

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **'HE likes coffee SHE likes tea'**

#### **Introduction**

In October 1957 'Raising a Husband' premiered on Australian television. It was the latest offering from Crawford Productions, and was hosted by one-time war correspondent and retailer Alwyn Kurts. The show's concept was simple, prescient and utterly presumptuous. 'Raising a Husband' consisted of Kurts' informal chats with ordinary married couples, livened by their humorous anecdotes and his wry asides. For all the cheek and banter, though, Kurts reassured both the guests and audience that marriage remained their surest bet for lifelong bliss. To this end, he offered snippets of advice here and there, much of which cited the program's principal sponsor – Bushells.

The show's premise was basic, but its logic was far from crude. 'Raising a Husband' showed much commercial foresight, as Crawford Productions had done for over a decade. Founded by siblings Hector and Dorothy Crawford in 1945, it had produced thousands of self-contained radio serials, many of them among Australia's most popular. In November 1956, it produced the first independent program to screen on Australian television, 'Wedding Day'. Not unlike 'Raising a Husband', 'Wedding Day' relied on and celebrated the social centrality of marriage. Indeed, it featured married couples competing for prizes *during* their wedding reception.<sup>341</sup> The contestants were young, acquisitive and incredibly typical; 'Wedding Day' embodied the generational drift towards a specific suburban ideal. 'Raising a Husband' was similarly skewed, but to the advantage of Bushells in particular. One short phrase featured throughout all thirteen episodes: 'Bushells is best'; and Kurts repeatedly reminded audiences that, 'If there's one thing a husband likes it's a good cup of tea'. It was a conspicuous segue, but it set up the sponsor's interests well enough. As Kurts pointed out, ad nauseam, Bushells had finer quality, finer flavour, and was always fresher, hence its popularity with four out of five Australian housewives.<sup>342</sup> Astute observers may have noticed that this was Bushells' *magazine* copy verbatim.<sup>343</sup> Still, it served the show's script well too. The program even featured a teenage assistant, Jenny Dunphy, whose main task was to prepare a pot of Bushells tea, live on air. In

her dress and demeanour, Dunphy was the television equivalent to her print-media counterparts.



Figure 7.1 Bushells advertisement 1957

Bushells' move into television marked a new era for the brand. Once again, it had adapted quickly to a new marketing opportunity. This said something of the influence the company had accrued by the 1950s. Hector Crawford, Alwyn Kurts and the Bushells family were all socially acquainted, and were all, by then, key players in their respective fields: media, retail and tea. Their convergence on 'Raising a Husband' was therefore a lucky fusion of business, friendship and potential.<sup>344</sup> Philip Bushell, in particular, had proved a highly adept net-worker in the 1940s and 1950s. He was an active member of some of Sydney's most prestigious golf and yacht clubs; was part of the Commonwealth Tea Control Board; and, through the Bushell Trust, became one of the country's most prominent philanthropists. As such, Philip could readily identify and exploit prime marketing opportunities. At the very least, the brand's collaboration with 'Raising a Husband' was born out of Philip's friendship with the Crawfords, something that placed it at the forefront of early Australian television.

At the same time, it also symbolised Bushells' *dilemma* from the 1950s. Since its inception Bushells had consistently integrated changing habits, preferences and technologies. From mid century, though, at least two developments actively undercut the place of tea in Australian culture: the introduction and subsequent popularity of instant coffee; and the arrival of immigrants from regions where tea was not commonly consumed. This chapter will look at the conditions that buttressed these forces, and Bushells' response. Bushells remained a major force, but only with some changes to its image and its range. 'Raising a Husband' thus marked a critical juncture in Bushells' history, a hint of what lay ahead, and the lengths Bushells would go to in order to keep pace.

### **Peace & Prosperity**

The last chapter argued that the ascent of a certain domestic ideal was to Bushells' benefit. Indeed, it encouraged a cultural dynamic that most advertisers could exploit and extend. Magazines like the *Australian Women's Weekly* incorporated prevailing discourses of gender and identity to the point that almost all their representations reaffirmed (if not naturalised) a given role for Australian women. For their part, advertisers like Bushells simply inserted their brand within this narrowly defined world. As one of the most frequent advertisers in the *Weekly* in the 1930s and 1940s, Bushells imagery became a seamless extension of the *Weekly's* stance.

In the 1950s, this image of suburban life became more entrenched and more accessible. The institution of marriage became the focus of wide and unbridled praise, nowhere more so than in the speeches of Prime Minister Menzies. In turn, the family unit became the cornerstone of politics, commerce and culture.<sup>345</sup> By the end of the decade, among Australians in their late twenties, all but one in eight women and one in three men had walked down the aisle.<sup>346</sup> After years of Depression and war, this cocoon-like retreat may well have expressed, as Peter McDonald suggests, a desire 'to "perfect" the private sphere of life, to live out the idealised morality of the nuclear family.'<sup>347</sup> Whatever the motivation, though, not only was marriage on the rise; its predominantly suburban setting was also within wider reach. The 1950s saw sustained and significant growth in Australia's manufacturing industries. This boom had a

profound effect on the industries' blue-collar staff. Put simply, it supported their claim to a 'middle class' way of life. As Anne Game and Rosemary Pringle write: '[along with] the availability of credit and the growth of hire purchase, the working class could now acquire houses, cars and a wide range of consumer durables.'<sup>348</sup> Sure enough, Australia's home-ownership rate rose from 52.6 per cent in 1947, to 63 per cent in 1954 and then 70 per cent by 1961.<sup>349</sup> The working class was drawn into a world hitherto associated with middle class mores, a consumerist, gendered, and insular existence.



Figure 7.2 Post-war Prosperity

After decades of thrift and restraint, the post-war combination of high employment and strong wages saw advertising spending skyrocket. This figure went from an estimated £40 million in 1952 to £100 million by 1956.<sup>350</sup> Magazines such as the *Weekly* not only accommodated the dizzying growth of such advertising, they championed the one advertising discourse used most often after the war: convenience. Well into the 1970s, 'quick and easy' became a promotional pitch of unrivalled popularity, for reasons outlined in this chapter. Indeed, some products were *so* convenient that their fool-proof preparation rendered obsolete skills once required of 'good' housekeeping. Where they challenged cultural values, then, the promotion of convenience items required some sensitivity. One company that was especially adept

at this was Switzerland's Nestlé, a corporate behemoth that became virtually synonymous with the one convenience product that Bushells could not ignore: instant coffee.

### **Coffee Cultures, from Yemen to Oxford**

This thesis opened with a lengthy look at the rise and spread of tea consumption in Britain. Thanks to both the English East India Company and smugglers, what began as a fashionable novelty quickly became an everyday staple. Even members of the First Fleet craved tea; such was the breadth and depth of its appeal. In turn, and as noted as well, this consumption came at the expense of another beverage popular at the time: coffee. Although different in most respects, both tea and coffee drew much of their early allure in the West from a certain fixation with all things oriental and 'exotic'. In coffee's case, its connection with Islam was especially significant. Although still a point of contention, it is widely believed that the practice of turning coffee berries into a drinkable mixture started in Yemen, in the mid fifteenth century.<sup>351</sup> By the early sixteenth century, it was the preferred drink in Arab regions generally, and amongst Muslims in particular.<sup>352</sup> Coffee's affinity with Islam was two-fold. Firstly, as teetotallers, Muslims saw in coffee a sanctioned alternative to alcohol, so its public consumption did not compromise respectability. Secondly, Sufis, followers of a form of Islamic mysticism, saw in its caffeine content a physiological aid, which seemingly heightened many of their trance-like practices (such as the continuous whirling of the enigmatic dervishes).<sup>353</sup>

However different the spinning Sufis were culturally from seventeenth-century Britain, the perception of coffee in both contexts was not. Like the whirling dervishes, Britons proved similarly enchanted by coffee's stimulatory effects. As such, the fact that coffee's popularity in Britain coincided with the Age of Reason cannot be readily dismissed. Coffee befitted an era famed for its intellectualism. Indeed, a Lebanese man named Jacob, in the university city of Oxford, aptly enough, opened the first coffeehouse in western Europe in 1650.<sup>354</sup> Two years later, Armenian immigrant Pasqua Rosee opened London's first coffeehouse. By 1663 there were 83 in the capital alone. For philosophers, writers, merchants and clerks, the local coffeehouse was a beacon for business, debate, and gossip. By 1675, coffeehouses were so popular

that King Charles II actually feared they would breed sedition and treason. When he moved to close them by 'royal proclamation, there was such an outcry that the idea was quickly abandoned.

Prior to tea, the only other beverage consumed on a scale comparable to coffee was beer. Indeed, the preponderance of beer in seventeenth-century Britain, even at breakfast, no doubt strengthened the association between coffee consumption and mental acuity. In *Tastes of Paradise* (1992), for example, Wolfgang Schivelbusch contends that, in the latter half of the 1600s, around the same time that coffee was becoming fashionable among the wealthy, the average English family 'consumed about three litres of beer per person daily, children included.'<sup>355</sup> By comparison, and as Tom Standage argues, coffee seemed an ideal alternative to all-day inebriety. Therefore, '[coffee] came to be regarded as the very antithesis of alcohol, sobering rather than intoxicating, heightening perception rather than dulling the senses and blotting out reality.'<sup>356</sup> Doubly blessed, coffee conferred both intelligence and class.

### **From a brew to a blend**

Given the treatment of the topic in the Chapter Three, there is no need to retrace the means by which tea overtook coffee as Britons' beverage of choice. It will suffice to note that, the closest the two came in terms of consumption per capita was in 1840, with coffee at 1.08 pounds and tea at 1.22 pounds; thereafter tea advanced and coffee declined.<sup>357</sup> That said, the processes by which tea took hold of British culture were not necessarily repeated in the Continent. Indeed, while England's coffeehouses were mostly frequented by men, and often functioned like 'gentlemen's clubs', the cafés of the Continent were, from the start (that is, 1671 in Marseilles) more open arenas. By 1750, there were around six hundred cafés in Paris alone, with patrons drawn from the whole gamut of social life, what one eighteenth-century observer called 'an unending series of persons.'<sup>358</sup> While tea took over in Britain, coffee reigned in Europe, unchallenged, accessible to all, and addictive.

That the Australian palate so closely resembled that of Britain meant that it too made little room for coffee. On that point, though, the situation in Australia was not *completely* one-sided. In fact, some of Australia's earliest settlers nailed coffee-

grinders to trees nearby their tents and huts.<sup>359</sup> Likewise, during the gold rushes of the mid to late 1800s, in bustling areas like Gulgong in New South Wales, coffee was one of the few items sold to the diggers from makeshift stores. That is, the beverage was, although not as prominent as tea, not exactly invisible either.<sup>360</sup> Sometimes, though, what passed for 'coffee' was a bit of a stretch. In *A Look at Yesteryear* (1980), Valerie McKenzie and Joyce Allen note that on some properties in the mid 1800s, 'coffee' was actually 'parsnips roasted to blackness and put through a grinder.'<sup>361</sup> Improvised thus, 'coffee' tested twentieth-century standards.

What concerns this thesis is not so much the availability of coffee but rather the extent to which its popularity was something that worried Bushells. Until the 1950s, then, there was little cause for concern. Coffee was imported and consumed in nineteenth-century Australia, but only in minute quantities and not on any sort of scale that came close to (much less rivalled) tea.<sup>362</sup> That said, from the company's inception in 1893, Bushells *had* traded coffee as a subsidiary to its tea operation. In fact, by 1908, the company's letterhead read 'BUSHELLS tea – coffee – cocoa'. This was a logical extension of the brand's portfolio. As Sidney W. Mintz argues in *Sweetness and Power* (1985), tea, coffee and cocoa shared a distinct history. All three, he writes, 'were new to England in the third quarter of the seventeenth century' and '[all] began as competitors for British preference.'<sup>363</sup> This competition was played out in a variety of settings: royal circles, in parliament and in the media. The higher the stakes – in terms of status, profit and habit – the more urgent it became.

Given the availability in Australia of the three beverages, the focus turns to how each fared in terms of custom and convention. The statistics cited so far suggest that of the three, by the twentieth century, tea led convincingly over both coffee and cocoa. Bushells' operations certainly reflected this, as its brand was overwhelmingly weighted towards tea. If anything, of its twentieth-century advertisements for coffee and cocoa, the ones for cocoa suggest the more consistent and confident approach. By the early 1920s, Bushells Cocoa was well established as a children's beverage. There was even a gumnut-baby mascot, Cocoa Kiddie, which positioned the product as a wholesome, chocolaty treat. One advertisement read: 'Mother! Bring your little kiddies into the glorious circle of health and happiness that Cocoa Kiddie radiates round himself.'<sup>364</sup> This was hardly an innovative or unusual approach. In the 1890s,

advertisements in the *Bulletin* for Cadbury's Cocoa had also construed cocoa as a predominantly children's beverage ('giving staying power and imparting new life and vigour'<sup>365</sup>). Bushells simply sustained this link and this lent its advertisements cohesion, consistency and familiarity.

Bushells' coffee promotions appeared far less certain. From the early 1930s and well until the 1950s, these advertisements appeared educative rather than assured, which suggests that Bushells' appeals rested more on hope and ambition than any promising evidence. Given the entrenched inclination towards tea, Bushells' advertisements worked hard to convince Australians that coffee could be prepared with the same carefree casualness. For example, one *Weekly* advertisement in 1938 read, 'Bushells Coffee – Make it the same way as you do tea'<sup>366</sup>; and another that year: 'Every year thousands of women are won over to the coffee famed for delicious flavor – Bushells Coffee – and, you know it's as easy to make as Tea.'<sup>367</sup> Still, coffee's appeal was let down by the fact that, even in the 1950s, many coffee products were in fact blends of coffee and chicory, a practice not confined to Bushells. Chicory was a root-based plant similar to a turnip, and had been grown and roasted as a coffee-substitute since the Middle Ages. Its huskiness, though, did little to tempt non-coffee drinkers. That said, even with chicory-free coffee, there was still the question of preparation. Despite Bushells' insistence that its pure, vacuum-sealed coffee was 'as fresh when you open it as the day it was Roasted and Packed'<sup>368</sup>, ground coffee still involved more effort and more apparatus than most tea-drinkers would tolerate.

In the late 1940s Bushells introduced a product that encapsulated coffee's auxiliary status in Australia – 'Bushells Essence of Coffee and Chicory'. Its advertisements foreground the product's versatility: as a hot *or* cold drink; as a flavouring agent for desserts; or as an ice-cream topping.<sup>369</sup> In effect, though, such culinary latitude actually undermined the image of coffee as a beverage, and therefore as an alternative to tea. Patently, this product lacked the texture, taste and refinement of coffee proper. In turn, it made a lacklustre case for the future of Australia's coffee market. As it happened, surveys concurred that coffee had far to go before it would challenge (not to mention replace) tea in Australia. A Gallup poll of March 1950 showed that 10 per cent of the population consumed at least ten cups of tea a day, and a further 47 per cent drank 5 to 8 cups; regarding their consumption of coffee, 55 per cent claimed to



have never tried it, while 24 per cent said 'seldom'.<sup>370</sup> To put it another way, since tea's popularity had barely flinched throughout war, recession and rationing, it was of little surprise that, by mid century, no other beverage came close – especially one that required the rigmarole of percolation.

### **From condensed milk to Nescafé**

Previous chapters have stressed that Bushells' relevance long depended on an astute engagement with dominant cultural discourses. From the 1950s, Bushells had to acknowledge a competitor that manoeuvred market conditions equally well: Nestlé. Having established a reputation around the world for its condensed milk and baby foods, Nestlé proved a stunning manipulator of consumer perceptions, and an aggressive instigator of product development. For Bushells, the threat came with a Nestlé invention that posed the first serious challenge to tea's primacy in Australia, Nescafé instant coffee. What is more, the success of this product owed much to its convenience. At a time when 'quick and easy' was the magic mantra, applied to everything from whipped cream to fish fingers, Nestlé applied it to the *one* item that could upset Bushells' balance.

