

A Modern Vision: Charles Bayliss, Photographer, 1850–1897



Charles Bayliss photographed Australian people and places and is considered to be one of the most important Australian photographers of the nineteenth century. He arrived in Australia from England as a boy and grew up here. The exhibition, *A Modern Vision*, looks at his fascination with the Australian landscape and cities, and how he explored the exciting new medium of photography.



An Inspired Patron: B.O. Holtermann and Charles Bayliss

In 1858, Bernard Otto Holtermann migrated from Germany to Australia and, in less than 20 years, made a fortune from goldmining. He dedicated the rest of his life to promoting his new homeland, Australia. To help him in this endeavour, he employed Charles Bayliss as a professional photographer.

In the cabinet, you can see images by Bayliss which have not been seen in public for 130 years. Their existence has only recently become known.

On display, you can also see some small photographic portraits called *cartes-de-visite*. These cards became very popular in the nineteenth century and were traded among relatives, friends and visitors. Trading these cards became such a fad in the 1860s that it became known as 'cardomania'. It also became fashionable to collect and trade *cartes-de-visite* of well-known people.

What kinds of cards do people trade today?



At home or school

Design your own *carte-de-visite* to hand out to people. Include a portrait of yourself on the front and invent some contact details for the back.

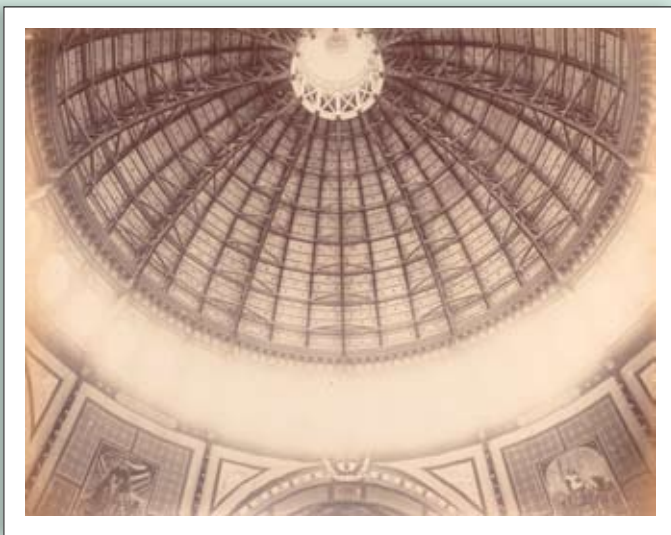
Have *carte-de-visite* cards been replaced in modern society? What with?

Early Photography

Early Australian photographers used large cameras, tripods with blackout hoods and heavy, fragile glass plates to create negatives. Often a tent was used as a darkroom, in which glass-plate negatives and prints could be processed on the spot. This involved the use of poisonous chemicals called bromides and nitrates.

Early photographers could not shoot multiple photographs to capture the moment, as is possible with modern digital cameras. Instead, after painstaking preparation and careful composition, they took only a few shots.

Bayliss pushed the technical boundaries of photography and created the largest 'wet-plate' negatives ever made. Have a look at the website at www.npg.si.edu/exh/brady/animate/photitle.html where there is an animation of the wet-plate photographic process used from 1855 until the late 1880s.



The Transformation of Sydney

Find this image of the interior of the Garden Palace, which was built to house the Sydney International Exhibition in 1879.

Holtermann sponsored Charles Bayliss to produce images intended to promote Australia overseas in international exhibitions. The pair's most ambitious project involved the creation of large-scale panoramas of Sydney.

The Garden Palace—and Bayliss's panoramas of Sydney—showed off Australia's new prosperity and confidence after the gold rushes and success of the wool industry, nearly 100 years after the first European settlers had arrived. A whole bay in the centre of the Garden Palace displayed Bayliss's photographs, including his latest panorama of Sydney taken from the roof of the Garden Palace dome.

Panoramas

The painting of panoramas has a long history in Western art. From the 1850s, the medium of photography was adapted to meet the demand for expansive views.

