

REVIEW OF JAMES FLEMING’S BOOK “ALL OUR TRACKS AND WAYS”

James Fleming’s *All Our Tracks and Ways* is a remarkable work that deserves praise for its meticulous and engaging portrayal of both family heritage and regional history. This book does not merely trace James’s lineage but serves as a comprehensive historical document, making it invaluable for those interested in the early days of Bourke. Through the lens of his ancestors, James and Frances Reed, and their large family of twelve, James captures the essence of pioneering life on the Outback frontier, blending family stories with the broader challenges of 19th-century Bourke.

The Reed family’s journey begins in England, transitioning through Sydney before finally settling in Bourke in 1862. Through three generations, the Reeds faced monumental struggles and celebrated hard-won successes. Their experiences reflect the highs and lows of Bourke’s development from its founding in 1860 to the turn of the century, with a special emphasis on the hotel trade, which saw both booms and busts. James’s attention to the Reed family’s business ventures provides a nuanced understanding of Bourke’s economic landscape. His research even challenges certain accounts from earlier historians, particularly concerning the hotel industry, presenting new evidence that adds depth to our understanding of Bourke’s commercial history.

One of the book’s highlights is its extensive, 30-page appendix on Bourke hotels, which stands out as an essential resource for history researchers. Jim enriches the narrative with many well-curated illustrations, photos, and maps that bring both his family’s story and the broader history of Bourke to life. His inclusion of a pull-out family tree is a thoughtful touch, allowing readers to keep track of the Reed family’s many branches.

As noted by the *Bourke Western Herald*, the book covers some of Bourke’s most significant historical events as lived by the Reed family and other pioneering families. Readers witness the arrival of Afghan cameleers, the impact of shearers’ strikes leading to the formation of the Australian Labor Party, and the tragedies brought by floods, typhoid epidemics, and deadly heatwaves like the 1896 event that took 47 lives. The Reeds’ resilience is seen in their perseverance through all these challenges, and in the legacy of their nine grandsons who fought in the Great War, three of whom paid the ultimate price.

All Our Tracks and Ways is more than a family memoir; it’s a cultural and historical touchstone, highlighting the courage, endurance, and contributions of Bourke’s earliest settlers. James Fleming has produced a well-researched and deeply personal account that will be a go-to reference for anyone studying Bourke’s formative years.

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