Since its formation in 1905, Nestlé had contoured its operations to budding markets in the industrialised world. The company was the result of a merger between the Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company (which specialised in milk products) and the Henri Nestlé Company (which specialised in baby foods). By 1905, both had established their expertise in their respective fields, internationally. Nestlé, for example, had advertised heavily in the *Bulletin* in the late 1800s ('Supplies all the elements necessary for the complete growth and nourishment of the Human Frame'<sup>371</sup>). With the merger, Nestlé essentially turned one region's climate into a worldwide problem-solver. From its two specialties, condensed milk and baby food, the Nestlé range expanded as its researchers found new ways to integrate complementary products, such as chocolate. In turn, the company's marketing division became increasingly important, to the point that some products required as much explanation as encouragement. Indeed, in a self-published tome the company commissioned in 1946, there is an open admission of Nestlé's 'educational' efforts and its need to 'foster public interest in the growing range of nutritional specialties'.<sup>372</sup>

One of the ideas that Nestlé used most often in its advertising was the reputation of its research. Nestlé consistently invoked the language of science and medicine and connected its work with the exacting standards of doctors and laboratories. A major part of such work, though, was product *development*. Apart from any concern for the nutritional interests of consumers, Nestlé studied the ways by which basic foods could be modified, stored and transported; in short, Nestlé was acutely sensitive to the scope and scale of global trade, and adjusted its research accordingly. It was this imperative that saw the company respond to a particular request in 1930. Brazilian coffee-growers faced a crisis of over-production that threatened numerous livelihoods, so they pressed Nestlé's researchers for assistance. It was the endpoint of what had been an otherwise spectacular century for the coffee trade. Several Latin American economies had turned to coffee as their primary export, but Brazil's situation showed just how precarious such reliance could be.

The size of the international coffee market had much to do with coffee's popularity in the United States. From around 1830, coffee became about as important to Americans as tea was to Australians. That is, Americans consumed coffee widely, frequently and cheaply. The nation's coffee imports constituted the largest share of the world total, and mostly came from Brazil.<sup>373</sup> Between 1900 and the mid 1920s, these imports doubled to almost 1.5 million pounds.<sup>374</sup> The trade was thus large enough to mobilise huge interests in both countries – growers, politicians, and promoters especially. When Brazilian officials approached Nestlé to solve the problem of over-supply, the implications were considerable.

It took Nestlé several years to find a suitable solution. Since Nestlé already manufactured milk products in Brazil, its initial idea was to mix some of this milk with the excess coffee in order to make soluble coffee cubes. This, however, fell through rather quickly, as Brazilian law forbade coffee products that were not 100 per cent pure coffee – which ruled out the milk-based coffee cubes.<sup>375</sup> Nestlé transferred the research to Switzerland where, in 1937 and under researcher Hans Morgenthaler, it finally resulted in a powdered formula: instant coffee. The product was unlike anything else on the market, something that actually stalled its introduction as it contravened food laws in several countries. As such, two major issues dampened

whatever fanfare Nestlé would have ordinarily mustered for its new invention: the political climate of the Second World War, and the numerous legalities Nestlé had to resolve before it could put to consumers its newest invention, which it called Nescafé.

From its quiet launch in Switzerland in 1938, it was in the United States that Nescafé made its breakthrough. Introduced in New York City and Philadelphia in September 1939, the product's expansion was swift and conclusive, and it was sold around the nation within two years. Indeed, US Army officials, so taken by Nescafé's convenience, made it a priority provision for the remainder of the war.<sup>376</sup> In this way, and as mentioned in the last chapter, wherever the US soldiers were stationed (including Australia), Nescafé joined the list of brands that accompanied them. As such, and alongside the likes of Camel cigarettes and Ray-Ban Aviators,<sup>377</sup> Nescafé helped define and illustrate post-war American glamour.

### **Instant Coffee in Australia**

By the late 1930s Nestlé was a familiar brand in Australia. Indeed, the company had opened a milk factory at Dennington, Victoria in 1911 and a chocolate factory at Abbotsford, New South Wales in 1918. Not only did Nestlé dominate the condensed milk and baby food categories, it was also responsible for one of the nation's most popular grocery items, MILO. This 'fortified tonic food' was created by one of Nestlé's Sydney researchers and launched at the 1934 Sydney Royal Easter Show.<sup>378</sup> By then, Australians were used to Nestlé's tendency to overlay its advertisements with 'nutritional information'. More often than not, this information amounted to general references to vitamins and nourishment, and in MILO's case, 'energy and stamina'.<sup>379</sup> The point is, over several decades, Nestlé's promotions in Australia sustained a popular association between the brand and its research reputation.

With such strong brand recognition, Nestlé moved quickly to introduce Australians to its instant coffee invention. Nescafé was test marketed in 1939-40. At the tail-end of the war, the product's prospects brightened with the American soldiers' endorsement of it. In 1948, the Dennington plant began continuous production of Nescafé. Within the first two years alone, the plant required two extensions to accelerate the extraction rate and meet demand. From 1952, Nestlé made Nescafé from 100 per cent pure

coffee beans; before that, its production had required the addition of carbohydrates. This ‘purity’ was a marketing boon, as Nestlé had effectively formulated a blend that promised consumers a particular taste and texture, and in a form that was far more convenient than its closest rivals were.

From the mid to late 1950s, Nestlé used a range of images to endear Nescafé to Australians, but all referred to its fashionable convenience. One advertisement in 1956 featured American commentator Emily Post, the ‘world-renowned authority on social etiquette’. Post’s image appeared alongside a larger picture of shiny silverware – once the preserve of afternoon tea – and Post’s quote, ‘It’s nice to drink your coffee in the living room even after an informal dinner’.<sup>380</sup>



Figure 7.3 Nescafé and Emily Post

Faced with a nation of tea-drinkers, Nestlé had to tread carefully, and link Nescafé to associations that Australians either identified with or aspired to. To this end, Emily Post was an effective hook. Indeed, her name appears in another advertisement for Nescafé. This one shows four adults (two men, two women) doing just what Post instructed – enjoying an after-dinner coffee, an empty dining room just visible in the background. Each adult is accompanied by a thought-bubble: ‘Nescafé, eh? Better flavour than even good ground coffee...’ reads one; and another, ‘Thank goodness for Nescafé...it only takes a jiffy to make and I’m sure of perfect coffee every time.’ The advertisement’s pitch is simple, straightforward and perfectly suited for a readership



that had presumably regarded coffee too complicated to consider – ‘It’s so wonderfully *convenient*! With Nescafé there’s no “perking”, no straining, no risk. Nescafé makes perfect coffee – *every time* – in just 3 seconds!’<sup>381</sup>



Figure 7.4 Nescafé Glamour

Nestlé italicised the crux of its product’s advantage: foolproof, fast and consistent. From the 1950s, numerous advertisers sought these same associations. ‘Convenience’ enjoyed a distinct glamour in these years, a measure of modern technology rather than a regrettable compromise. In magazines like the *Weekly* and *Woman’s Day*, advertisers lured consumers in terms of the effort and time their products would save. Nestlé was one of the most prominent participants in this process, and anchored almost all of its advertising in promises of speed, ease, and versatility. One advertisement for Nestlé’s sweetened condensed milk even doubled as a mayonnaise recipe: ‘You just use Mustard, Vinegar and Nestlé’s Milk!’<sup>382</sup> Similarly, an advertisement for Nestlé’s canned milk (called ‘Ideal Milk’, a semantic trump of nature itself) exclaimed, ‘2 pints of delicious single-whip ice cream so easy with Ideal Milk!’<sup>383</sup> In many of these advertisements, though, the ‘convenience’ was in the

compatibility of different Nestlé products, like this one: 'For the most delicious creamed coffee you've ever tasted...make the coffee with NESCAFÉ, then cream it with IDEAL EVAPORATED MILK'.<sup>384</sup> Conveniently, for Nestlé, instant coffee worked well with other products in its stable.



Figure 7.5 'Convenient' Nestlé Products

## A Cultural Shift

As mentioned earlier, the United States represented Nescafé's breakthrough market: by the end of 1952, instant coffee accounted for 17 per cent of all the coffee consumed there.<sup>385</sup> Viewed more generally, though, Americans' rapid embrace of Nescafé reflected a broader cultural tendency that spanned the industrialised world, but was often associated specifically with the United States. From the 1950s and into the 1960s, Americans' adoption of all things plastic, synthetic or frozen appeared to render them attractive to consumers elsewhere, including Australia. One advertisement in the *Weekly* for the Prestige brand of nylon stockings even featured

the New York skyline and an American flag – ‘American Women wear 15 Denier’.<sup>386</sup> It was a broad-based extension of technological progress, and its implicit populism inspired both awe and imitation around the world. In *An All-Consuming Century* (2000), Gary Cross argues that these decades saw the ultimate triumph of style, speed and convenience over utility, longevity and craft:

The joy of the ‘push button’ in everything from automatic transmissions to sewing machines sometimes made little engineering sense, but these devices all proclaimed an age of effortlessness, where everything was automatic and carefree.<sup>387</sup>

In the rumpus room, garage or kitchen, from America to Australia, convenience was king.

Nescafé embodied a decisive shift in Australians’ sensibility, and was a subtle but significant reflection of changing habits and loyalties. As Donald Horne wrote in *The Lucky Country* (1967), ‘we cannot any longer pretend we are all drovers boiling our billies.’<sup>388</sup> Horne was writing about foreign policy: Canberra’s commitment to London had waned, and it identified more with Washington, a process that questioned the ideological value of rustic myths. Still, the point stands; generally, after the Second World War, Australian consumers were more interested in (if not entranced by) American developments. Against the American-style combination of smart advertising, consumerism, self-expression and popular democracy, the British class system and its buttoned-up Royals appeared dull and dour.<sup>389</sup> This drift was especially apparent in shopping habits. Increasingly, the giants of convenience foods, all of which had saturated America’s post-war media with breathless pleas and seductive imagery, pursued Australian consumers.

For Australians, the variety and abundance of American-style advertising was a welcome relief from decades of frugality and restraint. Not only that, the new consumerism suggested a pluralism of sorts. As Stella Lees and June Senyard argue, it was not just a question of more goods available for the fashionable elite. Rather, they were now designed for and marketed to the ‘ordinary person’. In turn, ‘[the] measure of what could be acquired by the ordinary person was fixed by Mr and Mrs America.’<sup>390</sup> Advertisers emphasised leisure rather than luxury, so the pitch was that

much wider. Indeed, access to consumer commodities in the United States was, whilst not exactly democratised, at least broadened: between 1947 and 1961, the number of American families rose by 28 per cent, national income increased by over 60 per cent, and the group with discretionary income doubled.<sup>391</sup> With few exceptions, most directed this income to an ideal familiar to many Australians: between 1950 and 1970, America's suburban population went from 36 million to 74 million.<sup>392</sup> In short, the United States proffered the archetypal template for a material culture sustained by and for the suburban ideal.

The appeal of convenience items rested on their reformulation of the familiar. The ultimate post-war pantry was a triumph of cans, jars, bottles and boxes, most of which summoned no greater dexterity than the ability to open, pour, reheat or stir. Yet there was a nagging tension in this: many of these items cut out the sort of labour that had only a decade earlier been imbued with either a deep, abiding love, or the qualitative bonus of culinary skill. With convenience products though, and as Erika Endrijonas puts it, 'homemakers were charged with finding the balance between convenience and taste and duty.'<sup>393</sup> Changes to cake mixes offer some insight into this psychology. Originally, the Betty Crocker brand of cake mixes required nothing more than the addition of water – an outright victory for convenience. However, as Harvey Levenstein writes in *Paradox of Plenty* (2003):

...marketers soon realized that cake-baking was still too important a part of the housewife's self-image to eliminate her contribution completely. They therefore had the directions changed slightly to require the addition of one egg.<sup>394</sup>

Still, it is safe to suggest that this was an atypical gesture; between 1949 and 1959, American chemists devised over four hundred new additives to help process and preserve food, and forged what Levenstein called a 'Golden Age of American food chemistry'.<sup>395</sup>

### **Self-Service Supermarkets & Two-Minute Mayonnaise**

Convenience was not just a marketing gimmick for food manufacturers, but a philosophy that underpinned the spectrum of post-war consumerism. Moreover, as



much as the language of convenience implied ease, accessibility and speed, capitalist industry actually *required* consumers' compliance. The more that modern means of production, distribution and display overwhelmed the scope and scale of local grocers, the more marketers targeted consumers directly. The self-service supermarket was the architectural expression of this dynamic. As Kim Humphery argues in *Shelf Life* (1998), supermarkets depended on a specific literacy. Without grocers' advice and guidance, consumers had to assume autonomy and authority, however illusory this sovereignty really was. As Humphery writes:

[The] shopper was encircled with the mechanics of the shop: directed around its parameters and through its aisles, cajoled by its colourful and abundant products, and befriended by its public address system.<sup>396</sup>

In 1958, 9 per cent of food retail outlets in Australia were self-service; by 1968 the figure was 27 percent, and by 1976, over 50 per cent.<sup>397</sup> The place of convenience products in this milieu was therefore strategic as their no-fuss instructions worked well for consumers compelled to serve themselves.

By determining not only what consumers bought but also how they shopped, the discourse of convenience completed the retail developments of several centuries. As discussed in previous chapters, brands signpost specific points in consumer history. Bushells' advertisements have consistently plotted specific turns in consumer behaviour, particularly shopping practices. The rise in convenience products and the corollary expansion of self-service is similarly significant. Again, the United States spearheaded the trend. As more Americans left behind the 'downtown store' for the suburban shopping centre, they endorsed a set of interrelated processes and preferences, such as easy parking, extended trade times, wider variety, and more credit options.<sup>398</sup> The shopping centre 'served' the tide of suburban consumers that had both the social sensibility and material capacity necessary for the shopping centre experience. Three such centres opened in Australia in the late 1950s: Chermside (Brisbane, 1957), Top Ryde (Sydney, 1958) and Chadstone (Melbourne, 1959). Each one punctuated a suburban precinct and thus marked the strength of the middle-market dollar.

For their part, advertisers had to convince consumers that they could navigate the aisles and survey the products, unassisted, informed and confident. In the 1960s, then, the marketing buzzwords of the 1950s morphed into an advertising orthodoxy. The major advertisers shared an increasingly familiar, pervasive and often contradictory lexicon. One advertisement for Kraft's Tuna Noodle Dinner, for example, read: 'You cook up the specially prepared egg noodles...then add the freshly canned and seasoned Tuna and Sauce Mix',<sup>399</sup> while another, for Kraft Macaroni Dinner with Cheese, enthused: 'just 7 minutes from packet to plate',<sup>400</sup>; and finally, an advertisement for Kraft's Spaghetti with Meat Sauce, literally a kit packed with pasta, meat sauce and parmesan cheese, read: 'COULDN'T BE TASTIER!...COULDN'T BE SIMPLER (everything you need is in the pack!)'.<sup>401</sup> This pack was so 'convenient', even the parmesan cheese came already grated. Speed became a marketing fixation. Nestlé alone was responsible for 'Instant Ice Cream',<sup>402</sup> 'Two Minute Mayonnaise',<sup>403</sup> and '30 minute No-Bake Cheesecakes'.<sup>404</sup>

Besides specific brands, entire industries depended on Australians' acceptance of new types of convenience products. The Associated Chambers of Manufacturers even went so far as to advertise in the *Weekly* in 1963. The advertisement pictured an overflowing trolley in a supermarket aisle: 'Almost eleven million people take a lot of feeding. Their appetites keep 113, 000 people employed in the Australian Processed Foods Industry.' On the one hand, it was an explicit pledge to Australian labour; at the same time, though, it spoke of the peculiar premium placed on the trolley's contents: 'We are fortunate that, in a world where many go hungry, Australia can produce more than enough food for our needs'.<sup>405</sup> Rhetorically then, and not unlike the department stores of the 1800s, the post-war supermarket was reconfigured as capitalism's gift to Australian progress.

The intensity with which certain industries wooed Australian consumers suggests that 'convenience' alone was not the only motivation. Rather, the production, transportation and promotion of new consumer items involved a range of powerful economic players. For example, BHP Tinplate, one of the biggest investors in this process, sponsored a series of *Weekly* advertisements that focused just on cans: 'Almost every modern product benefits from the perfect protection of the can the way you benefit from the perfect convenience of the can'.<sup>406</sup> In a similar vein, the Glass

Industry of Australia also made a manipulative appeal to *Weekly* readers: 'Ever wonder why kids instinctively go for soft drinks in bottles?' asked one advertisement; 'Glass is a natural flavour protector. In pure glass there's nothing to change the flavour.'<sup>407</sup> Another read: 'Give your baby glass-protected milk and ask for more good things for your whole family packed in pure glass.'<sup>408</sup> Like food brands a century earlier, the packaging industries sought the reassuring glow of 'purity', and urged consumers to hook their trust on this promise.