Locate the joins in this panorama. By doing this, can you tell how many glass plates would have been exposed to create the image below?



'Charles Bayliss Landscape Photographer'

After the end of his collaboration with Holtermann, Bayliss established a photography business as a 'landscape photographer'. He produced images that looked very natural. However, they had been carefully orchestrated. Often he would place human subjects in the landscape to emphasise the contrasting scale of humans and nature.

Can you see the man in this picture? In the exhibition, find other photographs of human figures in the landscape in which a similar composition or idea has been used.



At home or school

Using a digital camera, create your own panorama of your favourite local scene.

Describe the elements that you think make your photograph successful.

Send your image in jpeg format to us at education@nla.gov.au and they will be displayed on our website at www.nla.gov.au/education.



SOCIETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT



Charles Bayliss depicted places, such as the Blue Mountains and the Jenolan Caves, when they were experiencing their first tourists. In the 1880s, Bayliss experimented with flash photography and electric lighting when he photographed the fascinating forms of stalagmites and stalactites in the Jenolan Caves.

What impacts of tourism can already be seen in this early photograph?

In 1886, Bayliss was the official photographer for a Royal Commission by the New South Wales Government organised to record the effects of the drought on the Darling River. The report also identified how farmers were using water. The drought-declared areas Bayliss visited were, however, temporarily in flood. Today, the Darling and Murray rivers are considered threatened due to long-term agricultural practices, drought and salinity.

Bayliss portrayed Indigenous Australians while travelling along the Darling and lower Murray rivers. The social attitude of the time viewed the original inhabitants of the river system as a race disappearing from their traditional lands, particularly with the expansion of Europeans into Australia's eastern interior. Indigenous Australians were photographed outdoors or sometimes in the photographer's studio, often with elaborate settings.



At home or school

After bark was removed from trees, it was often treated with heat to bend it into the shape of a canoe, and tied to hold it in shape. Find out what is recorded about how Aboriginal Australians made and used other traditional implements such as fish weirs and traps, bone hooks and nets.

Did Bayliss set up the scene in the image above or did he photograph the scene the way he found it? What information and feelings do you think Bayliss is attempting to convey in this image?

There are two prints of this photograph in the exhibition. Find them and identify the two institutions that own the prints. For what reasons do you think each institution acquired the image?

CONSTRUCTING A PHOTOGRAPH

Bayliss was interested in how to construct photographs. He deliberately used strong vertical, horizontal and converging lines, as well as triangles, semicircles and elliptical shapes to create an interesting photograph. In many cases, the central areas of his images were left free of detail, to provide a feeling of emptiness and spaciousness within the Australian landscape.

Find an image in this exhibition which you think shows a successful use of the elements of design such as asymmetry, dark and light tones, or disappearing lines. Copy it below and emphasise the basic design elements that Bayliss used to construct it.



At home or school

Discuss why you think the composition of this image is successful. Consider the elements of line, shape and tone. Find examples of the 'rule of thirds' commonly used by landscape photographers to divide a photo into evenly balanced sections.



Modern Life and Times

Bayliss documented technological progress in the world around him. This photo is not on display, but was taken by Bayliss near Fort Denison, Sydney Harbour. During Bayliss's lifetime, technological advances were taking place in maritime activity.

Look for some other examples of clipper ships with sails and new steam-driven vessels in the exhibition. What other forms of transport and built environments can you identify as examples of change?



Bayliss documented Lawrence Hargrave's designs for a manned flying machine, including his revolutionary 1893 box kite.

A box kite was made of four parallel struts with diagonal cross struts and two sails at either end. When Hargrave linked several of his box kites together, they lifted him nearly five metres off the ground. Because of its stability, his design was soon used for meteorological surveys.



At home or school

Using one of the photographs of Lawrence Hargrave's designs in the exhibition, make a drawing of the design, construct a model and test how well it works. Alternatively, find out how to construct a box kite and, as a group, discuss why this kite design works.

