishes from smaller and more obscure bodies such as one in 1901 for Hughes' efforts as a member of parliament in New South Wales from the Early Closing Association (which was calling on the government to limit shop trading hours). This address is in a leather binder and covers two

pages with watercolour, gold leaf and red gold decorations, representing a hive of bees and scenes of Sydney.

As well as illuminated addresses to the great and distinguished, there are more curious examples presented to people who were not well known, such as Louise Cullen, who received one from the Women's Social and Political Union, an all-women suffrage advocacy organisation. Signed by Emmeline Pankhurst, a famous British suffragette, it is a single sheet decorated with a colourful floral design and an illustration representing women in bondage. The script is in a graceful calligraphic hand. Little is known about this address—perhaps Cullen had taken part in some suffragette activity in England.

Later addresses include those in a leather-bound volume with a raised decoration of the Australian Coat of Arms, from clubs and societies representing European migrants in Australia from 1947 to 1953. It was presented to the people and Government of Australia on the occasion of the Australian Citizenship Convention in Canberra in 1953. Other separate addresses from post-World War II European migrants include one (c.1949) for A.A. Calwell, the then Minister for Immigration.

Not all illuminated manuscripts are addresses. One mysterious item from the 1920s is an illustrated eight-line poem beginning 'For some have travelled over'. A large embellished initial 'F' placed over a sumptuous gold-leaf

RIGHT
J.W. Reed
Illuminated address to W.M.
Hughes from the loyal and
patriotic citizens of Sydney,
1921
watercolour, pen and ink
illumination; 50.5 x 36.5 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an1033370



FAR RIGHT
Women's Social and
Political Union
Illuminated address
presented to Louise Cullen
52.0 x 35.0 cm
Manuscripts Collection
MS 2163





LEFT
Decorated letter in embroidered silk cover to Lady Tennyson, 24 December 1902
Papers of Baron Hallam Tennyson, 1895–1919
Manuscripts Collection
MS 479/39

BELOW
Verner Linde (1895–1970)
*To the Honorable
A.A. Calwell*
Illuminated address from a group of European migrants
watercolour and ink
38.8 x 26.5 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an8101063

background opens the poem, which is scripted in a stylish hand. Coloured letters and more gold leaf add to the picture and it is finished with a prettily coloured illustration of a cheeky kookaburra. Was this a love letter or an expression of regret? Although unsigned, the artist is thought to be Gordon Dalrymple Nicol, a renowned Australian illuminator, originally from New Zealand.

One of the most magnificent addresses in the Library's collection is not strictly 'illuminated'. It is a large folder (32.5 x 43.0 centimetres closed) with a silk cover stunningly embroidered (rather than 'illuminated') in silk, depicting the large red and black flowers of Sturt's Desert Pea and soft green foliage. In one corner are embroidered the initials 'A.T.' of Lady Tennyson, wife of the Governor of South Australia (subsequently Governor-General), to whom the address was presented. The names of Lady Tennyson's 170 women friends who presented the address are inscribed inside. The address itself is in the handwriting of (Lady) Katherine Way and was presented to mark the occasion of the imminent departure of the Tennysons from South Australia when Lord Tennyson was appointed Acting

Governor-General in 1902. This address is a wonderful example of female craft as well as of the affection and esteem in which Lady Tennyson was held.

It is clear who presented the addresses in the Library's collection and to whom, but who were the artists, artisans and calligraphers? Perhaps because the production of addresses was regarded more as a craft than an art, many do not record the names of the artists. Whoever they were, they have left us with a wonderful legacy of social history and some brilliant examples of the imaginative practice of recognising good deeds and achievements with a tangible memento.



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