### **Bushells Coffee: from Essence to Instant**

Long before frozen peas, pineapple rings and tinned tomatoes, tea enjoyed a primacy that transcended whatever appeal alternatives held. Until Nescafé, that is. With instant coffee, Nestlé had struck upon a beverage that not only trumped its predecessors in terms of simplicity, but also came with the approval of American consumers, a winning combination after the Second World War. Belatedly, then, and rather incredibly, Bushells borrowed the language of Nescafé to claim some sort of convenience to promote the one product that was *least* like actual coffee: Bushells Coffee Essence, in 1956. The advertisement read, 'GOOD COFFEE instantly!'<sup>409</sup> Bottled just like sauce, the closest this product came to 'real' coffee was courtesy of the moustached motif that appeared on the packaging. His dark features and red fez suggested a vague, Middle Eastern provenance. Rather appropriately, then, his image was as tokenistic as the product.<sup>410</sup>



Figure 7.6 Bushells Coffee Essence

Several years after the introduction of Nescafé, this advertisement claimed the sort of ease and speed that was Nestlé's hallmark. Yet the difference between the two products was huge, both technologically and culturally. Whereas Nescafé shared several traits with pure roasted coffee, with a disarmingly similar aroma, taste and texture, Bushells Coffee Essence was more akin to cooking syrup – as its introductory marketing had as much as admitted. As such, Bushells' *rightful* claim to an instant coffee did not come until 1959, with the launch of Bushells Instant Coffee in New South Wales and Queensland. An immediate success, it was marketed nationwide by the end of the year, accompanied by a massive advertising blitz. In fact, as if to underscore the brand's erstwhile half-heartedness, one advertisement read: 'It's here! Bushells Instant Coffee – the instant that IS coffee...100% pure coffee'.<sup>411</sup> This product, then, signalled Bushells' entry into Australia's increasingly lucrative instant coffee market.

Bushells Instant Coffee not only placed Bushells' coffee range on par with Nestlé's, it helped Bushells steer its coffee advertising with an obvious and coherent logic. Firstly, Bushells positioned its Coffee Essence as the cheapest coffee option ('Costs less than a penny a cup'<sup>412</sup>), an approach that mirrored Nestlé's budget blend, 'Ricory'.<sup>413</sup> Secondly, Bushells positioned its Pure Coffee as a high-end item, to be used 'on those special occasions...when only the finest coffee will do.'<sup>414</sup>



Figure 7.7 Bushells Pure Coffee

Thirdly, Bushells positioned its Instant Coffee as the closest thing to Nescafé, in terms of quality, and the closest thing to Bushells Tea, in terms of familiarity: ‘Now we have coffee *every day*’.<sup>415</sup> Herein lay Bushells’ advantage over Nestlé: its pre-eminence in the tea market gave Bushells an ideal position from which it could align the convenience of its latest addition (instant coffee) with the popularity of its flagship range – tea. In other words, the brand could parlay its reputation as a market leader in one field towards its expansion into another.



Figure 7.8 Bushells Instant Coffee

For several years Bushells actually collapsed any qualitative difference between its two main products. The one catchall cry subsumed both of them: ‘STOP for a “Bushells Break” – It’s wonderfully refreshing with Bushells Tea or Bushells Coffee’.<sup>416</sup> Indeed, in one of the brand’s first acknowledgements of a pluralised marketplace, one campaign even featured a man and women, and the line: ‘HE likes coffee SHE likes tea – both agree you can’t beat Bushells’.<sup>417</sup> With the same image, another read: ‘HE likes coffee SHE likes tea, both enjoy a Bushells Break’.<sup>418</sup> The phrase ‘Bushells Break’ was a sly twist on a phrase coined and popularised by the Pan-American Coffee Bureau, which had launched a major campaign in 1952 with the theme ‘Give yourself a Coffee-Break – And Get What Coffee Gives to You’.



However, as Mark Pendergrast writes, not only did the Bureau ‘invent’ the coffee break but, as the majority of American firms *did* introduce coffee breaks shortly thereafter, it helped insert the phrase into everyday parlance.<sup>419</sup> Bushells’ take on the term – from ‘coffee break’ to ‘Bushells Break’ – saved the idea of a ‘break’ from being seen as an exclusively coffee affair, as was the Bureau’s intention (and effect) in the United States.



Figure 7.9 ‘Bushells Break’

It may have taken Bushells over a decade to enter the instant coffee market, but it was quick to trumpet its early success. In 1960, a full-page advertisement that more closely resembled a public notice read: ‘Bushells say “Thank You”. The wonderful nation-wide acceptance of our Instant Coffee has made us very proud.’ Bushells Instant Coffee *was* an unequivocal success, and this divided Bushells’ advertising in a way that did not so much undermine the brand as extend its reach. As it has been argued throughout this thesis, branding speaks to consumers through associations, not attributes. All the same, instant coffee *was* Nestlé’s speciality; in fact, Nestlé researchers continued to refine the blend, extend the range and consolidate the perception that instant coffee was their domain. The early to mid 1960s thus saw Nestlé and Bushells wage an advertising duel. For example, once both brands had

exhausted the promotional pull of ‘instant’, they moved on, rather paradoxically, to ‘freshness’, as if the two terms were *not* hopelessly incompatible.<sup>420</sup> After ‘freshness’, the emphasis moved to ‘flavour’, as if to undo the damage of ‘too much’ convenience (*à la* ‘just add water’).<sup>421</sup>

***Get more when you pour ...***

***No other tea regardless  
of price can match  
Bushells for consistent  
flavor, freshness and  
all-round quality.***



Remember what the Tea Council of Australia says:  
‘Our good quality tea makes you feel like you’re having the best of good tea!’

Figure 7.10 Bushells & the Tea Council

For the first time in Australia, advertising for both tea and coffee approached some kind of parity in the 1960s. This placed Bushells at a peculiar interstice, between two increasingly organised, vocal and combative lobby groups. In 1962, Australia signed the first International Coffee Agreement (and subsequently became subject to its executive incarnation, the International Coffee Organisation, or ICO). This stabilised the world coffee market, regulated import quotas, and gave Australia’s coffee industry a focus and a framework. The following year, its interests were put straight to consumers in a magazine promotion.<sup>422</sup> This featured a series of vignettes and a variety of peopled settings – on a farm,<sup>423</sup> on a yacht,<sup>424</sup> in a factory,<sup>425</sup> by a river<sup>426</sup> and in a restaurant.<sup>427</sup> All included the line: ‘Nothing in the world like the rousing good taste of coffee’. In 1964, the Tea Council of Australia used a similarly constituted montage to make a virtually identical point, to the same readership: ‘There’s nothing like tea to start the day right. Nothing like its clean, fresh taste to get you going for the day.’<sup>428</sup> The Tea Council’s predecessor, the Tea Market Expansion

Board, ran a similar campaign in the mid to late 1930s: 'Feeling the heat? Drink Tea! Tea Lifts Vitality – Tea Keeps You Cool'.<sup>429</sup> Against the coffee coalition, though, the Tea Council had a bigger challenge; hence, its television campaign in 1966, with two advertisements screened each week. In its tea advertising, Bushells made direct use of the Council's recommendation and logo.

As long as the brand encompassed the two most commonly consumed 'everyday' beverages, Bushells was safe.<sup>430</sup> What was in doubt, though, was the extent to which Bushells could continue to presume tea's primacy. As coffee was increasingly acknowledged and promoted as a significant commodity (and a viable alternative to tea at that) Bushells would have to either rethink its focus, or concede that its signature item was on a cultural decline.

### **The Italian Influence**

Besides the influence of American-style consumerism, another factor that required advertisers in Australia revise their address was immigration. There is not the space here to discuss the changing composition of Australia's post-war population in too much detail, since the reasons are wide, varied and complex. It will suffice to note, though, that insofar as the population mix exceeded more than just Britons and New Zealanders, consumption patterns were liable to change. At the very least, after the Second World War, two factors fuelled a bipartisan desire to broaden Australia's migrant intake: defence and industry; both, many believed, would benefit from a population boost.<sup>431</sup> However, while Canberra's preference was for a ten-to-one ratio of Britons to non-Britons, it was soon obvious that the war-weary Continent was far more responsive to Canberra's call, particularly Europe's south, and particularly Italy's south.

The influx of Italian immigrants made an immediate and lasting impact on Australian culture. Italians very quickly formed the largest immigrant group of non-English speaking background (NESB); from the end of the war until 1973, 305 000 Italians had chosen Australia as their new home.<sup>432</sup> Moreover, they tended towards the city hubs of Sydney and Melbourne, and their migratory chains effectively encouraged and established distinct cultural precincts. Chief among these were Leichhardt in



Sydney and Carlton in Melbourne, where a network of businesses, clubs and services quickly emerged to cater to Italians' interests and preferences.<sup>433</sup> One of the first and most discernible signs of this presence was the early development of Italian-style cafés and restaurants. In 1948 Leichhardt's first Italian coffee shop opened, Caffè Sport; by 1962, there were enough Italian businesses to give the area a specific look and atmosphere, with seven fruit vendors, five restaurants, four social clubs and four cafés.<sup>434</sup>

What concerns this discussion is the extent to which this migrant pool affected the drinking habits of those from a non-Italian background. In that regard, Italian immigrants played a key role in expanding Australians' coffee vocabulary. For example, in 1947 the Cantarella Group was formed by brothers Orazio and Carmelo Cantarella, who perceived a growing market for European foods in Australia, and so opened a small retail outlet in Sydney's Haymarket. From there, they turned to coffee, and began roasting Vittoria Coffee in 1958.<sup>435</sup> When its success outgrew this premises, the brothers relocated to Leichhardt.<sup>436</sup> Vittoria not only became one of Australia's leading coffee brands, it was an early indication of the kind of influence Italians would have on general consumption patterns. In *From Scarcity to Surfeit* (1988), Robin Walker and Dave Roberts argue that the relative rise of coffee consumption in Australia parallels the arrival of migrants with a nuanced appreciation of it. That is, 'those European migrants who did not come from Britain had brought with them a Continental taste for coffee and the hitherto rare skill of making it.'<sup>437</sup> There was, then, a demographic turn away from one preference (tea) towards a more refined knowledge of another (coffee).

Nestlé had long promoted its commitment to product development; from the 1960s, it was clear that this commitment applied to Nescafé as well. In 1961, Nestlé extended the Nescafé range to recognise Australia's growing proportion of 'European' immigrants (numbers were tilted towards Italians, but advertisers rarely specified as such). This recognition was in the form of a 2-ounce can of Nescafé Espresso.<sup>438</sup> Its success prompted Nestlé to market it in a jar in 1970, which featured in a national advertisement that read: 'Because people's tastes are different – so is Nescafé.'<sup>439</sup> The product description was hazy (Espresso was for consumers that 'prefer the stronger flavour of a continental type coffee blend'), but the main message was not: major

advertisers were increasingly compelled to acknowledge (if not accommodate) a wider range of consumers *if* they were to maintain cultural relevance. That said, in 1979 for the first time Australians consumed more coffee than tea.<sup>440</sup> The next chapter will consider how Bushells dealt with this situation, and the means by which it retained some hold, however tenuous, over both the tea market and, increasingly, the popular imagination.

## **Conclusion**

In the film *They're a Weird Mob* (Michael Powell, 1965), 'New Australian' Nino Culotta stumbled across a series of familiar Australian icons, from Bondi Beach and QANTAS to Graham Kennedy and Test cricket. Fresh from Italy and eager to impress, Culotta tried hard to learn local customs and follow popular conventions. Having found work as a builder's labourer in Sydney, and keen not to offend, Culotta joined his workmates in one of their daily rituals: the afternoon tea break. At first sip, his face showed more than a hint of regret – but, ever the appeaser, he finished the cup all the same. Even in the middle of the 1960s, this image veered close to anachronism. Firstly, had Culotta ventured towards Leichhardt, for instance, he may well have enjoyed a beverage closer to his liking, or at least one that he found more familiar. Secondly, though, and as this chapter argues, by the mid 1960s the centrality of tea in Australian culture was already on the descent.

After the Second World War, and over several decades, a number of factors helped dim the place of tea in Australia: the introduction of Nescafé instant coffee; the cultural resonance of its convenience; the dazzling lead of the United States; and the arrival of coffee-savvy Italians. The combination of the aforementioned saw drinking patterns in Australia effectively dichotomised. Increasingly global flows gradually fragmented Australia's marketplace, and opened it up to the rhythm, logic and language of American-style consumerism. It was a shopping environment geared towards convenience, self-service, and variety, the perfect milieu for products like Nescafé.

The challenge for Bushells was to work with this mood and momentum. Given its link to tea, a decidedly old-world beverage, the 1950s and 1960s required Bushells adjust

its marketing to new trends and new technologies. This meant that, in terms of the imagery and associations Bushells had courted for decades, especially the picture of middle-class manners and British-bred tastes, would no longer suffice – the brand had to adjust. The introduction of Bushells Instant Coffee was arguably the most radical adjustment. Coffee had always appeared in the brand's portfolio, but not promoted with either clarity or conviction. This was not the case from 1959; Bushells finally had a product that could reasonably rival Nescafé, Nestlé's star invention and a major force in the diminishment of tea in Australia. That said, then, the following two decades saw Bushells balance what had rapidly become promotional adversaries: tea and coffee. In turn, Bushells faced its most critical development to date – the rise of coffee's popularity at tea's expense. The next chapter will discuss how Bushells negotiated this challenge, and how its brand was ingeniously spared from cultural oblivion. From 'heritage mugs' to the Powerhouse Museum, the 1980s and 1990s saw Bushells perpetuate itself in a myriad of ways. All underscored the spectacular elasticity of the Bushells brand.

*Notes to Chapter Seven on pp. 267-271.*

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **'Is it as good?' – Bushells beyond Australia**

#### **Introduction**

In 1895 *Bulletin* readers were among the first to meet Alfred Bushell and his eponymous brand of tea. Stylish and succinct, these early advertisements effectively launched what became a spectacular trajectory. For the better part of the twentieth century, the brand criss-crossed Australian media with an impressively elastic range of popular associations. From 'art deco' elegance to penny-pinching thrift, home-front restraint to post-war convenience, Bushells consistently courted Australians with culturally appropriate ideals. Indeed, few Australian brands had shadowed Australian developments quite as closely or tactfully as Bushells had.

In 1978, *Bulletin* readers were among the first to learn that Alfred Bushell's dynasty had come to an end. The notice came in the form of an article about the sale of Bushells to British tea giant, Brooke Bond. This sale marked a dynamic new phase in the brand's history, one that was often contradictory, complex and deeply ironic. Between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, the brand wove through Australian culture like an inadvertent barometer of numerous contemporary concerns. Indeed, in one of the more surprising twists in the Bushells narrative, the further it drifted from Australian control, the more it was popularly associated with all that was 'truly' Australian. This chapter tracks how this curious situation came about.

#### **The Family Fortune**

In previous chapters, it was noted that Philip Bushell had been a key figure in the organisation and orientation of the Bushells brand. Many of the brand's most strategic and successful marketing decisions had been his. In turn, Philip's advertising flair had proven especially fortunate for the family's personal wealth. When he died in March 1954, his estate rendered the Bushell family part of Sydney's elite, something that ultimately figured in its eventual sale. Survived by his wife Myrtle Dolce and their two daughters, Amber and Pamela, Philip left an estate worth £666 695; when Myrtle died in September 1959, her estate was worth £2 558 921.<sup>441</sup>

The company's direction thereafter had much to do with the daughters' spouses, whom they both met during the Second World War. Amber and Pamela had sailed to the Middle East in 1940 as Volunteer Aid Detachments. They returned having done little work in that capacity but instead betrothed to two Royal Navy officers, Anthony Oxley and Morgan Morgan-Giles, respectively. Although they eventually pursued very different careers, both men were monumentally affected by the Bushell fortune. When Myrtle Bushell's estate was divided between the two daughters,<sup>442</sup> Amber inherited 'Carthona', the family home in Darling Point, Sydney; while Pamela, who had moved to England and whose husband became an MP, inherited the jewellery collection.

With Pamela in England, Amber's family became the subject of media interest in Australia. Over the following few decades, their private world was relayed in the Australian press like a real-life soap opera. The majestic family home, Carthona, was of particular interest. Built in the early 1840s by NSW Surveyor General Sir Thomas Mitchell, Carthona became a standard reference for early waterfront architecture, renowned for its well-preserved, castellated design, and its spectacular position: a levelled site on the edge of Sydney's harbour, its front façade visible only by boat.<sup>443</sup> Bought by the Bushell family in 1941 for £10 500<sup>444</sup>, the last time it was on the market, Carthona nonetheless earned an enviable reputation as Sydney's most expensive house, even though valuers could only guess its worth.<sup>445</sup> Equally salacious, but far less favourable, was media interest in the four Oxley children – Anthony Jnr, Amber, Philip and Christopher. Of the four, though, none proved more newsworthy than Christopher. He first made headlines in 1974 at the age of 17, when he appeared in the Children's Court for stealing a Rolls-Royce, reportedly out of boredom.<sup>446</sup>

### **Moving On**

One of the earliest clues that the Oxley family would break Bushell tradition was the sale of its seven-story headquarters to the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority in 1974, the same year that Christopher's misdemeanour made news. The Rocks site served Bushells during what was arguably its heyday: between the mid 1920s and the early 1950s, the years during which tea consumption was practically unrivalled, the

brand enjoyed an almost peerless media presence, and Philip Bushell was an influential figure amongst Australia's rich and famous. As the last chapter argued, the decades after the Second World War rattled several of the certainties that had underpinned Bushells' success – not least of which was the extraordinary rise of coffee's popularity in Australia, and the dramatic shifts in the nation's post-war population mix. There is a symbolic overlap, then, between the deaths of the Bushell siblings (Phillip in 1954 and Alfred a year later), the decline in Australians' tea consumption, and the gradual retreat from the family's quasi-empire. With the sale of the building, the entire company relocated to new premises in Concorde, Sydney, in September 1975.

By the late 1970s the company was ultimately under Anthony Oxley's control. After Philip's death, various personnel assumed the company's everyday running, with Oxley acting only as Marketing Director. Still, as the effective heir, the eventual sale *was* at his instigation. As such, whatever his disposition or demeanour, it is clear that he did not embrace his role with anywhere near the energy that Philip exuded. Indeed, it appears that Oxley sought the sale at the first opportunity. As it turned out, and as already mentioned, the brand's figurehead had in fact married Agnes Brooke, whose brother Arthur had set up one of England's top tea firms, Brooke Bond, and helped raise young Philip. This connection was both strengthened and formalised over the years: in June 1958 Brooke Bond's Australian subsidiary was allocated 355 150 Bushells shares (some 20 per cent of the company) at £1 each; and Oxley owed *his* knowledge of the tea business to a four-year apprenticeship with Brooke Bond in London. Still, even though the sale was at Oxley's behest, Bushells' position was far from flexible. Represented by their financial adviser Malcolm Young, and with 60 per cent of the company's issued capital, the family proved shrewd and persistent in its negotiations, and eventually secured a \$34.3 million deal.

The sale of Bushells signalled a generational drift away from the tea trade. When Anthony and Amber Oxley were interviewed by the *Bulletin* about it, Amber explained that it had much to do with her children wanting liquid assets:

What I would do was buy their shares myself...I started to run short of money – but it meant we had hung on to the shares, and that was a big factor in [the] negotiations.<sup>447</sup>

The size of the settlement meant that, at the Bushells end, at least two areas were assured a financial windfall: the Bushell family (including relatives), and the Bushell Trust. The family received \$17 million from the sale, a good deal of which helped expand its already extensive property portfolio.<sup>448</sup> The Bushell Trust secured approximately \$7 million from the sale, enough to maintain the family's commitment to various charities.

While the sale of Bushells was not exactly invisible, it certainly did not spark too great an outrage either. Insofar as it gave Brooke Bond a three-quarters share of one of Australia's best-known brands, Canberra did take note. As Peter Browne points out, Australia's then Treasurer, John Howard, actually questioned the foreign investment guidelines that had approved the sale. Howard demanded that 'Brooke Bond restore the level of Australian shareholding in Bushells to over 50 per cent within five years.'<sup>449</sup> This symbolic stand showed Canberra's attitude towards a corporate giant. Still, compared to the media coverage that followed the next attempt by a multinational to 'buy up' Bushells (by Unilever in 1988, to be discussed shortly), Brooke Bond fared relatively well. The most extensive coverage was in the *Bulletin*, and that more closely resembled a tender biography of Bushells than a biting critique of Brooke Bond.

### **Another grocer, another brand**

Not unlike Bushells, Brooke Bond had also grown from a small-scale operation in the late nineteenth century to a position of influence and power. More so than Bushells, though, it had proven a far more ambitious player in various global markets. Alfred Brooke's career began in a small Manchester shop in 1869: Brooke, Bond & Co. There was no 'Bond' as such; Brooke just thought it an impressive addition to his letterhead. The cash-only store stocked just three items: tea, coffee, and sugar. However, as Denys Forrest argues in *Tea for the British* (1973), the starkness of the selection was more than offset by Brooke's savvy marketing, which included extensive newspaper advertising. With the store's expansion into Lancashire and

Yorkshire, the Brooke Bond tea proved most popular. This, writes Forrest, 'led to grocers positively begging to be allowed to stock it.'<sup>450</sup> In 1892 Brooke Bond was floated as a public company with a share capital of £150 000.

Throughout the twentieth century Brooke Bond widened its reach and range beyond both Britain and tea. By 1970, just a few years before the Bushells deal, Brooke Bond not only enjoyed a 43 per cent share of the British tea market<sup>451</sup>; it had also merged with Liebig, a meat extract company, and Oxo, an integrated delivery service. Before the close of the decade, Brooke Bond had turned into a diversified food company. Its worldwide stable included Black Diamond Cheese, Fray Bentos Corned Beef, Blue Ribbon Coffee, Red Rose Tea – and Bushells. By 1979 it was the world's largest tea company with an annual volume of \$US 1.5 billion.<sup>452</sup> Brooke Bond's purchase of Bushells thus saw the latter integrated into the pace and pattern of twentieth-century globalised trade. Almost immediately, Brooke Bond made the modernisation of Bushells' machinery a priority, and committed its newest addition to an aggressive advertising drive.<sup>453</sup> Fortunately, there *was* a milestone that could not only justify a major promotion, but assert the brand's national significance at a time when, ironically enough, its control ceased being predominately Australian: Bushells' one-hundredth birthday.

### **Centenary Celebrations**

In 1983 the Bushells brand marked a seminal achievement – its centenary. This was a pivotal point in the brand's development as it summonsed the one discourse that would dominate the next few decades of the brand's advertising: the past. Moreover, there was an odd dimension to this in that Bushells increasingly co-opted symbols and motifs with which it previously had very little to do with. Images appeared in the 1983 promotions that had been hitherto absent from Bushells' catalogue, but were celebrated as part of Bushells' history all the same. This revisionist slide highlights the semiotic play of much advertising, as associations are conjured in a way that seemingly defies straightforward linearity.

The main way that Bushells tweaked its history was through a range of commemorative items that consumers could purchase. Bushells had been part of a



‘gift’ scheme before, as discussed previously. What was different this time, though, was the way that Bushells (re)wrote its history into these ‘gifts’; these were not generic items, like the silverware and crockery of the 1930s. Rather, these were imagistic extensions of the brand, and anchored its historical significance through their design. As they appeared in magazines and newspapers, many of the promotions featured a sepia-toned banner-head that read: ‘The Olde Bushells General Store’. Its quaint anachronism aside, the mock-sign was an early indication of what became Bushells’ primary prop: its heritage, fabricated or otherwise.

For example, one of the most popular promotions Bushells ran in 1983 was its series of commemorative tea canisters.<sup>454</sup> Each set celebrated imagery that was both nostalgic and nationalist: the first reproduced several Bushells advertisements from the interwar years; the second featured ‘Special Moments in Australian History’ (the opening of parliament, the completion of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the veneration of the Anzacs, and the success of Charles Kingsford-Smith); while the third featured ‘Australian Wildlife’ (a kookaburra, kangaroo, koala, and frill-neck lizard).



Figure 8.1 Commemorative Canisters



Figure 8.2 Heritage Mugs

Equally popular, and similarly construed, was a set of commemorative coffee mugs. These could be bought with two 'proofs of purchase' of Bushells Instant Coffee. Like the canisters, they were steeped in historical imagery, albeit with far more nebulous settings, what Bushells termed 'early Australian scenes' (one by the docks, the other by a camp site). Blithely oblivious to the impossible coupling of instant coffee *and* colonial Australia, this promotion relied on a rustic populism that became a feature of Bushells' campaigns: 'Made by Australian Craftsmen in ivory earthenware, these mugs will add even more pleasure to drinking Bushells coffee.'<sup>455</sup> The artisans' integrity was raised as if to demarcate the mugs from the mass-produced sameness that otherwise dulled the drinking experience.

If nothing else, the range of imagery used for both the canisters and the mugs shows that Bushells appealed to much more than the success of a tea brand. Rather, it invoked a rather flexible interpretation of Australian history, and a similarly fluid interpolation of the Bushells consumer. These promotions happily collapsed historical incongruities for the sake of a feel-good mosaic. The effect was to insinuate Bushells into a loose narrative that was more about a certain mood and style than any historical accuracy or thematic consistency. Moreover, both the canisters and mugs were designed to transcend the temporality of most grocery goods. For instance, unlike empty coffee jars that may or may not be re-used, these mugs defied obsolescence and as such sustained the Bushells brand long after the initial transaction.

The Bushells Centenary Edition Cookbook was a further example of the brand's patch-work approach to its own heritage. Its preamble as much as admits to a disjunctive timeline:

Some of the recipes in this collection may have been forgotten and others have become part of our daily lives. But they all have one thing in common: they are distinctively Australian – as Australian as Bushells.<sup>456</sup>

The book itself presented a curious juxtaposition. Its cover reproduced a Bushells advertisement from the 1920s. The peculiarity comes from the combination of what were in fact conflicting currents of consumer development; the cover's 'art deco' elegance points to one, and the nature of the recipes points to another. The 1920s was the period in which Bushells asserted its upmarket sophistication in magazines like

the *Sydney Mail*, yet this glamour is lost alongside the cookbook's recipes. These include: Outback Chutney; Jumbuck Spuds; and Fair Dinkum Damper.



Figure 8.3 Bushells Centenary Edition Cookbook

In 1983, this sort of back-flip helped contort the Bushells story. It linked the brand to an image that apparently satisfied popular accounts of 'olde' Australia, more so than an archive that actually drew from imported magazines and Madison Avenue rather than jumbucks and bushrangers. For \$3.95, then, consumers not only received yet more kitchen paraphernalia stamped with Bushells' importance. They received an insight into a time and place that seemingly predated the modern mores on which branded tea actually depended, and a depiction of consumption that was instead tied to a mythologised resourcefulness. In short, the cookbook idealised the sort of outback ingenuity that was opposite to the image Bushells pursued in the 1920s, particularly in its advertisements in the *Sydney Mail*, an image of immaculate, middle class cultivation.

Besides the canisters, coffee mugs, and cookbook, there was also a competition, the prize of which constituted Bushells' most elaborate take on history. This appeared in the *Australian Women's Weekly*, *New Idea*, *Woman's Day* and *Family Circle*. The competition offered entrants not only the chance to win one of one hundred major prizes, which included a carriage clock, silverware, and a framed picture of Alfred Bushell; a further 10 000 had the chance to be written into Bushells' centennial celebration, literally. Bushells had commissioned a history book that presented its history alongside 'other' epochal events, an approach that blurred any qualitative

difference between the history of Australia and that of the brand. Bushells positioned its past as a matter of national pride, hence the competition's cachet:

This unique book, to be presented to a renowned Australian library, will record the names of those who entered Bushells Centenary Celebrations prize draw...Enter now and your name will go down in history.<sup>457</sup>

So, alongside the carefully compiled list of year-by-year events were 10 000 names that had been selected by a process no more rigorous than sheer luck.

The book in question was *Bushells' Centenary 1883-1983* (1984). Written by Lyn Gamwell (with the help of a researcher and a calligrapher), the account is an audaciously abridged version of 'Australian history', the purpose of which is expressed quite clearly in its 'Introduction':

The growth and expansion of Mr Bushell's small operation into the thriving, leading company that Bushells Proprietary Limited became, is very much in parallel with the phenomenal growth and expansion of the country itself.<sup>458</sup>

Each year is represented by a handful of important events, and Bushells' achievements shared the same privileged space as those of the nation. For instance, 1899 saw both the start of the Boer War *and* the opening of a Bushells branch in Victoria; while 1959 saw both Canberra restore diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, *and* the launch of Bushells Instant Coffee. In a significant inversion of academic convention, the brand's ascent was placed on par with moments of standard 'textbook' significance.

### **A Rural Renaissance**

Under the direction of a London-based multinational, Bushells forged a symbolic field that was deeply nostalgic. Moreover, these initiatives benefited from a usefulness that kept them in high visibility, well after the centennial year. Whether as décor, storage, or bric-a-brac, from the decorative canisters to the PR-style history book, these items were designed to linger in everyday domestic life, and thereby to make a deeper claim to Australian culture. Bushells relayed its heritage with more than a modicum of spin.

With such latitude, Bushells opted for a creative take on its history, and thus modified its catalogue according to whatever resonance the promotions required. The imagery thus blossomed into an all-encompassing and evocative 'Australianness', no longer plotted with any sort of precision.

Bushells was not alone in its sentimental depiction of a rural Australian past. Indeed, this broad aesthetic featured in another area of immense cultural influence: Australian cinema. This was more than mere happenstance. After the establishment of the Australian Film Development Corporation in 1970, the 'bush' genre was one of two that emerged and characterised over a decade of Australian filmmaking. The first was the so-called 'ocker' genre, à la *Alvin Purple* (1973) and *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1973), films that fared well at the box-office, but less so amongst critics. The other, however, shared a canvas not dissimilar to the type that Bushells adopted. That is, as Richard Waterhouse explains, 'films set at least primarily in the Bush, featuring spectacular landscapes, quintessentially rural characters, and stories with a historic and sometimes nostalgic context.'<sup>459</sup> This was seen in *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), *The Getting of Wisdom* (1977), and *My Brilliant Career* (1978). To the extent that these films represented a 'renaissance' of Australian cinema, Waterhouse argues that their homage to rural nationalism paid a collective debt to a particular tradition. In turn, they established a distinct reference point, with a pool of imagery that enjoyed a wide and often warm embrace – critically, popularly and, as it appeared in Bushells' promotions, commercially too.

The rise of rural imagery in the early 1980s effectively resurrected those themes popularised by the *Bulletin* in the late nineteenth century. As it resurfaced, though, it betrayed more than just an aesthetic symmetry. As noted in Chapter Five, the 1890s entailed an economic recession that destroyed numerous rural livelihoods. As it happened, the 1970s was also a time of considerable hardship for the rural sector, not least because successive Australian governments had reduced subsidies towards it. To put it another way, Canberra no longer justified such protection on the grounds that rural Australia was a 'national good'. So, from the 1970s, and as Australia's reliance on rural exports lessened, both major parties slowly withdrew their support of it.<sup>460</sup> Once again, then, as rural Australia faced an unforgiving world market, and what seemed an indifferent Canberra, it presented an image that could be mined for both

sympathy and affection. As its future appeared bleak, its past was widely imagined in terms of wistful longing. Bushells' centenary thus coincided with this crucial moment in Australia's economic evolution.

### **Coffee connoisseurs & teabag converts: the new market shakers**

While the Bushells brand paid tribute to rural serenity, its management was swept up in the tumultuous drama of multinational capitalism. In a clash of advertising imagery and boardroom reality, the 1980s saw Bushells become yet more embedded in those global forces that were, increasingly and ironically, airbrushed *out* of its promotions. In 1984 one of the world's largest food companies, Unilever, initiated a hostile takeover of Brooke Bond. Against the advice of Brooke Bond's chairperson, Sir John Cuckney, the bid succeeded and transferred to Unilever an almost 50 per cent share of Bushells. At the same time, though, Unilever inherited the 'public interest' specification that Treasurer Howard had initially applied to Brooke Bond, in addition to a Treasury demand that Bushells and Unilever continue to compete as separate entities. For the time being, then, Unilever's hold was fixed. For Bushells, though, the instability was not confined to its ownership; the marketplace proved equally challenging. Shifts in taste, technology and fashion showed just how much Australians had changed in a matter of decades, not to mention an entire century.

The first shift that Bushells had to contend with was Australians' burgeoning preference for premium coffee. For a growing number of discerning coffee drinkers, the ease and convenience of cheap instant blends had become a regrettable compromise. As such, they happily embraced the various instruments required for pure coffee and displayed a nuanced grasp of both its properties and preparation. In short, Australia's coffee market had matured. As one observer put it, 'Tidy jars of powder are rapidly giving way to small chemistry labs full of drip-dry devices, infusers, filter paper and grinding mills.'<sup>461</sup> Between 1983 and 1984 the sale of loose and packaged beans grew by around 23 per cent, while the sale of instant coffee increased by less than 1 per cent.<sup>462</sup> Of that 1 per cent, the market tilted towards the premium segment (expensive granulated brands), which grew 28 per cent in 1984. There were various explanations for the phenomenon. One was the growing availability and ownership of coffee-making machines; once the preserve of offices

and restaurants, these were increasingly designed and marketed for home use. Another was the rise of so-called 'yuppies'. A popular descriptor in the mid 1980s, the term referred to 'young and upwardly mobile professionals' that enjoyed prestigious lifestyle commodities.<sup>463</sup>

Bushells' response to the coffee turn was bold and decisive: in August 1984 it acquired the Robert Timms range of premium coffee from Castlemaine Tooheys. The acquisition gave Bushells a one-third share of the pure coffee market, a formidable stake given that, by then, pure coffee accounted for almost 11 per cent of the \$230 million market.<sup>464</sup> The advertising campaign was launched in July 1985 and certainly had an epicurean air about it: 'The reason people prefer our coffee is right under your nose'. The campaign emphasised the aroma of 'the finest ground beans', so Robert Timms was aimed at 'the serious coffee drinker.'<sup>465</sup> Before the end of the year, the range included Gold Standard, Continental Style, Mocha Kenya and New Guinea Gold. The investment paid off. Having acquired Robert Timms for \$6 million, Bushells' annual sales rose by 26 per cent from \$137 million to \$172 million.<sup>466</sup> By March 1987, the Robert Timms range had given Bushells control of 37-40 per cent of all ground coffee sales.<sup>467</sup> Clearly, the coffee market claimed a significant share of the company's resources, attention, and profitability.

Just as coffee connoisseurs turned their noses *up*, the tea market saw an inverse development with the growing popularity of teabags. This was a real test for Bushells as it had a longstanding preference for the traditional leaf tea, of which it enjoyed a market lead. Moreover, this preference complemented the brand's broader appeal to quality and distinction, something that had been central to its earlier depictions of class and refinement. With teabags, then, Bushells was in fact slow, if not reluctant, to adapt – to the point that it misread the extent of teabags' appeal, both in Australia and abroad, and thus lost market share in its tardiness. First popular in the United States in the 1920s, it was several more decades before Britain took to teabags, and that was largely due to the tenacity and patience of tea entrepreneur Joseph Tetley. Having tried to introduce Britons to teabags in the mid 1930s, it was not until the post-war decades that Tetley's perseverance was rewarded. Only then did teabags finally harmonise with the growing preference for all things quick and easy: from less than 3



per cent of the British market, teabags rose to 6 per cent in 1969, 10 per cent in 1970, and 12.5 per cent in 1971.<sup>468</sup>

That year, Unilever acquired Lipton tea and within a decade turned it into the leading force in teabag sales. In turn, just as Nestlé's success in instant coffee had once undercut Bushells' complacency in one area, Lipton's success in teabags undercut Bushells' complacency in another. The addition of teabags to its plant and packaging overheads entailed a commodity cost increase of about 60 per cent, but it was an expansion that Bushells could not afford to ignore. In 1984 the total market value for teabags increased by 33 per cent to \$62.7 million.<sup>469</sup> However, by the time Bushells conceded teabags' popularity and adapted its tea production accordingly, Lipton had secured the market advantage. By 1985 Lipton's range boasted three different types of teabags – the standard string and tag (dubbed 'danglers') and two kinds of heat-sealed bags (one for cups and the other for pots). That same year, \$1.5 million was spent on Lipton's promotions, the account handled by high-profile advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi. Despite the fact that Bushells' share of the teabag market increased five-fold between 1979 and 1985, Lipton's 15 per cent lead was still safe.<sup>470</sup>

Bushells' response was a massive advertising campaign that featured what became one of its most memorable lines: 'Is it as good?' Between 1985 and 1988, 'Is it as good?' stamped a media mix that spanned television, magazine, radio and outdoor advertising – even buses became mobile billboards for the brand. The central theme was strength, as Bushells claimed a fullness of flavour that both trumped its competitors', and addressed the entrenched prejudice tea purists had against teabags. The television commercials, for example, featured contrasts between dowdy, daggy caricatures that were forced to suffer weak tea, and Bushells' more upbeat, youthful demographic. For instance, the campaign included a middle-aged man in bow-tie and cardigan, sartorially upstaged by a woman in grey corporate wear (the infamous 'power suit'); a 'proper' ladies' tea party, with wilting flowers in the foreground, contrasted with a young couple by the beach; and yet another middle-aged man, with thick-rimmed spectacles, outshone by a young, blonde women, whose only accessory is a cat.<sup>471</sup>



This campaign, with its obvious interplay of age, style and sensibility, pinpointed a major dilemma for the Bushells brand. Bushells *had* to coordinate its image with contemporary trends, and convey this to consumers explicitly. Put simply, Bushells had an image problem. This is not to suggest that the company was either mismanaged or struggling. On the contrary: in September 1986 Bushells Holdings Ltd celebrated a 47.5 per cent jump in profits to a record \$9.7 million, and a turnover increase of 16 per cent to \$199.9 million.<sup>472</sup> As good as this was for shareholders, though, it still did not translate into a position of market supremacy. The growth in teabags intensified, and Lipton had the advantage. By 1988 57 per cent of the value of the national tea market was in tagged teabags (the 'danglers') while just 28.6 per cent was in leaf tea, and the remainder in tag-less tea bags. This gave Lipton a market share of 33.1 per cent, and Bushells just 18.2 per cent.<sup>473</sup> So, as much as Bushells pushed an image of verve and vitality, Lipton had more convincingly wooed the growing band of teabag converts.

### **Unilever Steps Up**

In the late 1980s Bushells was in an odd position: well managed and with healthy returns, but still outperformed in teabag sales by its nearest rival, Lipton, owned by Unilever. In November 1987, this situation came to a head when Unilever announced its intention to buy whatever Bushells shares it did not already own, for \$2.30 each. This move was made possible by the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB), which had relaxed regulations in an attempt to attract foreign investors to Australia's sluggish manufacturing sector; inadvertently, though, this allowed foreign investors to pursue companies that were strong as well as those that were not.<sup>474</sup> Bushells, for example, was in such good form that, in light of record profits, directors outright rejected Unilever's initial bid of \$93 million.<sup>475</sup> An independent report from merchant bank BT Australia advised shareholders to do the same.<sup>476</sup>

At the same time, the bid raised widespread concerns about Unilever's extraordinary power should the takeover proceed unchecked. With both Lipton and Bushells, Unilever would control 70 to 77 per cent of Australia's \$85 million teabag market, and 63 per cent of the \$70 million leaf tea market.<sup>477</sup> The Australian Federation of Consumer Organisations was one of the most vocal critics, and urged the Trade

Practices Commission (TPC) to halt Unilever's bid for fear that its dominance would undermine competition and quality.<sup>478</sup> Eventually, though, Bushells' directors (and its key institutional shareholder, AMP Society) *did* endorse the takeover – once Unilever upped its offer to \$101 million, and assured the TPC that it would relinquish several of its existing tea brands.<sup>479</sup>

The move was another in a series Unilever had made to consolidate its tea interests in Australia. It also signalled Bushells' deepening engagement in multinational capitalism. Formed in 1930 after year-long talks between Margarine Union (of the Netherlands) and Lever Brothers Limited (of the United Kingdom), the company's dominance first came in soaps and oils, then gradually encompassed a growing range of convenience products, like frozen foods, some of which were discussed in the last chapter. Indeed, there is a direct link between, on the one hand, the post-war boom in industrial production and the concomitant rise in wages, and, on the other, Unilever's strength.<sup>480</sup> Its forays into Australia's tea market, though, had been uneven: between 1946 and 1957 the company's Australian subsidiary tried to break Bushells' hold with the Lipton brand, but to no avail. Frustrated by Canberra's control of tea prices (a vestige of the wartime measures which made market entry almost impossible for newcomers), Unilever surrendered and returned Lipton to its parent board.<sup>481</sup> As such, Unilever's acquisition of Lipton some fourteen years later was an act of renewed faith, demonstrated with massive investment in and advertising of its well-timed specialty: teabags.

With control of both Bushells and Lipton, Unilever epitomised growing fears that the FIRB's water-down guidelines would undermine Australia's interests. For example, the manager of the World Development Tea Cooperative, Geoff Turnbull, publicly bemoaned the transformation of Australia's tea market, from being mostly Australian-owned to being mostly foreign-owned, in less than ten years. For Turnbull, this was not dissimilar to the fears amongst tea producing nations that Unilever's power would nullify whatever leverage they once had, fears that were presented to the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation.<sup>482</sup> Criticism of Unilever's power was not confined to its tea practices either; in mid 1987, the *New Internationalist*, a left-leaning publication that spoke from the perspective of the developing world, devoted

a special edition to Unilever. At stake was the autonomy of the various entities forced to negotiate with a company as large, resourced and intimidating as Unilever was.

### **Not Australian-Owned**

As one of the world's largest multinational corporations, Unilever's takeover of Bushells placed the brand at the centre of a large and influential discourse about capitalism in general, and globalisation in particular – with 'globalisation' understood as the increasingly complex interconnections between the economies, cultures and politics of the world's nations.<sup>483</sup> This was by no means a new concern; it had simmered for decades. In *The Highest Bidder* (1965), for example, Brian Fitzpatrick and E. I. Wheelwright spoke out against what they deemed too much foreign investment for 'the social and political community, as an *Australian* economy, an *Australian* community with its own distinctive character.'<sup>484</sup> Similarly, in *Australia: A Client State* (1982), Greg Crough and Ted Wheelwright asked:

...what difference does it make to a country, its class structure, and its government, when so much of its productive assets are owned and controlled by transnational corporations which are headquartered elsewhere?<sup>485</sup>

In much of the press coverage, Unilever's takeover was framed within discussions of excessive foreign ownership in Australia. In this way, the late 1980s saw the fears discussed by Fitzpatrick *et al* turn into a more popularly articulated frustration. The extent to which the Australian economy had become integrated into global flows became an especially contentious topic. As previous chapters have noted, Australia had *always* been shaped and challenged by global forces. What *was* relatively new, though, was the scale, scope and speed of the global contact as it emerged in the mid to late 1980s. At the very least, this process was marked by the growth of a world market, with fewer national controls on capital flows and corporate activity.<sup>486</sup> As such, Unilever's takeover of Bushells was seen in relation to the FIRB's more relaxed stance.

In what became the brand's standard response to this particular process, just as Bushells became more entwined in global activity, its promotions appeared more

insular, parochial and 'Australian' than ever. Indeed, Unilever returned the brand to the imagery of 1983. If anything, Unilever reconfigured this loving tribute to 'olde' Australia into more than just a birthday indulgence; it became the chief prism through which Bushells was marketed. For example, one of the first initiatives under Unilever was the Bushells Vintage Truck promotion in mid 1989. For \$3.95 and two 'proofs of purchase', some 25 000 entrants received a matchbox replica of a 'heritage' Bushells truck.<sup>487</sup> That same year, there was a repeat of the canister promotion, although this time they were filled with 'traditional' leaf tea and were in stores in October 1989, just in time for Christmas. The canisters featured Early Advertising, Early Australian Transportation and Australian Sports. A sell-out, the promotion appeared again in 1990 with another series: Our Wildlife, Our Homes, and Our Country. These were followed by the Heritage Print promotion, also in 1990. For \$4.95 (and with two 'proofs of purchase'), consumers could have a set of three specially commissioned prints, each one set in or around a small, 1930s-style general store, with a faded Bushells sign somewhere in the scene, 'reproduced in full colour on art quality paper to compliment any home.'<sup>488</sup> These prints were subsequently co-opted by crafts organisations as templates for tapestries.

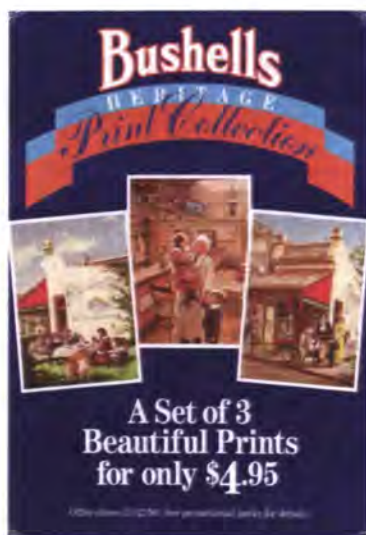


Figure 8.4 Heritage Print Offer

Bushells' overt provincialism failed to mute Unilever's critics. On the contrary, the early 1990s saw numerous calls for both Canberra to step in and stop the likes of

Unilever, and for consumers to rethink their shopping habits. In this context, Unilever's takeover prompted something of a delayed reaction, noted by the national broadsheets a few years after the fact, and generally in relation to other takeover bids for other big-name brands. For example, when Campbell's bid for Arnott's in October 1992 proved especially controversial, Bushells joined the roll-call of brands that journalists would list in their treatment of the topic. In the *Age*, for example, Geoff Maslen saw a direct correlation between the FIRB's liberalisation of the Australian economy, and the list of household names that had 'fallen into foreign hands' – Bundaberg rum, Coolabah wine, Violet Crumble chocolate, Speedo swimwear, and Bushells tea.<sup>489</sup> As the FIRB processed some 3 000 proposals each year from overseas investors, overseas ownership of Australian assets had doubled in five years to approximately \$300 billion.

Mindful of such resentment, the Nerada tea company increasingly used its Australian credential as its chief marketing hook. Controlled by 70 individuals and based in Innisfail on Queensland's Atherton Tablelands, Nerada was a timely intervention in what was, by January 1992, a \$165 million tea market dominated by Unilever. After just 12 months on the national market, Nerada captured 5 per cent of tea sales and recorded positive consumer reaction to its Australian management and ownership.<sup>490</sup> Image-wise, it was the antithesis to Unilever – small, specialist and Australian, the complete opposite of Unilever's 'big picture' approach.

The depiction of high foreign investment as cause for anxiety had grassroots support. While there *were* attempts to sway Australians away from this position, they did not register with much persuasion. The *Australian Financial Review*, for instance, argued that, in light of the nation's mounting foreign debt and seemingly intractable balance of payments, Unilever *et al* should be welcomed, not scorned: 'The injection of foreign capital and management is likely to safeguard those companies' prospects, not diminish them.'<sup>491</sup> Such reasoning, though, had many opponents. One of the most prominent was Harry Wallace, who founded the Australian Owned Companies Association in 1991 to protest against Canberra's acquiescence to foreign investors. With missionary zeal, Wallace compiled the AusBuy Guide to help orient consumers towards what was Australian-owned and away from what was not, including Bushells tea.

There was overwhelming demand for the AusBuy Guide. Ampol service stations distributed 100 000 copies, and ran out in three weeks; Sydney taxi drivers distributed 5 000 copies; Gosford Shire Council posted 650 000 with its rate notices in 1993; and when Wallace appeared on Channel Seven's *Eleven AM* show that same year, the producer described the response as 'Telephone meltdown. All our phones were running hot for days.'<sup>492</sup> Wallace was scrupulous in his attacks and reserved particular criticism for what he considered Unilever's deceptive use of the 'Australian Made' logo. For Wallace, the government's Advance Australia Foundation (AAF), which supervised the logo's use, had failed to adequately differentiate between products that were Australian-made and those that were Australian-owned. For Wallace, the fact that the three largest AAF licensees were multinationals (Unilever, Kelloggs and Heinz) undercut the logo's integrity.<sup>493</sup> AusBuy thus challenged Bushells directly, and turned Australians' attention from the imagery to the fine-print. Unilever would have to reconcile this nagging incongruity between, on the one hand, Australians' emotional attachment to the brand's history, and, on the other, their growing unease with what globalisation entailed. The next chapter will look at several such attempts to do just this.

### **Outside Endorsements**

At the same time, and in yet another ironic layer to the Bushells story, the brand's historical significance was actually *validated* in certain quarters. In the early to mid 1990s, at least three things saw Bushells' heritage endorsed, if not institutionalised, by interests that were otherwise not affiliated with the company: the integration of old Bushells advertisements in nostalgic Australian memorabilia; the National Trust listing of the Bushells building in the Rocks; and the Powerhouse Museum's acquisition of a 1920s Bushells window display. As disparate and self-contained as they appear, these three processes not only cued the brand's subsequent marketing; they demonstrated that Bushells' implication in various debates and discussions, for over a century but especially in the preceding decade, had effectively positioned it as a compelling and useful cultural marker.

Firstly, the early 1990s saw brands like Bushells and Arnott's increasingly sentimentalised. Expressed in terms of loss and lament, the sale of such famous Australian brands to large multinational corporations turned them into subjects of affectionate nostalgia. Especially in the popular media, these brands merged into a fuzzy collage of Australian iconography. In 1993, for example, the GreeTin Company in Sydney marketed tin-plated postcards that featured old advertisements from brands like Arnott's, Rosella, QANTAS, and Bushells – that is, iconic Australian names. According to its managing director, Victor Than-Aye, customers often had the nostalgic postcards framed for their home or office.<sup>494</sup> Similarly, in 1995, Bradford Exchange, the world-renown specialist in collectible plates, issued a series that featured old country stores with faded Bushells signs. With names like 'A Bygone Era', these plates were simply porcelain versions of the GreeTin cards; as their advertisement put it: 'It was more than a store. It was a way of life.'<sup>495</sup> Re-contextualised thus, the use of Bushells *et al* by GreeTin and Bradford Exchange had much to do with Australians' sharpened appreciation of them at a time when they were perceived to be in danger. They became the aesthetic incarnation of an Australia that was either on the wane or under threat.<sup>496</sup>

Despite its sale in the mid 1970s, the Bushells building in the Rocks not only continued to be widely identified as 'the Bushells building'; it became the site of intense interest from conservationists, so much so that it was listed by the National Trust in 1995. Established in 1945, the National Trust was the nation's largest non-government conservation organisation; its listing of the building came after a detailed conservation plan was presented to the Sydney Cove Authority (SCA) in 1991. So, when a 99-year lease was granted to CRI Ltd in March 1995 to turn the building into a \$25 million boutique conference centre, it was on the basis that CRI would adhere to the plan's recommendations. This plan noted that, above all else:

...the building was built for and occupied by one of the most high-profile Australian food manufacturers, maker of some of the most popular and ubiquitous brand-name staple products in the nation.<sup>497</sup>

Accordingly, the building's conservation entailed finding uses that required minimal changes to its structure and fittings (such as the purpose-built tea lifts, chutes and mixing hoppers), and that did not cloud its historical significance.<sup>498</sup>

Interest in the Bushells building had two facets. In its conversion, the building served corporate and state interests. The conference centre was meant to ease the pressure on Darling Harbour as Sydney's main convention site, as well as exploit the sizeable contribution conference delegates made to the state's coffers.<sup>499</sup> In its conservation, though, the building honoured the contribution Bushells had made to both the Rocks precinct and Australian history. As it surfaced in the literature of the SCA and the National Trust, Bushells' significance was backed by institutions whose principal role was to recognise, endorse and protect properties and artefacts of public importance. In this way, they staked public ownership of what was an ostensibly private entity, and hence fulfilled the psychological component of any heritage listing, what Graeme Davison called 'a concept grounded in the first-person plural.'<sup>500</sup> The building attracted heritage support because, by the early 1990s, Bushells' history *was* increasingly framed in a way that embodied and endorsed contemporary concerns, and thus inspired its conservation.<sup>501</sup>

The more that Bushells was affected by heritage policies, the more its artefacts assumed historical significance. This was especially apparent when Sydney's Powerhouse Museum acquired a Bushells shop window display. Produced by one of Sydney's first advertising agencies, O'Brien Publicity, the 1920s display consisted of five lithographic posters and came complete with installation instructions. Bought by the museum from a Paddington dealer, the piece was valuable for both its immaculate condition and as a sophisticated example of what became something of a lost art. According to the museum's Social History curator, Charles Pickett, such window displays represented a 'new marriage of design and technology' and 'reached a peak of popularity and quality during the 1920s and 1930s.'<sup>502</sup> The acquisition also represented growing recognition of Bushells' place in Australian history, in this context as an innovative advertiser and therefore important in Australia's consumer history. In this way, Bushells was caught up in the Powerhouse Museum's broader (and relatively atypical) objective: to encompass a generous sweep of Australian history, and direct it to a broad-based demographic – something which placed Bushells within a contemporary definition of history itself.<sup>503</sup>



## **Conclusion**

The 1990s was a difficult period for Bushells. Not only was consumption of tea generally on the decline, but leaf tea in particular suffered a huge fall at the expense of teabags. By early 1992, Australians were ranked just eighth in the world in their consumption of tea, and 60 per cent of that was of the teabag variety.<sup>504</sup> As a leaf tea specialist, Bushells' market had shrunk considerably. On top of that, Bushells' dilemma was exacerbated by the fact that, even the one area that could attract those of an old-fashioned persuasion – its heritage image – was undermined by those hostile to its offshore ownership. However, there was an ironic extension to all of this. Even as the Oxley family retreated from the business and despite monumental changes to how the company was owned and managed, the brand's history assumed an increasingly metonymic function. Indeed, the more drastic the changes to the Bushells business, the more its advertising clung to a winsome, watercolour past. This bias was not confined to Bushells alone, as its heritage was eventually acknowledged in ways that seemingly confirmed its national significance, institutionalised its conservation, and conferred some degree of iconic privilege. In the end, the much-maligned Unilever could turn this final irony to its advantage, with a series of advertisements that centred on Bushells' Australianness in ways that were both controversial and complex. These will be considered in the next chapter.

*Notes to Chapter Eight on pp. 271-274.*

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **'The ONE thing we all agree on'**

#### **Introduction**

Since the national election win of the Liberal-National Coalition in March 1996, Australia has experienced more than ten years of contentious public debate. Several of the most divisive milestones in recent political history have happened on John Howard's watch. Discussions about Australia's history *and* future have raged with an intensity that both highlights and problematises the very notion of national identity. Through trailblazer personalities like Cathy Freeman and Pauline Hanson, and flashpoint events like September 11 and the Cronulla riots, notions of nationhood have been both invoked and interrogated. In turn, it is clear that, from the tail-end of the twentieth century and even into the new millennium, for better or for worse, the question of Australian identity remains as volatile as ever.

Bushells' advertising in this period has paralleled changes in Australia's political culture. One way or another, events of epochal significance, both in Australia and abroad, have surfaced in the brand's promotions. Each campaign thus provides some insight into how ideas of national identity have shifted. However, these campaigns not only show the increasing difficulty of picturing Australianness; they also show that, no matter how fragmented Australian culture actually became, there remained a lingering bias to certain images, ideals, and values. To put it simply, as both Canberra and the electorate became more insular, parochial and conservative, Bushells followed suit.

#### **Quintessential Oz**

At the end of the 1990s, Bushells straddled an unusual divide. On the one hand it was widely associated with an authentic Australianness. As discussed in the last chapter, this was due to both its own myth-making marketing, as well as recognition from the likes of the National Trust and the Powerhouse Museum. This saw Bushells move away from any association with a specific class or gender (as detailed and explained in earlier chapters), towards a more nebulous sentimentalism, one that tied the brand

to more of a mood than a lifestyle. To the extent that Bushells often exploited the nostalgia of its heritage, this was a profitable association. On the other hand, though, insofar as Bushells wished to broaden its image beyond one of 'olde Australia', this was a liability. Bushells' challenge was therefore twofold: to retain the Australianness by which consumers identified the brand, but without risking its relevance in a fickle marketplace. The growth in herbal teas gave Bushells a chance to resolve this dilemma.

Just as the growth in teabags prompted Bushells to react in the mid 1980s, the growth in herbal teas a decade later proved similarly lucrative. In 1996 the value of the herbal tea market in Australia was \$18.3 million, with an annual growth rate of 11 per cent.<sup>505</sup> Market research attributed this to two things: a more adventurous palate amongst tea drinkers; and a widely perceived relationship between herbal teas and stress-relief.<sup>506</sup> So, after thousands of taste tests and 18 months of development, Bushells launched a range of 'Australiana Herbal Infusions' in September 1996. The 'Australiana' came from the fact that the range blended native Australian flora: Rosehip Lilly Pilly, Camomile Lemon Myrtle, Orange and Wattleseed, and Lemon Honey Eucalyptus. The promotion consisted of two main initiatives: the distribution of 2 million free samples through selected magazines and letterboxes; and a series of advertisements in *Australian Woman's Weekly*, *Woman's Day*, *Better Homes & Garden*, *Reader's Digest*, *New Woman* and *Who*.

A major component of this campaign was its emphasis on the Australian bush, in both the product information and advertising imagery. By Bushells' logic, an outback origin conferred some measure of intrinsic Australianness, something that was highlighted in the accompanying press releases. As one representative informed an industry journal, since it is:

[blended] and packed in Australia with approximately 50 per cent Australian ingredients, this range is uniquely differentiated from the rest of the mainstream herbal market which is predominately produced from totally imported ingredients.<sup>507</sup>

With flora gathered from rainforests on Australia's east coast, and bush lands west of the Great Dividing Range, Bushells had a seemingly obvious link to something that

was irrefutably Australian – the land. For this reason, the advertisements consisted of simple photographs of various bush scenes, uncluttered, unpeopled and stunning. For a brand that relied on its nationalist resonance, this was one claim that even offshore ownership could not dispute.



Figure 9.1 'Australiana' Herbal Infusions

The 'Australiana' campaign rendered Bushells another in a long line of cultural players that had appealed to the archetypal Australian in a highly specific way. Namely: through an exclusively outback setting. This tendency, already noted in previous chapters, had surfaced across a range of discursive sites, and with exceptional frequency. One of the most influential explanations of this is *The Australian Legend*. First published in 1958, Russel Ward's attempt to identify and explain the 'national mystique' provided one of the most compelling (and contentious) claims in the nation's history: that the evolution of a singularly Australian disposition is best considered in relation to its landscape. Ward looked to the history of Australia's pastoral development and considered those workers who responded to what were often difficult conditions in a very particular way. For him, those that persevered became, by necessity, stoic, taciturn, and resourceful. In short, their strength and tenacity sprang from 'their struggle to assimilate themselves and their mores to the strange environment.'<sup>508</sup> Decades on, even those that had barely ventured beyond the suburbs saw in the 'Australian legend' much to admire and emulate. As such, Ward argued that, even though relatively few Australians ever had

their survival skills tested, they still saw in this legend a model for 'typical' Australian behaviour.<sup>509</sup> Turned into a tale of endurance and triumph, Ward's conclusion thus became an attractive template for the national self-image.

In its emphasis on the bush, Ward's seminal account focused on what John Carroll called the 'psychological setting of the country'.<sup>510</sup> To this end, it has been both a beacon and a bane. Ward's thesis has undoubtedly skewed many subsequent analyses towards a similar (if not identical) conclusion. Moreover, these accounts not only repeat Ward's central claim about the land and the legend; many have followed Ward in seeing a direct correlation between the harshness of the land and an egalitarian ethos. Indeed, according to this argument, therein emerged one of Australia's most feted creeds: mateship. For example, in *The Australians* (1966), George Johnston, like Ward, maintains that the land compelled a 'strong sense of social solidarity...for in such a country the enormity was too much not to be shared.'<sup>511</sup> Thirty years later, Craig McGregor drew a similar conclusion in *Profile of Australia* (1996):

...for all their faults, country people have many of those admirable qualities which people think of as 'typically Australian'. They are down-to-earth, sardonic, forthright; friendly and hospitable...and quick to help those in trouble.<sup>512</sup>

With such backing, then, the bush still offered the surest route to those traits that many Australians felt most proud to call their own.

For others, Ward's legacy has been anything but edifying. According to its critics, the 'legend' has stunted a more sophisticated and accurate grasp of Australia's development. For example, in his equally influential account, *The Lucky Country* (1964), Donald Horne argued that, for all the outback eulogies, Australia was essentially a suburban nation, even possibly the world's *first* suburban nation.<sup>513</sup> The implication of this is obvious. As David Dale puts it, 'instead of a bronzed farmer in a broad-rimmed hat, our national stereotype should be a suited office worker, or a surfer in board shorts.'<sup>514</sup> Others, like Geoffrey Serle, have argued that the nation's preoccupation with the outdoors has stifled appreciation of other pursuits and inclinations, especially the arts.<sup>515</sup> Whilst for some, *The Australian Legend* fails to speak of or to most Australians. It was, as John Thornhill writes in *Making Australia*

(1992), 'partisan in tone', and 'favoured a particular group at the expense of others.'<sup>516</sup> Its so-called camaraderie found little room for Aborigines, women, foreigners and intellectuals. Frustration with such glaring omissions has fuelled numerous attempts to explore what David Goodman called a 'new pluralised imagination.'<sup>517</sup> To this end, academic forays into this field have been many and varied, and generally see overarching accounts (like Ward's) terribly myopic, if not outright dangerous.<sup>518</sup>

Despite attempts to challenge its hold on the Australian imagination, *The Australian Legend* has nonetheless morphed into an elastic catchall for popular depictions of national identity. From Canberra to Hollywood, many continue to project the characteristics that Ward identified as quintessentially Australian onto the gamut of Australian stereotypes, usually in tones of unbridled praise: the gold miner, the bushranger, the drover, the settler, the Anzac, and even the lifesaver.<sup>519</sup> As captured by professional image-makers, each one embodies the quiet nobility and laidback candour that Ward believed the bush produced. Despite its empirical holes, then, as a flexible framework through which to imagine and admire Australianness, the outback has proven both resilient and reliable.

Re-contextualized by its successors, Ward's thesis showed considerable latitude as it emerged across Australian culture, in literature, sport, art – and advertising. Whatever qualifiers or caveats Ward raised were more or less lost in the appropriation of his ideas. Therefore, by placing its Herbal Infusions range within a bush setting, Bushells defined its Australianness through a popularly agreeable narrative. In turn, the brand both borrowed from and bled into one of the most enduring accounts of national identity. Over the following decade, the brand maintained its close connection to this trajectory. Moreover, despite the odd detour, Bushells eventually returned to a bush setting, albeit one with a demographic tweak or two.

### **Debating Difference**

As much as the 'Australiana' campaign registered with other accounts of authentic Australianness, it was clear that, by the late 1990s, such simplicity had become harder to assert, much less demonstrate. If anything, the question of Australia's identity had

come under immense and unprecedented scrutiny. In turn, the transition from a Labor government to a Liberal one entailed more than just a fiscal adjustment; it made most Australians confront issues of deep and long-term consequence, not least of which concerned Australia's constitution. Through their very different platforms and agendas, Paul Keating and John Howard offered competing versions of Australianness. So, in 1998, just two years after the 'Australiana' bush jaunt and only two years into the Liberals' first term, a very different Bushells campaign emerged, one that actively acknowledged these political fault-lines.

Where the 'Australiana' advertisements recycled a cliché, the 'Rivals' ones toyed with the ambiguous (see accompanying DVD, clips 1 and 2). Indeed, the campaign offered more of a surprise than a stereotype, and had four famous adversaries laugh off their differences over a cup of Bushells tea: Ron Casey and Normie Rowe in one advertisement, and Cathy Freeman and Arthur Tunstall in another.<sup>520</sup> The 'Rivals' campaign was devised by advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather and was launched in March 1998. In its bid to make the brand more contemporary, Bushells chose high-profile pairings that symbolised the complexity of Australia's *present*.<sup>521</sup> In turn, Bushells presented its brand as the only one to unite people whose grievances were so profound and had become so public: 'Bushells. It's one thing we all agree on.'

Normie Rowe and Ron Casey were responsible for a live-to-air fistfight that has become one of the most replayed moments in Australian television. In July 1991, as guests of Channel Nine's *Midday Show*, the pair had agreed to debate Australia's constitutional future with a panel split between monarchists and republicans. Rowe, an actor, singer and Vietnam veteran, argued for a monarchy, alongside RSL stalwart Bruce Ruxton and socialite Diana Fisher. Casey, a bellicose radio announcer, had sided with fellow broadcasters Mark Day and Geraldine Doogue, and argued for a republic. The event coincided with the official launch of the Australian Republican Movement (ARM), endorsed by the ALP government and chaired by best-selling author Thomas Keneally. The launch was the ALP's most conspicuous call for a republic, and included a commitment to achieve one by January 1 2001. The list of over one hundred well-known signatories included Ian Chappell, Bryan Brown, Malcolm Turnbull, David Williamson and Neville Wran. Its aim was to educate



**Bushells and  
the Cultural Logic  
of Branding**  
(accompanying DVD)

**Susie Khamis**  
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Australians and ultimately sway opinion. To this end, the *Midday Show* debate was set up to provoke both perspectives, with host Ray Martin as mediator.

At first glance, Rowe and Casey were hardly the most obvious fronts for either side; neither was speaking in an official capacity. Yet therein lay the emotion: a fight erupted when Ruxton mocked Rowe's army experience: 'Oh, I didn't bleed in Vietnam', he taunted, 'You are a bloody hero...you live for the badge.'<sup>522</sup> The subsequent wrangle only lasted a few seconds, but prompted 35 000 people across the country to call Channel 9 and comment. Indeed, much of the Australian media reported the event. Some of this coverage was in the form of tongue-in-cheek commentary of the men's boxing skills, or lack thereof.<sup>523</sup> Others saw it symptomatic of a deeper crisis of masculinity and violence.<sup>524</sup> However, while the immediate reaction to the fight was born more out of shock and amusement, the incident nonetheless flagged republicanism as an issue that was likely to both excite and enrage. Moreover, the ALP's closeness to the ARM encouraged a view that its plans for Australia's future were bold and ambitious. For their part, Rowe and Casey became prominent advocates of opposite positions, as well as famous combatants in a quick and clumsy melee.

The other duo that appeared in the Bushells campaign was Cathy Freeman and Arthur Tunstall. These two had made headlines in 1994. As the *chef de mission* ('head of mission') for Australian athletes at the 15<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Games in Victoria, Canada, Tunstall was the most outspoken critic of Freeman's infamous decision: to celebrate her gold-medal wins of both the 200 and 400 metre races by draping herself with an Aboriginal flag. According to Freeman, her aim was to honour her heritage as well as inspire other indigenous Australians.<sup>525</sup> For long-time sports official Tunstall, though, this breached Article 52 of the Games constitution, which stipulated that athletes from any one country must compete under just one flag. As he saw it, 'There are disciplines that must be observed.'<sup>526</sup>

As relayed in the Australian press, what began as a bureaucratic bind soon turned into a much bigger discussion about national unity. Subsequently, their stalemate – with Freeman refusing to heed Tunstall's warning and Tunstall refusing to acknowledge her symbolism – spotlighted a significant cultural chasm. Some, for example, hoped

that Freeman would set a precedent. According to the *Age*, Freeman was 'proof that with will and determination, Aborigines can succeed in what many of them still regard as a white person's world. She deserves to be congratulated, not censured.'<sup>527</sup> Moreover, Freeman had some top-tier support, including Paul Keating.<sup>528</sup> In contrast, Tunstall's intransigence was widely interpreted as little short of reactionary. One journalist dubbed him 'a generational signpost, too pathetic to be disturbing.'<sup>529</sup> To his disadvantage, Tunstall's dour pedantry was far less telegenic than Freeman's youthful, unassuming verve.<sup>530</sup> At 71, his stand was fixed, familiar, and, by some accounts, practically archaic. 'I'm a monarchist', he told the *Sunday Age*, 'when I went to school, we'd say every morning: "I honour my God, I serve my country, I salute my flag." And I still believe in that.'<sup>531</sup> For those of Tunstall's ilk, loyalty to Australia meant loyalty to these symbols.

What little support Tunstall received publicly came mostly from Liberal backbencher Bill Taylor<sup>532</sup> and the RSL's Bruce Ruxton. Their view invariably came back to Freeman's apparent demotion of the Australian flag, and her preference for an alternative symbol of cultural pride. As Ruxton told the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'I congratulate the Aboriginal runner on winning the medal. But Australia has one flag only. The Aboriginal flag means nothing to me.'<sup>533</sup> For all of Ruxton's indifference, Freeman inspired many other Australians to revisit the Aboriginal flag anew and to reconsider its place in the nation's image-bank. Indeed, according to one Melbourne flag maker, in the week after Freeman's first victory lap, sales of the Aboriginal flag had jumped by 20 per cent.<sup>534</sup> Here was another issue, then, with which the Keating Government positioned itself in relation to more conservative views. More specifically, Keating showed his support for a wider spectrum of national symbols, especially ones that raised complex issues about history, race and identity.

As they appeared in the 'Rivals' campaign, these foes brought their differences to the fore. One advertisement featured Rowe and Casey drinking tea, with a videorecording of the *Midday* bout in the background; Rowe takes a sip and says, 'Ah, that hits the spot Ronnie'. The other has Freeman preparing a cup for Tunstall. As she asks him if he would like milk, he replies, 'No, black's just fine.' Bushells thus emerged as an all-round pleaser, even between those whose differences were as pronounced as these four. According to the campaign's producers, though, Rowe *et al* were more than

willing to take part.<sup>535</sup> For Jacob Mayne, Unilever's tea marketing controller, this only reinforced the perception that Bushells 'brings people together.'<sup>536</sup>

The campaign's impact was in its audacity, glossing over several of the deepest divisions in Australian culture with something as simple as tea. Still, Bushells addressed Australians in terms that were both attractive and timely; at the end of the decade, these were the issues that were pitched to the voting public. For some Australians, Keating's preoccupation with 'big picture' politics was too far removed from the pressures of everyday life. For these voters, republicanism and reconciliation, key planks in Keating's agenda, were emblematic of ALP hubris, 'political correctness' and an aloof disregard for 'ordinary Australians'. Since its election win in 1996, the Howard Government has proven especially adept at gauging this sensitivity, to the point that the issues through which Keating *tried* to invigorate the nation have diminished, if not disappeared. The 'Rivals' campaign pointed to this cleft in the political culture, and conceded differences that had become too big to ignore. In the following few years, Bushells made it increasingly apparent which path it would follow. That said, though, several events in particular ensured that this path would seem the most logical.

### **Sharp Right Turn**

It did not take long for the Howard Government to stake its divergence from what came to be seen as the ALP's 'new class' agenda.<sup>537</sup> One of the clearest examples was Howard's resolve during the so-called 'Sorry' debate, an issue that dealt with the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from their families between the 1880s and the 1960s. The debate was motivated in part by the 'Bringing them Home' report, the result of a 1997 National Inquiry into the matter. The report included a five-part reparation package, part of which was an official apology. In contrast to Keating's overt endorsement of such gestures, Howard quickly moved to define his party's approach to indigenous affairs as one of 'practical reconciliation', and reasoned that an apology would have little effect on things like health, education, housing and employment.<sup>538</sup>

The Howard Government perceived some demarcation between the legitimate interests of indigenous Australians, and those that were mere vestiges of ALP elitism. As such, Howard reconfigured the question of an apology into something that both exceeded the popular will and insulted Australia's history. For Howard, 'politically correct' academics had misrepresented Australia's past with terms like 'genocide' and 'invasion', and had consequently created a 'black-armband' version of history.<sup>539</sup> There was some affinity between this position and that of Independent MP Pauline Hanson.<sup>540</sup> In her maiden speech to the Australian parliament in September 1997, Hanson argued that, amongst other things, minority groups (like Aborigines) had long enjoyed undeserved privileges to the material detriment of 'ordinary Australians'. She even likened Australia's racial situation to that of Northern Ireland and Bosnia. These ideas were further articulated in the policies of One Nation, which Hanson subsequently set up on the basis of her populist support. In June 1998, eleven One Nation representatives were elected into Queensland's State Parliament.

Thanks to both Howard and Hanson, Australia's political culture became increasingly parochial, paranoid and insular. The terrorist attack on the Twin Towers of New York's World Trade Centre on September 11 2001 ('S11') only intensified this. The fallout of this event has been linked to phenomena as diverse as the growing popularity of big-screen TVs, to the US-led 'War on Terror'. At the very least, the fact that it was orchestrated by al-Qaeda, an Islamist paramilitary organisation led by Saudi-born Osama bin Laden, put a worldwide focus on Islam in general, and fundamentalist Islam in particular. In turn, in countries like Australia, shock and despair soon turned into anger and suspicion. Australia's mainstream media was abuzz with a powerful new discourse about the 300 000 Muslims in the country, and the extent to which they could be trusted, let alone be considered Australian.<sup>541</sup>

### **Border Control**

In the immediate aftermath of S11, Australia was embroiled in an event that went to the heart of national identity: the *Tampa* affair. This episode crystallised much of the fear and ignorance that ensued in Australia in the wake of S11. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, Christmas Island, an Australian territory in the Indian Ocean, had received boatloads of refugees, mostly from Indonesia. This had not caused too much

concern on the island. During 2001, Christmas Island received an especially large number of asylum seekers, many from the Middle East. The arrival of the *Tampa*, a Norwegian cargo vessel which had rescued people from a sinking Indonesian fishing-boat in international waters nearby, prompted a diplomatic showdown between Australia, Norway and Indonesia. The vessel held 420 asylum seekers from Afghanistan, 13 from Sri Lanka, and 5 from Indonesia. They were eventually transported to Nauru for processing; another boatload of asylum seekers was taken from Christmas Island to Papua New Guinea, after the erroneous claim that many of the asylum seekers had thrown their children in the water.<sup>542</sup>

The affair had a dramatic impact on both Canberra and the electorate. In the final week of parliament in late September 2001 the 'Border Protection Bill' was driven through parliament in two late-night sittings that bypassed customary conventions. Among other things, the Bill excised Christmas Island, Ashmore Reef, the Cartier Islands and the Cocos Islands from Australia's migration zone. This meant that asylum seekers arriving there could not automatically apply for refugee status, and the Australian navy could relocate them to other countries. In turn, Howard's hardline response was widely seen as one attempt to take control in a world where the borderless flows of people, goods and ideas actively invokes nationalist concerns. Or as one commentator put it, *Tampa* tapped into 'contemporary fears of "our way of life" being swamped by the appearance of a few hundred Muslim asylum seekers on the horizon'.<sup>543</sup>

So, amongst other things, the *Tampa* affair dealt with a simmering discord between a particular image of Islam and a particular image of Australia. When the Howard Government excised these islands from Australia's migration zone, it made a crystal-clear statement about border control, and the need to police Australian boundaries, both territorial and cultural. As the prime minister pointed out at the Liberal Party's election launch in October 2001: 'We decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.'<sup>544</sup> That is, and as Kate Slattery pointed out, this statement 'declares the government's ideas about control – not only of borders, but also of citizenship, including national identity and values.'<sup>545</sup> Subsequent and successive election wins seemingly confirmed widespread support for this stand. In turn, a survey conducted by Sydney advertising agency Euro RSCG found how this

translated into marketing terms. Put simply, advertisers faced 'a nervous population uncertain about the future'.<sup>546</sup>

### **Battles on the beach**

With a yearly advertising budget of \$7 billion,<sup>547</sup> Unilever was in a better position than most to work around shifts in cultural climate. Furthermore, by 2003, it was clear that Bushells Tea remained a priority for the company. In its bid to streamline operations and concentrate on a more focused range, Unilever had, since the late 1990s, trimmed its portfolio considerably. One of the first to go was Bushells Coffee, something that conceded the formidable advantage Nestlé continued to enjoy in instant coffee.<sup>548</sup> That said, then, whilst over 1 000 brands were culled, Bushells Tea remained.<sup>549</sup> Like the other brands retained (such as Flora, Streets, Continental and Bertolli) Bushells' viability was an important part of Unilever's \$9 billion 'Path for Growth' restructuring plan, one that aimed for an annual sales growth of 5 to 6 per cent.<sup>550</sup> As it happened, Bushells' sales *had* declined since the 'Rivals' campaign; the company could not afford to be complacent. So, of the \$12.7 million that was spent on all tea advertising in 2002-2003, Unilever alone accounted for \$4.5 million with its campaigns for Bushells and Lipton.<sup>551</sup>

As much as Unilever was keen to lift Bushells' profile with a promotion that was fresh and exciting, it was tempered by a cultural mood dampened by war, terrorism and a growing unease with anyone related to such things, either logically or otherwise. This cued a necessary realignment for Bushells; it maintained a connection to Australianness, but, like the electorate, turned towards a narrower definition of it. That is, the brand's 2003 television campaign, 'As young as you feel', saw Bushells engage ideals and images far more conservative than those broached just five years earlier (see accompanying DVD, clip 3). The campaign consisted of three captioned vignettes: in a tango club ('Puts the t in our tango'), in a kitchen ('Puts the t in my tease'), and on the beach ('Puts the t in my battles'). Brightly lit, with a quasi-rock soundtrack, the three scenes featured spritely, middle-aged Caucasians, dancing, flirting and surfing, with their exuberance *and* Australianness attributed to Bushells: 'Puts the t in Australian'. Six months in the making, the Ogilvy & Mather



advertisement was a positive affirmation of older Australians, in settings that were happy, safe and secure.

Of the three, it is the surfer's 'battle' that sees Bushells cling to one of the most familiar expressions of Australian identity: the male hero, resilient, proud and territorial. Indeed, more than most sports, surfing has long been identified with a particularly Australian form of physical excellence, an activity that Grant Rodwell has deemed little short of 'eugenically inspired'.<sup>552</sup> Nowhere is this more obvious than in the popularity of surf lifesavers, those for whom the battles with the water are for a greater good – the safety of others. According to Tony McGowan, these have been accorded the same national reverence once reserved for 'those other two imposing Euro-Australian icons, the Digger/Anzac and the Bushman/Stockman'.<sup>553</sup> Moreover, given lifesaving's distinctly militaristic overtones, the association is more than arbitrary. Like the army, lifesaving also involves drill, discipline, march-past, equipment inspections and voluntary sacrifice.<sup>554</sup>

As he appeared in the Bushells advertisement, the grey-haired surfer harked back to the symbolic place of beach cultures in Australia. The language ('my battles') spoke of a deep link many had made between the beach and the sorts of activities it allowed or required, from play to vigilance. This tacitly endorsed a given model of male accomplishment, one that exulted in athletic prowess and selfless duty, and that turned these attributes towards a singularly 'Australian' appreciation of the beach. As had the bush and the battlefield, this site celebrated a particular relationship with space and society, and an overarching emphasis on skill, grit, and mateship. So, as Canberra turned inwards, Bushells' appeal to Australianness showed a similarly conservative bias, with a campaign that was as ideologically taut as the 'Rivals' one was ambiguous.

On December 11 2005, one event in particular showed just how effective 'the beach' was for Australia's national identity. Put simply, a crowd of some 5 000 converged on Cronulla beach in Sydney's Sutherland Shire to protest against what many considered years of anti-social behaviour on the beach, mostly by men of Lebanese-Muslim background. As it transpired, though, the protest became a day-long riot. According to many among the crowd, these 'outsiders' had consistently displayed a machismo

disregard for the local beachgoers, particularly the women. An angry exchange a week earlier (December 4) between off-duty lifesavers and a group of 'Middle Eastern' men<sup>555</sup> proved pivotal: Cronulla locals deemed it emblematic of a hopeless cultural chasm.<sup>556</sup> Fed up and frustrated, they vowed to reclaim the beach to its rightful owners, vigilante-style.

In various ways, Cronulla does represent a particular kind of Australianess. A safe Liberal enclave, the Shire has one of Australia's lowest proportions of people with English-as-a-first-language. While critics have named it the 'insular peninsular', John Howard once referred to the Shire as 'a part of Sydney which has always represented to [him] what middle Australia is all about.'<sup>557</sup> Ironically, though, Cronulla also happens to be a short train-trip from the closest Sydney has to an Islamic precinct: the south-west. The Lakemba area alone, for instance, is home to some 10 000 Muslims, as well as the Imam Ali Mosque. This proximity vexed Cronulla locals. Rumours spread and resentment escalated; this had simmered in Sydney generally, but Cronulla especially.<sup>558</sup> It found release in the excitement of a hot, alcohol-fuelled day. Two men of Middle Eastern descent that defied the belligerent crowd were jostled and jeered; when one of them pointed out that the Australian flag brandished before him was his as well, he was beaten.<sup>559</sup>

A striking aspect of the day was the overt display of Australian imagery, with t-shirts, banners and temporary tattoos. A local discount store reportedly sold more Australian paraphernalia in the lead-up to December 11 than during the Sydney Olympics.<sup>560</sup> The Australian flag was by far the most common marker on the day. For Brendan Jones, the director of Ausflag, such use of the flag confirmed that, particularly in its inclusion of the Union Jack, it functioned as a 'cultural and racial wedge, a means by which white, Anglo Australians could remind everyone else that "you are not, and never will be, considered truly Australian".'<sup>561</sup> It soon emerged that white nationalist groups *were* active in the day's organisation. The Patriotic Youth League, for example, distributed 'Aussies Fighting Back' pamphlets, while the Australia First Party, whose policy is that 'Australia should remain predominantly white'<sup>562</sup>, boasted that it was responsible for one in every 45 or 50 people that turned up.<sup>563</sup> News of their involvement added another dimension to the day. It linked the riots to a broad dissatisfaction with an inevitable outcome of multiculturalism

(another ALP priority): that it will include people whose values, interests and tendencies supposedly conflict with some definition of what the dominant culture perceives to be Australian. The use of particular Australian symbols (like the national flag) was, then, deliberately divisive.

As much as the riots belonged to a specific moment in Australian history, they also played out a more general pattern of the globalised age. As Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere explain, contemporary globalisation has tended to sharpen expressions of collective unity and cultural distinctiveness. Australia's post-S11 climate has undoubtedly encouraged this phenomenon. As they describe it:

...people's awareness of being involved in open-ended global flows seems to trigger a search for fixed orientation points and action frames, as well as determined efforts to affirm old and construct new boundaries.<sup>564</sup>

In turn, those that resist or fear such flows form what Manuel Castells called 'cultural communes'. As Castells describes them, these communes share three main features: firstly, they appear as 'reactions to prevailing social trends'; secondly, 'they function as refuge and solidarity, to protect against a hostile, outside world'; and thirdly, 'they are organized around a specific set of values' and 'marked by specific codes of self-identification: the community of believers, the icons of nationalism, the geography of locality.'<sup>565</sup> The more they resent what the global movement of goods, ideas and cultures entails, the more they defend the traditional particularities of a place and its people.

The Cronulla riots revitalised the most conventional signifiers of Australianness. The scenes of violence and hate, filmed in time for the evening news, inspired a new generation of Australian nationalists. Sydney tattooists, for example, reported a surge in demand for nationalist symbols, particularly by young men. Most requested were the Southern Cross, the Australian flag, and the words 'Aussie Pride'<sup>566</sup> – one of the day's most photographed images was this phrase written in the sand: '100% AUSSIE PRIDE'. Flags soon appeared in front of people's homes as well, a form of 'front-porch patriotism'.<sup>567</sup> The sentiments of what was once considered the ideological fringe (that is, the far right) thus found a more benign expression in this more broad-based articulation. However, while the populace showed a more robust engagement

with such symbols (something that, ironically, was once deemed fairly *un-Australian*, and more akin to American-style patriotism<sup>568</sup>), there were some wider risks. A poll by the *Australian* showed three-quarters of respondents believed that the riots were proof of the nation's 'underlying racism'.<sup>569</sup> This view affects how representations of overt national pride are read, with the hint of latent bigotry drawing closer.

This had a direct impact on brands like Bushells. After the Cronulla riots, depictions of Australianness had to negotiate a nation increasingly aware of just how fractured its culture was. In the lead-up to the first Anzac Day in the riots' wake, advertising agency Singleton Ogilvy & Mather (SOM) surveyed Australians about companies' use of patriotic symbols. It found that, despite the wellspring of nationalism, consumers would still detect and reject the flagrant exploitation of this. The advice was not so much that companies should *avoid* national identity, just that they should avoid imagery that suggested too close an alignment to Australia's increasingly vocal reactionaries. According to SOM director Justin Papps, the safest approach was one that was inclusive, irreverent, optimistic, original and candid, and that 'made [Australians] feel good about themselves in times of social change'.<sup>570</sup>

### **How's the serenity?**

In February 2006 Unilever handed the Bushells account to the McCann Erickson advertising agency. In terms of media presence, the brand had definitely languished. Besides various in-store promotions and its affiliation with projects like the Driver Reviver program (supplying free tea to long-distance drivers), and the Biggest Morning Tea (in conjunction with the Cancer Council) Bushells had suffered from a drop in visibility. As marketing magazine *B & T Weekly* remarked on the McCann Erickson deal, 'Can anyone even remember what the last spot for Bushells was?'.<sup>571</sup> With a market share of less than 10 per cent, Bushells' performance was decidedly lacklustre. Within just three months, then, the agency launched a television campaign aimed at restoring Bushells' resonance with Australians. According to account director Simon Cheng, the new campaign was designed to break what had been a costly hiatus: 'I guess it has sort of lost touch with Australians. The whole idea behind this campaign is reconnecting with...contemporary Australians'.<sup>572</sup>

The campaign resurrected one of Bushells' most memorable lines from the 1980s: 'Is at as good?' (See accompanying DVD, clip 4.) Indeed, the advertisement exhumed more than just this; it showcased a catalogue of well-known images, compressed into a surreally narrated scene: a campsite, peopled by familiar Australian identities, from history, popular culture, cinema and sport. More specifically, the advertisement appropriated a scene from one of the most popular Australian movies of the past ten years, *The Castle* (Rob Sitch, 1997). The scene in question sees Darryl Kerrigan, the film's affable protagonist, take in the tranquillity of his Bonnie Doon holiday-house, and muse 'How's the serenity?' Bushells takes a Kerrigan-like figure to survey his peaceful campsite and say, 'Ah, this is as good as it gets'. The advertisement draws a thematic link to the film, and an affinity to its values and ideals. The rest of this chapter considers just how apt this approach was for Bushells' most recent depiction of Australianness.

By most accounts, *The Castle* worked through a sentimental if naïve scenario: one man's win over a cold, faceless, bureaucracy, thanks largely to a lucky encounter with a friendly QC. Central to his struggle was the sanctity of his family home, a humble bungalow in outer suburbia. Moreover, as media coverage at the time made clear, the film itself was also a victory for the small-scale. Made by the Working Dog production company, best known for its television series like 'The Late Show' and 'Frontline', *The Castle* was reportedly filmed in eleven days and at a cost of only \$700 000. Yet, despite a budget that was tiny by Hollywood standards, *The Castle* became Australia's thirteenth most popular release in 1997, and the most popular Australian release.<sup>573</sup> There was a sense, then, that the film was made by (and for) 'ordinary Australians.'

Much of the film's success has been explained in terms of self-recognition. As Lorraine Mortimer put it, 'Legions testify that when they watched *The Castle* they saw themselves, their family, friends or neighbours.'<sup>574</sup> If nothing else, the film evoked the Australian experience of suburban home life. In turn, it offered what Rochelle Siemienowicz called 'a genuine belief in the unquantifiable preciousness of ordinary experience' and 'an affectionate acknowledgement that, while it may seem gauche and unsophisticated, suburbia is nevertheless where most of us live.'<sup>575</sup> Kerrigan's world was built around a material culture that was instantly recognisable,

even if with some bemusement. References to 'Hey Hey It's Saturday' and the *Trading Post*, for example, framed a cultural sensibility that is rarely acknowledged in cinema, and certainly not with the sort of affection that *The Castle* showed.

Kerrigan's defiance validated the often-underrated achievements of likeminded Australians. To put it another way, though, and as Evan Williams pointed out, the film ultimately extolled 'a certain kind of complacent philistinism', with Kerrigan motivated by 'nothing more than a self-protective instinct to hang onto his patch'.<sup>576</sup> His world was close, closed and dear. In this way, *The Castle* harmonised with the political drift of the Howard years. Through its loving treatment of the domestic and the familial, *The Castle*, as Stephen Crofts has argued, was the filmic equivalent to the era's other popular genre: the lifestyle program, where 'the world shrinks to the immediate family and home, preferably well protected against outsiders'.<sup>577</sup> *The Castle* muted the philosophical implications of this parochialism and achieved a feel-good factor accordingly.

Through this homage to the Kerrigans, Bushells marshalled a parade (if not pastiche) of other Australianisms. The happy get-together featured Ned Kelly, the Leyland Brothers, a children's choir, a singing barramundi, three drag queens, a Pavlova float, a jubilant jockey, a 'drop bear', and an elderly runner. For all the eclecticism, though, it is argued here that this advertisement nonetheless settles on a political plateau. That is, each element, from the bushranger to the barramundi, has been integrated into Australia's mainstream, by virtue of a contextually determined measure of acceptability; they all conform to a given range of ideals and values. As such, the advertisement submits to a cultural lexicon that is no less limited than all the others considered thus far.

Of the all images in the advertisement, few are more iconic than that of Ned Kelly. It has seen numerous incarnations, from Sydney Nolan and Peter Carey to Mick Jagger and Abe Forsyth. Kelly's dramatic rails against empire, class and the judiciary, as well as his knowledge of the land, have seen him consistently projected as the ultimate national hero – resourceful, principled and stoic, a legend in Ward's sense of the word. Indeed, like Lawson's rural characters, writes Lynn Innes:

[H]e battles against the odds of drought and poverty, and the formidable Australian terrain; like them he dreams of a peaceful life and making a living on a modest selection; like them also he owes his main allegiance to his mates, while also seeking to provide for and protect his womenfolk.<sup>578</sup>

In fact, this land, which centred on the King River Valley, now bears his name: 'Kelly Country'. Such deference not only salutes Kelly's knowledge of the bush, it attests to the premium contemporary Australians place on such knowledge.<sup>579</sup>

It is this fixation with bush survival that turned the Leyland brothers into national celebrities. Mike and Mal Leyland first 'went bush' in 1963. They travelled the length of the Darling River, the documentary of which provided their breakthrough success: *Down the Darling*. Two more followed, *Wheels Across Australia* and *Open Boat To Adventure*, before their successful television series, 'Off the Beaten Track' and 'Ask the Leyland Brothers', which aired between 1971 and 1991. The brothers' folksy style has since been both satirised and caricatured. As Peter Wilmoth so presciently put it, Mike and Mal were 'two men unashamed to be dags – in fact proud of it – before the 'Frontline' crew had dreamed up the Kerrigans.'<sup>580</sup> That said, though, they are still popularly credited as 'the blokes who showed Australians how to travel this sunburnt country'.<sup>581</sup> It may well have been a vicarious experience for most, whose engagement with the outback took place from an armchair; still, the English-born brothers were another in a long line of men who inspired others with their outdoor skills, and earned their place alongside Ned Kelly accordingly.

The inclusion of the Leyland brothers pinpoints this advertisement's ultimate premise: if the Leyland brothers can clink cups with Ned Kelly, it follows that just about anything and anyone can unite a nation – provided it elicits some degree of engagement, participation or identification. Yet therein is the critical implication; as the camera moves from one familiar face to another, it is clear that, for all the colour and movement, the panoramic sweep still belongs to a highly circumscribed world. The three drag queens atop a Pavlova float (floating on the river) are a case in point. This image points to two of the most high-profile expressions of gay culture in Australia: the annual Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in Sydney, and the Stephen Elliot film, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994). Both have helped



broaden the presence of gay culture in Australia, but not without some compromise. Whatever activism the Mardi Gras once represented has been popularly outshone by the spectacle and glamour of costumes and floats, so much so that what was once a heavily policed protest march is now more widely seen as a prime-time party.

Similarly, whatever subversion *Priscilla* implied was eventually trumped by certain concessions. Certainly, there *was* the mild surprise of seeing two drag queens and a transvestite drive to Kings Canyon in Alice Springs. However, and as Allan James Thomas noted, the film shared with the ‘ocker’ films of the 1970s shades of racism and misogyny.<sup>582</sup> These elements worked against a liberal mindset, and merged *Priscilla*’s narrative with a familiar Australian genre. Such conformity inevitably dimmed *Priscilla*’s progressive potential. It also starred three famous (and famously) heterosexual actors, and thus placed the audience within a safe enough viewing position to accept the fictionalised ‘queer’.<sup>583</sup> As such, Bushells’ glamorous trio owes its inclusion to antecedents that were hardly confronting, much less radical.

Just like *The Castle*, this Bushells advertisement revels in the ordinary. Besides the drag queens, for instance, there is a children’s choir, whose dulcet contribution leave little doubt that Bushells has referenced another Australian icon: QANTAS. Specifically, the airline’s advertising series that has the National Boys Choir and the Australian Girls Choir singing the Peter Allen hit, ‘I Still Call Australia Home’. Since it first appeared in 1998, this campaign has become one of the most lauded by advertising insiders, not least because its emotional drama is heightened by spectacularly ambitious visuals.<sup>584</sup> These have included the Red Temple in Kyoto, the Temple of Poseidon in Athens, and Kings Canyon in Alice Springs. Bushells’ choir, however, is set against a scene no grander than a nondescript river, and it is led by a kangaroo conductor.

Bushells works through an Australianness marked by participation and familiarity. This approach is no more accommodating or elastic than any other, but it does rationalise the inclusion of the seemingly random. For instance, the happy jockey with trophy in tow. He clearly nods to the ‘race that stops a nation’ – the Melbourne Cup. Moreover, there is some truth in the cliché. A reported 80 per cent of Australians participate in the event, in some way, so it makes a substantial claim to national

importance.<sup>585</sup> Slightly more irreverent, but just as familiar, is the image of a lanky, lopsided runner. The runner's style and wave mimics that of Cliff Young. Young's win of the Sydney-to-Melbourne marathon in 1983, at the age of 61, both surprised the nation and turned him into a celebrity. As unlikely as the win was for the part-time potato farmer, though, there was enough to lift him to 'legendary' status: specifically, his mannerisms (the 'bush-speak' and 'laconic wave'<sup>586</sup>) and attire (he lived in the wet Otway Ranges, so he trained in a raincoat and gumboots). In turn, when Young died in 2003, his obituary in *The Courier-Mail* referred to him as the 'True-blue ultra-marathon legend.'<sup>587</sup>

In its collapse of hierarchy and rank, the advertisement celebrates a kind of cartoon democracy. It even closes with a 'drop bear', which falls to the sound of a hearty laugh. Used to tease and confuse the gullible,<sup>588</sup> the 'drop bear' legend refers to the koala bear's killer cousin, the four-foot carnivorous variety that inhabits treetops and attacks the hapless, human prey below. The image has also appeared in the 'Bundy Bear' series of advertisements for Bundaberg Rum. This series features the brand's polar bear mascot rescuing his mates from compromising situations, often involving women. In the case of one advertisement from 2004, Bundy Bear helps his mates attract three Scandinavian women by making their 'drop bear' warning seem more plausible – by falling out of a tree, and prompting the women to scurry to the men's protection. In this way, the series supports one of the strongest traditions in Australian advertising: the linking of alcohol with an overarching male heroism. Or, as Kate Bowles describes it:

[t]he series presents certain things as eternal and unchanging, no matter how the rest of the world moves on: Bundy drinkers enjoy mates-only fishing trips, camping, the footy and sitting around in the backyard. All their limitations are on display and are the butt of the joke, so they can hardly be the subject of criticism – this is simply the way things are with Australian men.<sup>589</sup>

As it appeared in the Bundaberg Rum advertisement, the 'drop bear' myth effectively functioned like an 'inside joke', a trick that could be used to help Australian men woo Scandinavian beauties – by duping them. As it appeared in the Bushells advertisement, just two years later, the 'drop bear' confirmed the endurance of even the flimsiest of tales; so long as audiences saw in it something that was both familiar

and favourable, it would prove both resilient and reassuring, and therefore ideally suited to the exclusionary logic of nationalist imagery.

In all the triumphant Australianism, then, there is little to separate one myth from another. The cohesion of Bushells' advertisement thus comes from its distinctly suburban take on the archetypically Australian – an identity born out of academic insights, political tussles, popular processes, and the (dis)organisation of space. As much as this scene celebrates the outdoors, it is clear from the barbeque, esky and tent that these people are not *of* the bush. They are tourists, but ones which, by virtue of a perceived and historicised lineage, have a legitimate claim to the land. The advertisement therefore works through a chain of associations available to and dependent on a particular involvement in Australian culture.

### **Conclusion**

Having established a popular association between its brand and Australianness, Bushells consolidated this perception with the four campaigns discussed in this chapter. Throughout, Bushells drew on prevailing assumptions about the country – its people, politics, landscape and values. In turn, these advertisements were coded in such a way that presupposed familiarity with particular customs and conventions. This showed that Bushells was an active player in the construction and maintenance of national identity. The brand did this through the integration of images, icons and identities that resonated as already 'Australian'. This approach was evident in all four campaigns, but none more explicitly than the most recent. With this, Bushells positioned its brand alongside other expressions of national belonging.

Bushells' engagement with these discourses shows two very important things. Firstly, that national identity, as articulated by cultural players as symbolic as Bushells, evolves as an unruly amalgam of old habits and new insights. Secondly, that the media (including brands) play a pivotal role in this process, as they provide the visual and thematic material by which a sense of identity can be forged. As Craig Geoffrey has noted, 'they picture the diversity of daily practices, rituals and customs that constitute national life, they provide a sense of the temporal and spatial coordinates of everyday and daily life.'<sup>590</sup>

Between 1996 and 2006 Bushells canvassed a range of nationalist discourses. In varying degrees of detail, the brand dealt with issues of race, identity and nationhood. Through these representations, Bushells acknowledged ideals and experiences that have been labelled, loosely or otherwise, 'typically' Australian. Ultimately, these show that, in its association with such claims, Bushells was always beholden to a contextualised definition of this very concept. This is less of an indictment than the recognition that *any* attempt to convey Australianness must cross a similarly contentious field, and therefore will only ever be partial or provisional. This most recent advertisement alluded to a heterogenous society – but in fact only went so far as to accommodate what had already been flattened by populist conservatism, and thus conformed to a white, suburban, middle-market scale of difference and diversity. As such, it was a fitting reflection of contemporary Australian culture, which has drifted ever further to the political right over the last ten years.

*Notes to Chapter Nine on pp. 274-277.*